However, let us be honest, most men are sensual and intemperate and love to satisfy their appetites and live a life of excess in all ways. And so they can be even more intemperate, they want to have a medicine that is able to keep away the ill rather than follow a sorrowful life of temperance. So they rack their brains with thoughts of gold and any other kind of way to find it and they do not realize that they are looking for something that cannot have the effect they desire. And they do not understand the natural remedy they have in their own hands or they do not understand it because it will deprive them of their delights. Then, seeing that every now and then they cannot avoid the ills that result from intemperance, by way of apology they say they would rather live ten years less but live in excess, ignoring the importance of living another ten years in good health at a mature age, which is when they can be seen for what they truly are, in all virtues. For this is the age of perfection. To name just two fields, letters and science, when the majority of the most beautiful and famous books were penned by the authors at this age. And it is in these ten years that they say they would rather satisfy their appetites. As is generally known, I chose to do otherwise and wanted to live these ten years and, if I had not done so, I would not have had the good health to write these treatises over the past ten years, and which I know will do good.

Sensual men also say that it is impossible to live a regular life. The answer to this is as follows: Galen, who was a great doctor, did it and said it was the best medicine. Plato, Cicero, Isocrates and many other great men in the past also did, but I shall not bore you with their names. And in our days so did Pope Paul Farnese and Cardinal Bembo, and this is why they lived so long as did our Dukes Lando and Donatto. The same can be said of many others of lower social rank and of those who live not only in the cities but also in the country for it is to be found all over, for those who wish to find it. Therefore, since many have led this life and many are still leading it, it is a life that can be led by everyone as there is no great difficulty in doing so. Cicero himself says that nothing is needed but to begin it in earnest while Plato, although he lived a temperate life, says that men in Republics cannot do so as they are often forced.
to expose themselves to various hardships and changes which are incompatible with a temperate life. To this I reply, as I did earlier, that these are not cases of intemperance that are of importance and lead to illness and death, for those who lead a life without excess of food and drink, which men of the Republic should be particularly careful of, can be sure that they will be better equipped to bear the hardships they come up against.

Comments

Nobody, no matter what their social rank, cannot but hope to reach an old age that is characterized by a good quality of life and a satisfactory level of diligence, as happened to Hesiod. However, there are very few who wish to follow a path that leads them to this kind of old age. This is why many elderly people can be seen in the cities, such as the ones Juvenal describes (Satyr X.) while there are very few vigorous, active elderly, who are able to work for the good of the people. Plato must have had something similar in mind when he suggested that the elderly, the majority of whom were ill, should be removed from any public administration posts. Those who devote themselves to the military do not always reach old age and, if they do, they do not always enjoy good health and alternate between periods of excess of all kinds and periods of hunger and thirst. The same applies to peasants who work in the fields and those who carry out strenuous trades that are harmful to their health in cities. There is no doubt that those who can afford to devote themselves to intellectual activities are privileged. Indeed, if they so wish, they are in the ideal condition to change their lifestyle and thus enjoy an old age that is healthy and serene and that allows them to put their experience and knowledge to the use of others, thus achieving a sort of posthumous life as it were. Hippocrates was of a considerable age when he wrote the Aphorisms, or his Oracles, as it would be correct to say; the works Galen produced in his old age are his most important; Vallesio, archiater to the King of Spain, Phillip I, was at a ripe age when he wrote De Sacra Philosophia; the longeval Santorio wrote his valuable work De Medicina Statica; Harvey, an English Democritus, edited a new edition of his work on the circulation of blood during his old age and was seventy-three.
when he had his work on the generation of animals published. The same phenomenon occurred for many more scientists in various fields of knowledge. It must be said that this is not the case with an author who, overcome by a sudden urge, wants to publish one of his early works. This is because if one re-reads one's early works when older, it can be a source of dissatisfaction and results in melancholy. In his *Carmi* Ovid illustrates a similar sensation when he says: “When I re-read my lines I am ashamed of what I have written because I see many things which I believe should be erased”.

