

**CICERO DE SENECTUTE (ON
OLD AGE). TRANSLATED WITH
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY ANDREW P. PEABODY**

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Cicero De Senectute (on Old Age). Translated with Introduction and Notes by Andrew P. Peabody by Marcus Tullius Cicero

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MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

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WITH

AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES.

By ANDREW P. PEABODY.

BOSTON:

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.

1884.

SYNOPSIS.

- § 1. Introduction, and dedication.
2. Old age a part of the order of nature.
3. Reasons why old age is complained of.
4. The old age of Quintus Fabius Maximus.
5. Examples of men who continued their labors in philosophy and literature to a late old age. — The specific charges brought against old age.
6. It is alleged that old age incapacitates men from the management of affairs. The contrary shown to be true.
7. Memory and the mental faculties are not necessarily impaired by age ; but may be preserved in working order if kept in exercise. Proved by examples.
8. Old men need not be disagreeable to the young. Nor need they be unemployed and inert.
9. Failure of bodily strength in old age not to be regretted.
10. There is no need of full bodily strength, if there be an increase of wisdom.
11. Failure of strength and of mental vigor may be averted by a proper regimen of body and mind.
12. It is complained that old age renders one less susceptible of sensual pleasure ; but this is to be regarded as an advantage and a benefit.
13. Moderate and sober conviviality may be still enjoyed by those advanced in years. Cato's own example.

- §14. Examples of old men who have continued to find delight in learning, literary labor, or public service.
- 15. The pleasures of agriculture.
- 16. Examples of honored and happy old age in rural life.
 Comforts belonging to life on a farm.
- 17. The horticulture of Cyrus the younger.
- 18. Honorable old age must be provided for by a virtuous youth.
- 19. Death not to be feared.
- 20. Death easier and less repugnant to nature in old age than in youth.
- 21. Reasons for believing the soul to be immortal.
- 22. The last words of Cyrus the elder, as reported by Xenophon.
- 23. Immortality anticipated with longing.

INTRODUCTION.

AFTER the death of Julius Caesar, and before the conflict with Antony, Cicero spent two years in retirement, principally at his Tusculan villa. It was the most fruitful season of his life, as regards philosophy. To this period (B. C. 45 or 44) the authorship of the *De Senectute* is commonly assigned. In his *De Divinatione*, in enumerating his philosophical works, he speaks of this treatise on Old Age as "lately thrown in among them,"¹ and

¹ *Interjectus est etiam nuper*. The chief ground for doubt as to the time of its composition is that Cicero seems to speak of this book as "thrown in among" the six Books of the *De Republica*, written during his consulate; while he sometimes gives a very broad sense to *nuper*, as when he writes, *nuper, id est paucis ante seculis*. But between his mention of the *De Republica* and that of the *De Senectute* he names the *Consolatio*, which was written in B. C. 45, after the death of his daughter. *Interjectus*, as I suppose, refers, not to the date, but to the brevity of the treatise, and by virtue of the *etiam* applies equally to the *Consolatio*. "While I have written, earlier or later, the longer works that I have named, I have thrown in among them these smaller treatises."

as meriting a place in the list. In the *De Amicitia*, dedicated also to Atticus, he says: "In the *Cato Major*, the book on Old Age inscribed to you, I introduced the aged Cato as leading in the discussion, because no person seemed better fitted to speak on the subject than one who both had been an old man so long, and in old age had still maintained his pre-eminence. . . . In reading that book of mine, I am sometimes so moved that it seems to me as if, not I, but Cato were talking. . . . I then wrote about old age, as an old man to an old man."¹ Again, Laelius, who is the chief speaker in the *De Amicitia*, is introduced as saying, "Old age is not burdensome, as I remember hearing Cato say in a conversation with me and Scipio, the year before he died." Cicero repeatedly refers to this book in his Letters to Atticus. In the stress of apprehension about Antony's plans and movements he writes: "I ought to read very often the *Cato Major* which I sent to you; for old age is making me more bitter. Everything puts me out of temper." At a later time he writes, "By saying that *O Tite, si quid ego*,² delights you more and more, you increase my readiness to write." And again, "I rejoice that *O Tite*² is doing you good."

In his philosophical and ethical writings, Cicero lays no claim to originality; nor, indeed, did the

¹ Cicero and Atticus were not old men when the *De Republica* was written.

² The first words of the *De Senectute*.

Romans of his age, or even of a much later time, regard themes of this kind as properly their own. Philosophy was an exotic which it was glory enough for them to prize and cultivate. This fame appertains pre-eminently to Cicero, equally for his comprehensive scholarship, for his keenness of critical discernment, and for his generous eclecticism. Were it not for his explicit statement, we might not learn from his writings to what sect he accounted himself as belonging. Though he disclaimed the Stoic school, he evidently felt a strong gravitation toward it, and we could ask for no better expositor of its doctrines than we find in him. Indeed, I can discover no reason for his adherence to the New Academy, except the liberty which it left to its disciples to doubt its own dogmas, and to acknowledge a certain measure of probability in the dogmas of other schools.

In this treatise Cicero doubtless borrowed something from Aristo of Chios, a Stoic, to whose work on Old Age — no longer extant — he refers, and he quotes largely from Xenophon and Plato. At the same time, thick-sown tokens of profound conviction and deep feeling show that the work, if not shaped from his experience, was the genuine utterance of his aspirations. What had been his life was forever closed.¹ He was weary and sad. His home was desolate, and could never again be other-

¹ *Mihi quidem senectus*, — "Life is indeed over with me." Letters to Atticus, XIV. 21.

wise. His daughter — dearer to him than any other human being had ever been — had recently died, and he had still more recently repudiated her young step-mother for lack of sympathy with him in his sorrow. His only son was giving him great solicitude and grief by his waywardness and profligacy. The republic to which he had consecrated his warm devotion and loyal service had ceased to be, and gave faint hope of renewed vitality. The Senate-house, the popular assembly, and the courts were closed for him, and might never be reopened. He had courted publicity, and had delighted in office, leadership, and influence; but there was now little likelihood that any party that might come into power would replace him, where he felt that he had a right to be, among the guiding and controlling spirits of his time.

Old age with him is just beginning, and it may last long. He is conscious of no failure in bodily or mental vigor, — in the capacity of work or of enjoyment. Yet in all that had contributed to his fame and his happiness, he has passed the culminating point; he is on the westward declivity of his life-way; decrease and decline are inevitable. But shall he succumb to the inevitable in sullen despondency, or shall he explore its resources for a contented and enjoyable life, and put them to the test of experience? He chooses the latter alternative, and it is not as the mere rehearsal of what he has read in Greek books, but with the glow of fresh