I spend the same number of days in my country villa which is of
great beauty, both because it is full of pretty streets that all lead to
a beautiful square, in the middle of which stands the church in its
place of honour, and because it is divided by a wide, quick-flowing
branch of the river Brenta. On both sides there is extensive land, full
of fertile, cultivated fields and now inhabited; this was not the case
previously, or rather, it was the very opposite, since it was marshy
and an unhealthy area, and was more popular with grass snakes
than men. However, once I had the water drained the land could be
inhabited and people gradually came; the numbers soon multiplied
and the place is now one of perfection so I can truly say that this is
an altar and temple to God where he can be admired; and this gives
me endless pleasure and joy every time I return there in delight.

I return to these places each year to visit some of the surround­
ing towns and enjoy the company of my friends who live there. I
find delight just being with them and conversing together with the
other men of great intellect who are in their midst – architects,
painters, sculptors, musicians and farmers, for our age is abun­
dant in such men. I admire their works both new and old, and I al­
ways learn something that delights me, I see the buildings, the gar­
dens, old-fashioned things and the public squares, churches and
fortresses, leaving nothing aside that can be a source of pleasure
and knowledge. But above all, I enjoy the journey there and back,
when I can contemplate the beauty of the places and villages I pass.
Some are in the valley, others in the hills, near rivers or fountains,
and many have beautiful homes surrounded by gardens. And this
enjoyment and delight is not in the least diminished because I see
or hear badly or because of the failing of any other of my senses,
which are all perfect (thanks be to God). Especially that of taste, as
I appreciate the simple food I eat now much more, no matter where
I am, than the delicate dishes I ate when I led a life of intemper­
ance. And sleeping in different beds does not disturb me because
I sleep soundly wherever I am and my dreams are always serene
and pleasant. And it is with the greatest delight that I observe the
success of such an important undertaking by the State, reclaim­
ing the uncultivated areas of land, something that began during
my lifetime but which I never believed I would see finished since I know that such important undertakings are slow to be commenced by the State. However, not only have I witnessed it but I was personally also assisting them in this undertaking for two months without interruption during the height of summer in these marshy areas, and not once did I suffer from boredom or fatigue, or any other kind of inconvenience—such is the power of a temperate life, which accompanies me wherever I go.

Comments

At this point the author digresses and describes his services to the Republic and, at the same time, the advantages he himself gained at a time of life that others consider to be marginal and unproductive. He also describes how he managed to rectify the damages that ensued in vicissitudes involving his family and other calamities by applying himself to agriculture. In particular, he managed to reclaim uncultivated, marshy areas and transform them into land that could be inhabited and cultivated, as well as building churches there. There is no doubt that the drying of marshy areas is of the greatest importance as in the winter they are submerged in water and in the summer emit a mephitic stench. The Romans carried out this kind of work systematically. Livy remembers the land reclamation of the Agro Pontino by Marco Lepido. One of the effects produced in cases such as these is that the air is much healthier, which has a very positive influence on the crops. There is nothing that is useful that does not also produce disadvantages. When drying swamps and channelling the water into artificial canals that lead to a river, at times it is impossible to stop the river overflowing its natural banks, thus creating new rivers and flooding vast areas of land.

This was the case with the River Reno that flows into the Padua valley and into the River Po. It burst its banks and created a river that flowed towards the sea, flooding the countryside around Bologna, Ferrara and Ravenna. And this is the path the river still follows today. When the cities of Bologna and Ravenna suggested that the Reno should be channelled back to its ancient waterway towards the Po, Ercole II, the Duke of Ferrara refused to agree to the under-
taking saying that one should not lead more water back to the Po than it was able to deal with.

The greatest river in Italy would have reached the sea in a less majestic manner renouncing the grandiose proposal by the Romans who wanted to deviate all waterways into the Tiber to make it the biggest river; “the glory of the Tiber is not affected by the number of its tributaries”.