Old age, in particular one that is given the epithets *fresh* and *operose*, is the most precious fruit of a sober life lived at the right moments in the right way. This fruit cannot embrace those men of letters who claim to be enemies of frugal dining, who spent their youth and adulthood indulging themselves in the excesses of Bacchus and Venus. As the author of the *Eunuch* says, “A decrepit, lethargic, ashen-coloured old age” awaits them “and they will become the living dead, with bodies that are half alive and half dead, or rather, completely dead.”
Here the objection might be raised that those who have always followed a temperate life have always eaten small quantities of food fit for the sick even when well and therefore have nothing left to resort to when ill. To this I reply that first of all Nature, who wants man to survive as long as possible, teaches us how to deal with illness by immediately taking away our appetites, so if we eat, we eat very little as this suffices. However, if one falls ill even after following a temperate life, one must only eat the food recommended for one's illness and in even smaller quantities than when healthy. For if he were to eat more, he would die because since his body is already upset by the illness, he would be creating even more harm by giving it greater quantities of food than it is used to. But one can also reply that those who lead a regular life do not fall ill, and if they do, very rarely and for just a brief period of time, because a regular life removes all the causes of ill, and once these have been removed, they can have no effect. Thus those who lead a temperate life need not fear sickness, since they have no reason to fear the effects resulting from such causes.

Comments

Nowadays, there is no lack of those who follow a frugal, regular lifestyle and live serenely to a ripe old age. Several religious communities with a considerable number of old people are evidence of this. These people dress scantily, go around barefoot, sleep on straw in cramped cells and are exposed to considerable heat during the summers. Nevertheless, a considerable number of them live to the age of seventy or eighty and are healthy and robust, aware that they owe this to nothing other than their frequent fasting and a frugal diet, which was not always of the highest quality. Our author rightly wants to reply to the objections from critics, those who find the sober life so repugnant. He points out that those who lead a regular life are not predisposed to illnesses of a plethoric or cachectic nature and if they become ill, it is usually nothing serious. The critics also claim that those who lead a regular life
are weakened by such abstinence and when they fall ill, they are unable to tolerate any medicine. I would like to reply to this as follows: owing to this supposed weakness caused by abstinence, they are extremely lucky that they need no medicine. Hippocrates (I. Aphor.) wrote that the elderly are less inclined to acute fevers than the young because the metabolism of their body is sluggish and less susceptible to inflammation.

Those who lead a sober life fall ill less frequently and seriously than those who decide to follow a life of excess. As a result, the humours in the latter are corrupted and they can no longer perform their original physiological functions. As far as risks the environment might pose for the health are concerned, for example particles carried by the air which are impossible to avoid, and as far as certain epidemical constitutions are concerned, those who follow a sober life are still susceptible to illness but less so than those who live a life of excess and forgo nothing. In the latter, epidemic diseases are the most virulent, as can be seen during outbreaks of the plague, when it is the obese who suffer most.

"The plague is less cruel to the elderly", Pliny wrote (Lib. VII: H. N. Cap. X) and I believe this is only due to the fact that their bodies are leaner and therefore less susceptible to external factors than the wearier ones of the young. Giulio Cesare Zarotto (De Med. Mart. Interp.) gives a different explanation. He believes that the bodies of the elderly are less susceptible to the plague because of its highly feverish nature. In one of Martial's amusing epigrams (Libro III) he describes a woman called Vetustilla who, although considerably advanced in years and full of wrinkles, would still flirt and do her utmost to find a husband. The poet makes several sarcastic comments and then says, "Since it is still winter for you in the month of August, not even a pestilential fever would be able to warm you. After two hundred dead husbands, you still have the courage to remarry".

This hypothesis, which is intended to prove that the plague is a highly feverish disease, might also recognize other causes, but it is based on the judgement in Martial’s passage when it says that not even the plague itself would be able to melt and arouse the frigidity of that old woman. This is an explanation that is not only amusing but also ingenious, but I am afraid I disagree.

Cases of the plague are not always accompanied by fever, so even
doctors can be deceived. However, I would like to draw attention to
the fact that the bodies of the elderly are lean and wrinkly and this
is why they are less susceptible to the plague, or are less seriously
affected. The same phenomenon can be observed in epidemics in
animals and I personally had the opportunity to study this several
years ago when there was a terrible lethal bovine epidemic in the
whole of the Venetian Republic. It also raged throughout Italy, and
in the Roman countryside in particular, causing considerable dam­
age. One of the phenomena I observed was that robust, muscular
oxen were afflicted more than the older, leaner ones. I have written
a lecture on the subject which I gave at the University of Padua and
have since had published.
Since a sober life therefore appears to be so advantageous and virtuous, everyone should follow it. Even more so as it does not conflict with duties of any kind and is easy to follow. There is no need for anyone to eat as little as I do or not to eat fruit, fish and other things since I limit myself to a quantity that suffices for my small, weak stomach and abstain from the fruits, fish and other foods that disagree with me. Such things are not forbidden to those who find them agreeable. On the contrary, they should eat them. But they are forbidden to eat a greater quantity of any food they like than their stomachs are able to digest easily and the same applies to drink. The only rule to observe in eating and drinking is that of quantity and not of the quality of the food, and this should not be at all difficult. And I do not want anyone to say that there are those who lead a life of excess but are still healthy and vigorous in their old age as this reasoning is based on something that is uncertain and dangerous, and occurs very rarely. When it does, it seems more like a miracle than natural and this should not induce us to follow a life of excess since Nature has been too generous to these people and their example is not to be followed. However, those who wish to pay no heed to these observations since they have placed their trust in their youth or healthy constitution and strong stomachs, may expect suffering in the future and a life threatened by disease and death. I therefore claim that even if a man is of a weakly constitution, he is more likely to reach an old age if he has followed a life that is regular and sober than a young man who follows a life of excess. However, there is no doubt that those who are healthy can live longer than those who are not, and that it is the wish of God and Nature that a man is born with such a healthy constitution that he can live a healthy life for many years without too much sacrifice, as was the case in the Venetian Republic with the Procurator M. Thomaso Contarini and Cavaliere M. Antonio Capo di Vacca in Padua. But cases such as these are few and far between. Thus, those who wish to resolutely live longer and die without sickness need to follow a regular life, as this is the only way to enjoy the fruits of such a life, which are almost infinite and all the source of endless appreciation.
Comments

Should somebody ask me questions regarding which food they should eat, how much and at what time of day in order to remain healthy, I would tell them to put the question to their stomach, since the latter will surely give the most appropriate answers. When he was trying to see if one of his speeches would meet with his audience’s approval, Quintilian used to say: “I ask my ears”.

The stomach must be considered along the same lines as Polykleitos’ principle. There would be no point in following a sober life without taking into consideration what agrees or disagrees with it and, above all, without taxing it or burdening it excessively with things that are good for it. Everyone is familiar with the saying, “It is bad to fill oneself with any kind of food, and filling oneself with bread is even worse”. Those who believe they will live to a ripe old age by fasting are also contradicting the laws of a sober life. The juices that form in the stomach and then go on to receive and attack the food accept no fasting and continue their work, thus digesting the gastric membrane and attracting humours from other parts of the body. Hippocrates compared the stomach to the sea, the giver and receiver of all things. Hunger also stimulates the production of bile and makes men terribly bad tempered, which made a saying by Plautus proverbial: “both hunger and waiting make the bile go to the head”. This is why Hippocrates disapproves of eating just one meal a day. Such abstinence produces particular stimuli in the body, food is devoured rather than eaten, and the intestines slowed down. Hunger is to be avoided in a healthy body and the stomach must be given the food it needs.
For such a life keeps the humours clean and pure, and does not allow vapours to ascend from the stomach to the head, so that the brain of those who live in this manner is always clean and well. He can therefore rise above the vile and low worries of this life to the exalted and beautiful contemplation of the heavenly to his well-being and comfort. He then has a true understanding of the things he would otherwise never have learned or understood, which is the magnificence of God, with his infinite power, wisdom and goodness. He then recognizes Nature as the true son of God, and can see and touch the things that at another age or with a less healthy brain he would otherwise not have been able to. It is then that he truly understands the brutality of those vices into whose trap men fall when they are unable to restrain their human impulses and the three important desires which seem to have been created for us just to make sure we are always tormented and restless.