Virgil (O’Georj.) describes the River Po.
Furthermore, I am sure I shall see the completion of another undertaking that has been started, which is that of the preservation of our estuary, or rather lagoon, the supreme and marvellous fortress of my beloved Homeland. I have reminded the Republic of the need for its preservation more than once both in writing and in person (and I am not saying this for my own satisfaction but because it is the simple truth) and since it is in my nature to bring benefit wherever possible and to preserve it for as long as possible.

Comments

Our author is right to regard the lagoon, this extraordinary adornment of Venice, as a fortress which, although just water, offers more protection than the high city walls of Rome. No other city can boast that it has never seen the ominous face of enemies threatening its very destruction, as was the case in both Rome and Vienna. If enemies have ever considered threatening the prosperity of Venice, they did so from a distance and in vain. It might well be that one day suppositions become fact and that within a couple of centuries, Venice might be linked to the mainland as was the case in Ravenna. I would not be at all surprised and this will happen when, “In just one day, everything will end; the engine of the world, which has worked for so long, will collapse”.

The writer does not state what needs to be done or what arrangements need to be made so that once the canals have been made deep enough they are easy to navigate so that trade with nearby cities becomes easier. I personally believe that the deviation of waterways and rivers that are not used for navigation is necessary to stop them flowing into those that are navigable, thus depositing large amounts of sand together with the water that then obstruct the ports. Otherwise artificial canals should be built leading off these rivers. In accordance with the latter, starting from the river Brenta in Mira, around 12 miles from Padua, in 1611 the construction of a great canal around 25 miles long was started, upon the orders of the Water Board. In his great work on the measure-
ment of flowing waterways, Benedetto Castello from Bressanone, mathematician to Pope Urbano VIII, disapproved of the works that had been carried out to deviate the waters so they would not block the ports with sand. He actually believed this was harmful and explained his reasons which were more than valid – rivers that gently flow into the sea take greater quantities of sand with them. The waterways should therefore be made to flow into the rivers so they become stronger and when they reach the sea, they are both faster and stronger. In this manner they would act in the same way as the canals built in the sand of the sea where the sand would also be deposited. This phenomenon can be observed in large rivers which, once they have crossed vast areas of land with considerable force, burst into the sea with the same violence. Virgil (*IV Georg.*) describes the River Po:

No other river flows so violently / Through vast expanses of fertile countryside into the purple sea.

The image used by Torquato Tasso is just as effective:

Whose streams the further from the fountain rolled / Still stronger wax, and with more puissance go.
These are my most important pastimes. These are the recreations and amusements of my old age, which is so much more to be appreciated than youth as thanks to God's grace I have been freed from worries of the mind and ills of the body. I therefore no longer suffer from any of those contrary emotions that torment such a number of young men and just as many old ones who, as a result of their careless lifestyle and intemperate habits, are destitute of health and strength and therefore of all true enjoyment. And if it is legitimate to compare minor matters to those of importance, I shall even go so far as to say that such are the effects of my temperate life that at my present age of eighty-three, I have been able to pen an amusing comedy, full of innocent mirth and pleasant jests. Such a work is usually the fruit of youth, just as a tragedy is one of old age since its charm and playfulness is proportional to youth, and its melancholy nature proportional to old age. Now, since that great Greek old poet was praised for having written a tragedy at the age of seventy-three and therefore considered healthy and hearty, and since the tragedy is a gloomy, melancholy poem, why should I be considered less healthy than him since I wrote a comedy when I was five years older than that, especially since a comedy is cheerful and pleasant as everyone knows? Certainly, if I show no bias in judging myself, I believe I am healthier and more cheerful than he was when he was ten years younger.

Comments

The author continues with the advantages of the sober life and in particular on the chances it offers to keep all kinds of passion under control, something that is of the greatest importance. Indeed, the humours of those who follow a temperate life are well-balanced, starting with the bile and melancholy, so they are not easily aroused and do not lead to agitation. I have already described the serious impediments that can afflict the body because of suffering of the soul. The work on the suffering of the human spirit by Gunther Christopher Schelhamer, primary
professor at the University of Kiel, should be consulted on the subject. In it he describes all the pleasures that have accompanied him in his old age.
There is one more comfort I would like to mention and that is of seeing a kind of immortality in a succession of descendents. For when I return home, I find before me not one or two, but eleven nieces and nephews, the eldest of whom is eighteen and the youngest two, all the children of the same mother and father, all healthy and beautiful and as far as I can tell, all fond of study and healthy habits. I play around with the youngest ones as they love to jest, and it is true that those of the age of three up to five are natural jesters. The older ones are my companions in certain ways, and as nature has given them such perfect voices, I enjoy listening to them sing and play various instruments and even I myself sing, too, because I have a better voice now, clearer and louder, than I did when I was young. Surrounded by such beautiful children, I feel I am like God the Father as he is portrayed in paintings, surrounded by his Angels and Archangels.

This is how I enjoy my old age. One can therefore see that the life I live is one that is full of life and not a living death, as those who are unhealthy like to say, and I would not exchange my lifestyle or age with that of a younger man who succumbed to his appetites, no matter how healthy. For I know that every day this young man is subject to a thousand kinds of ailments and death, something that can be seen quite clearly and needs no proof. I remember very well the things I did when I was that age, I know all too well how foolhardy such young men are, and how they tend to believe in their own strength in all their actions, and as a result of their inexperience, they are overconfident in their expectations. They audaciously expose themselves to all kinds of danger and, banishing reason, they yield to all their yearnings and try to satisfy their appetite, not realizing they are bringing upon themselves the very miseries they are trying to avoid, that is, infirmity and, as I have said more than once, death. And these are the two great ills that afflict those who follow an intemperate life. One is troublesome and painful, the other is unbearable and frightening – unbearable to those who are overcome by reason, and to youth in particular, who do not want to die before their time. Frightening to those who reflect on the errors to which this mortal life is subject, and on the vengeance which the justice of God is wont to take on sinners.
While I in my old age must praise the Lord because I am free from both these torments – from the one because I am sure I will not fall ill, since I have removed the causes of illness by following the sober life, from the other which is that of death, because from many years’ experience, I have learned to obey reason. I therefore believe it is folly to fear what cannot be avoided, but likewise expect some consolation from the grace of Jesus Christ when it is finally my turn. Furthermore, while I know all too well that my turn will also come, it is still so far away that I cannot discern it, because I know I shall only die of mere dissolution since my regular course of life has closed all other roads of death and thus prevented the humours of my body from making any other kind of war upon me, than that which I and my generations must expect from the elements. I am not so foolish as not to know that, since I was born I must also die. But the death Nature gives to those who have followed a temperate life is one that is beautiful and desirable. For since it is Nature herself that created life, it is easier for her to end it, and she does so much later than illness. Without pretending to be a poet, this is the death that is one without life, and it cannot be otherwise. But this natural death does not overtake one until many years have passed and it is the result of the considerable weakness that results in men – as they are gradually impaired in their movements and can barely reason –, becoming deaf and blind, stooped and full of all other kinds of ill. But thanks be to God, I am sure I still have many years ahead of me and I even believe that my soul, which has found a haven in my body, finding only peace, love and harmony, not only amongst the humours but also between sense and reason, is more than happy to stay there. So it only follows that I still have a great number of years before me, before it is to be released. I am convinced that I still have a long time to live in health and good spirits, to enjoy this beautiful world which is truly beautiful to those who make it so, as I did and hope to continue to do so if God so wishes, but its beauty can only be realized by those who enjoy good health of both body and mind, having followed a life of temperance and reason.