These are lust and a desire for honour and material belongings, which grow in those who do not follow a sober life, because as they advance in age, they observe neither reason nor appetite as they should, and continence and reason take their place, virtues that are not abandoned by those who do not live a life of excess. He then finally understands that such passions and desires are beyond reason and thus abandons the paths of vice and intemperance and replaces them with virtue and charity. Thanks to the mercy of God, he may look forward to a long life in the knowledge that he has relinquished the paths of vice and hopes to die in God's favour, through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ. He no longer fears death, safe in the knowledge that he will die when he is full of honour and has lived a long life, reaching an age that countless other men who live a temperate life also reach. And they do not even fear death might take them by surprise or violently with sharp pains and fever, as they know it will come upon them quietly and gently. For the only cause of death in such men will be the release of one's soul owing to the lack of aqua viva, which gradually disappears like a lamp which has consumed all its oil. He then passes gently from this life to one that is celestial and eternal.

Oh blessed, heavenly life of temperance to be followed by men,
since the other is so disagreeable to you, as is clear to see from the effects of both. Your very name should suffice for men to understand just how beautiful a regular and sober life is, and how terrible an intemperate one is. Indeed, it is like talking of the Angel and the Devil. So far I have described my reasons for abandoning intemperance and embracing a sober life, how I did so and what happened. I have also described the advantages to those who do so.

Comments

In short, temperance in eating is to be considered the basis and “pillar of health and long life”. It then leads to a series of advantages of the sober life that our author goes on to explain such as “prudence, wisdom and also a peaceful death”. For if one follows a temperate life without ever giving in to the temptation to stray, when one reaches old age and it is time to take one’s leave, this happens without pain and the soul leaves the body it has been imprisoned in and flies up to the skies; I repeat, this is what happens if one has spent one’s life not only living a temperate life, but also in good health. Life in the true meaning of the word is one that has constantly followed the rules of moderation, far away from doctors and medicine. This is not the case for those who, owing to their excesses in eating and drinking, are forced to take to their beds or have to sit, suffering a life of hardship.

However, I would like to make one further observation. Those who eat just once a day and fast frequently suffer from bad breath. Aristotle (Sect. XIII. Probl. VII.) wonders why one can recognize those who have fasted for days by their bad breath. Explanations for this phenomenon have been put forward by Aristotle himself, Aphrodisio, Settalio and others. I would like to recall the amusing epigram by Martial that describes a woman called Bassa, who was renowned for her bad breath. The poet lists the various unpleasant smells he is familiar with and amongst them includes that of those who fast on Saturdays and goes on to say he would rather be exposed to all of them rather than to Bassa’s bad breath. I take it that the poet is referring to Jews when he speaks of those who fast on Saturdays as they are the only people who fast so strictly in accordance with their religion. They do not eat or drink for over twenty-
four hours. This is why they have bad breath, especially during the
summer when fasting is proclaimed at the height of summer. Their
tongues and stomachs become dry because of the concentration
produced in their bile and other juices and the air they inhale is re­
leased from their mouths after having come into contact with those
organs and substances. This is why Ballonio (Con. Liber II. Con.
XVI.) says that fasting is not suitable for those who have an excess
of bitter bile. During Martial's life-time, there were a great number
of Jews living in Rome and their religious customs were familiar
to everyone. It is therefore possible that famine and fasting might
increase the diffusion of bad breath, as Ovid writes (Liber III. Ars
Aman.): "Those with bad breath should never speak when fasting".
Now, some intemperate, unthinking people believe that a long life is no good thing and that, at an age of seventy-five, it can no longer be called life but is really a living death. I shall prove that they are wrong (because it is my wish that everyone lives as long as me, as this is the most beautiful period of all). I would now like to describe how I pass my time, and the joy I have in life at my age, as those who know me can testify, to show everybody that the life I am living really is life and not death, and one that can give so much happiness in this world.