Now, if this sober living brings such great happiness, if its name is so attractive and pleasing and it is so easy to attain, and if the blessings it brings are so stable and permanent, all that is left for me to do is to pray that every man of sound judgement embraces
this valuable treasure, One that exceeds any other worldly blessing (since it gives us a long, healthy life), and should therefore be sought after by all and looked after for always. This is that divine sobriety, which is so agreeable to God, the friend of Nature, the daughter of Reason, sister of all Virtues, the companion of temperate living, modest, courteous and content with little, regular and mistress of all her operations.

Comments

There must be a reason why grandparents dote on their grandchildren and look after them with even more care than their own parents and a reason why the intensity of these emotions increases with age. They love to jump, play and shout together with their grandchildren and are more indulgent towards them, even if they deserve to be punished. One reason might be, as the saying goes, that at a certain point once again the elderly become children. Another might be that at that age, since they have no other worries and do not have to worry about looking after the family, they spend more time at home and therefore look after their grandchildren more often, and see in them the continuity of their own family. Our writer describes the pleasure he found in the presence of his eleven nieces and nephews, born to the same mother and father. The latter was the author's brother and they had always lived together when they were children. He tells us that he played and jumped around together with the children and he himself behaved more or less as they do. He claims that until the age of five children are little jesters. Tolomeo's *Commentari (Lib. VIII)* is interesting. In his court, King Masinissa kept a flock of children instead of monkeys and little dogs, and when they turned three, he sent them back to their parents and they were replaced by younger children. Watching so many young children of the same age play together, making considerable noise and at times even fighting, must have been a much greater source of delight and pleasure for Masinissa than watching mimes and jesters as other princes did for entertainment. According to Seneca (*De Tranquill. Ani.*), the famous philosopher Socrates felt no shame in playing with children and he did so not only for relaxation, but also when he was working on something
because he wanted to study and predict how the intellect or habits of this or that child would develop.

Cornaro himself says that his behaviour was very similar and he found it immensely satisfying. When he sat down to eat with his eleven nieces and nephews around him, he would observe their faces and listen to their conversation and their replies, and he would try to decide who was going to join the army or take up a public post, and who had the vocation to embrace and serve religion.
From her, as from their proper root, spring life, health, cheerfulness, industriousness, study and all those actions that are worthy of noble and general minds. The laws of God and man are all in her favour. Repletion, excess, intemperance, superfluous humours, illness, fevers, pains and dangers of death all flee from her as does the mist from the sun. Her beauty nourishes each and every noble soul. Her influence guarantees a long and agreeable life to all. Her simplicity invites everyone to attain such victories with ease. And, finally, she promises to be a mild and pleasant guardian of life, both of the rich and poor, male and female, the elderly and young, like the one who teaches a rich man modesty, a poor man parsimony, a male moderation, a woman modesty, an old man how to ward off death, and a young man the hope of a more constant and secure way of living. Sober living cleans the senses, keeps the body lively and the mind agile, the soul cheerful, the memory tenacious, movements easy and actions quick and willing. Since she feels hardly nothing of her earthly burden, the soul experiences much of her liberty – the spirits move gently through the arteries, the blood flows through the veins, the temperate and gentle heat creates gentle and temperate emotions, and man finally enjoys a pleasing and agreeable harmony.

Comments

The author lists the advantages that result from the sober life and the harm it is capable of preventing. I personally shall limit myself to pointing out an observation that contradicts medical knowledge, and that is, that in the bodies of those who follow the rules of the sober life in eating and drinking, “The spirits move gently through the arteries, the blood flows through the veins”. This is in accordance with Erasistrato’s theory which states that the vital spirits are to be found in the arteries while the blood is in the veins. In Galen’s treatise *On the nature of the blood in arteries* he criticizes this theory harshly, claiming that not only is blood enclosed in the arteries, but that it also moves quickly and constantly and it is
thanks to this movement that various organs are nourished. Thus, if it is true, all that remains returns from the latter to the heart via the veins, just as the law of circulation is undisputedly true. The ancients ignored this law that was discovered by Harvey, an English Democritus, after having exploited the hypotheses formulated as a result of experiments carried out on various animals by Acquapendente and Paolo Sarpi, both from the University of Padua.
Most holy and innocent Sober life, the only comfort of nature, benevolent mother of human life, the true medicine of both body and soul, how much should men praise and thank you for your generous gifts. Show them the way to preserve that asset, their life and health to please God, since every living soul appreciates and takes care of his life and very being.

However, as it is not my intention to sing the infinite praises of this unique and outstanding Sober life, I shall stop here for the moment. And as so many men follow a life of spirituality and contemplation in prayers, just think how much more grateful they would be to God if they also devoted themselves to a life of temperance. They would add to the beauty of the world because they would be regarded as holy fathers on earth, as were the ancients who followed a sober and spiritual life. By living to the age of 120 thanks to the grace of God, they would be able to perform countless miracles, as did the ancients. And they would always be healthy, satisfied and cheerful, instead of being ill, melancholy and discontent. And since some people believe this is God’s will, and by doing so they are showing penance for their sins, I believe they are wrong, because I cannot believe that God wishes man, whom he loves so much, to live a life of illness, melancholy and discontent, but wishes to see him healthy, cheerful and satisfied, because that is how the Holy fathers live, thus making them better servants of his Majesty, and performing the beautiful miracles one can read about.

Oh what a beautiful and pleasant world it would now be, as it was in the past, and it would be even more beautiful because now there are so many more religions and monasteries, and if they were to follow the sober life, we would be able to witness an infinite number of venerable elderly men, which would be wondrous to behold, and they would not deviate from the sober life of their Religion; on the contrary, they would observe it even more faithfully, because every Religion includes a diet of bread, wine, eggs, as well as meat, legume soups, salad, fruit and egg pies, some of which do them great harm and others which lead to their deaths. But since they are permitted by their order, they believe it might be wrong to leave them aside, which they do not do. Whereas once they
are over thirty, they would be wise to do so and to live off bread and wine, small loaves, eggs with bread. And this is the only way to save a man with a sickly constitution and it is a more abundant life than the one our ancient Holy Fathers enjoyed in the desert, when they ate only wild fruit and plant roots, and drank simple water, but nevertheless, as I have already said, their lives were long, healthy, cheerful and content. And this is what men today should also do, and together they will find it easier to follow the path that leads to heaven, which is open to each and every faithful Christian, because this is what our Redeemer Jesus Christ did when he came down to earth to shed his precious blood to free us from our tyrannical servitude to the Devil, and all of this out of the endless kindness of his heart.

To conclude, I would like to say that, since a long life is so full of grace and good and as I am one of those lucky enough to enjoy it, since I do not want to be uncharitable, I have no choice but to act as testimony and give faith to others that my present good health at such a ripe old age is nothing other than the result of having followed this much praised temperate and sober life.

Comments

The author completes his treatise with an elegy of the sober life and all the advantages it brings to those who follow it, first and foremost, a long life. He gives the example of the hermits whose diet consisted only in fruit, grass and water, and lived healthily to the age of a hundred. He adds that the same thing should be the case with men of the church today who have embraced spiritual life in monasteries, if they were true believers and did not neglect to do so and suffer from poor health as is the case today, being melancholy, restless and dissatisfied with their life. Our author says that claiming they are in such a state because God is trying their patience is no justification. Cornaro wisely continues that God wants men to be healthy because they can therefore serve in exultation and those who are atoning for their sins are atoning for the sin of not having followed a sober life. At times one can observe men of the church who devote themselves to the spiritual life without foregoing any worldly goods, acting very like others who made no
vows. In his *Epistle to Nepotiano* on the life of clerics and bishops, Saint Jerome denounced the fact that many monks were richer in the monasteries than they ever were outside.