Comments

Those that claim that once one has reached the age of sixty-five it would be better to renounce life on earth rather than drag oneself on in such a pitiful condition, afflicted by countless illnesses are to be forgiven. However, this only applies to those who were not led astray by the passions that accompany vice and intemperance in their youth and ripe age. It is easy to see how those who live without temperance then have to bear the consequences and rarely reach the age of sixty. The fate of those who embrace the rules of temperance and sober living in their youth and the years that followed is preferable. In the Psalms we can read that a man should live to the age of seventy and, in some cases, eighty. This is in basic agreement with what philosophers wrote on the climacteric years, also called the scalar years which include seventy year olds and ninety year olds, and therefore also sixty-three, the number of years that is the sum of seven and nine and is worthy of great interest and honour. The number seven occurs in many natural phenomena. Acute illnesses break out most frequently on the seventh, ninth and twentieth day; chronic ones on the fortieth and eightieth; thus, the course of life continues for those who are seventy and the seventy-eth year is considered to be the last for the majority of mortals. Seventy is a climacteric number and eighty-one is the sum of nine times nine. Plato is said to have died when he turned eighty-one. I am aware that many people do not believe in the influence of
numbers, starting with the observation that nature is absolute, as it were, while numbers are created and live in the heads of men.

Nevertheless, I would like to give a piece of simple advice. Let us avoid an attitude of total denial as regards any possible influence of numbers, since God himself used them as parameters of weight, number and measurement. He took six days to create the universe and rested on the seventh. Saint Augustine (Lib. XI. De Civ. Dei) wrote with great perspicacity on the number six, which is considered one of the perfect numbers. He says that it is made up of its parts which are a sixth, a third, and a half that is, one, two and three which make six when added, and of which they represent a share. Saint Augustine underlines the fact that God used the number six when he created the world in six days. This number is to be considered the root of all perfect numbers. The number one hundred is not one of these. The Creator, who is perfect, wanted the world to be perfect and therefore created it in six days which, in turn, is a number that is truly perfect.
And not only shall they be convinced of this but also be amazed by my good health, at how I can mount a horse without assistance, climb not only a flight of stairs but a hill with the utmost ease, and how cheerful and good-humoured I am, free of any worries or burdens. My heart is full of joy and peace and there they shall remain. Furthermore, they also know how I spend my free time so I am never weary of life as I spend many hours in discussion with men of great intellect, customs and culture and outstanding in countless other virtues. Then, when it is impossible to converse with them, I dedicate myself to a beautiful book and when I have read enough, I write, thus hoping I will be able to do good to others as long as I have the strength. And all these things I do with the greatest ease when the time is right, in my rooms which are not only in the most beautiful part of the noble city of Padua, which is of such great beauty and worthy of praise, but which were built before our times and offer me shelter from both the heat and the cold as they were constructed in accordance with the logic of architecture, which has taught us how it should be done. And I can also enjoy the various gardens with their streams nearby, where I can always be sure to find some pleasant way of passing the time.

I also have another way of entertaining myself whether in the month of April or May, September or October for these are the days when I can enjoy my favourite hill here in the Euganean hills, the most beautiful of them all, with its fountains, gardens and hunting and in particular with its beautiful rooms where I can spend some moments doing something that is suitable to my age and not too tiring.

Comments

Our author takes pleasure in describing the pleasant pastimes he has found in his old age - reading, writing, hunting, beautiful buildings whether in the town of Padua or in the Euganean hills where such beautiful and comfortable residences were built. The old man in Terenzio's *Eunuch* (Act. V) says the following: “My
country home gives me the greatest satisfaction. I like both the
countryside and the city and when I begin to be bored I move
from one to the other". Our venerable wise old man could not
have chosen countryside or hills that were more amenable than the
Euganean hills or a more illustrious city than Padua, the home of
all Muses and virtues. These places nourish the spirit by remaining
in touch with the most illustrious men in all fields of knowledge.
Seneca’s Epistle LXXXIII is truly profound and worthy of note. The
author was no longer young and was explaining his lifestyle to Lu-
cilio, how he vented his inclinations by exercising both body and
mind, and how he practised the utmost temperance in eating and
drinking. He would say, “Dry bread and lunch without a prepared
table that does not require one to wash one’s hands afterwards”.
There is an epigram by Martial that seems to have been written
especially for this subject:

Should someone ask me how I pass my time when I am in the
country, I have no trouble in answering.

In the morning I invoke the gods, check up on the servants and
crops, and give everyone their orders for the day.

Then it is time for reading, Apollo and the Muses.

I let myself be massaged and exercise my body in moderation.

Happy and relaxed, I then meditate, drink, sing, play, bathe, eat and
rest with pleasure.

A small lamp burns little oil.

If I then create something with the favour of the night, I dedicate
it to the Muses.