Letter written by Magnifico M. Alvise Cornaro to the very reverend Barbaro, Patriarch of Aquileia

Very Reverend Lord,

It is true that there is something divine in the intellect of man, and the fact that I found the strength to write and reason with someone so far away is an example of this. It was the divinity of nature that allowed someone as far away as myself to see another with the eyes of thought, just as I see you, my Lord, and with this I shall present arguments of reason that are of great benefit. It is also true that it will be this very reasoning above any other kind, but not at my age of ninety-one, for I have no choice, because the older I grow, the more my good health improves, much to everyone’s amazement. And as I know the reasons for such good health, it is my wish to explain how this is possible and let people know that such a paradise on earth is possible after the age of eighty. But the only way this can be achieved is by respecting Temperance and the Sober Life, much beloved by God because they are the foes of the flesh and friends of reason.

My Lord, over the last few days I have had occasion to discuss this subject with many outstanding Doctors in this University, both doctors and philosophers, and all extremely well-informed as regards my age, lifestyle and habits, and they have all witnessed how cheerful and healthy I am, and that all my senses, memory, heart, intellect and even my voice and teeth are still in perfect shape; they also know that I spend eight hours a day writing treatises to benefit the world, while the other hours I spend walking and singing. (Oh, Lord, if you could only hear just how beautiful my voice has become when I sing my prayers, to the sound of the lyre, just like David, I can assure you that it would give you the greatest joy if you could but hear me sing!). And they replied that the amount I was writing on subjects of the intellect and spirit was truly amazing. (Oh, Lord, it is incredible just how much satisfaction and joy this writing gives me; however, as I am writing for the benefit of others, you will be able to understand just how much joy it is giving me). Furthermore,
people do not believe me to be old as I spend my time doing things that are associated with the young, and not like other old men who have reached the age of eighty and show every year of their age, afflicted by gout, short of breath and other ills; they are constantly searching for new medicines or folly to alleviate themselves and prove extremely tedious. And if there is one who is suffering from no ailments, his senses are impaired, whether his eyesight, hearing or the like, so he is unable to walk or his hands tremble, and if he is not suffering from one of these ills, either he has lost his memory, or his heart or intellect no longer function properly, so his life is no longer as cheerful, content and pleasant as mine. But in addition to such good grace, there was another thing that amazed them even more and that was that I had reached the age of fifty despite suffering from a mortal affliction that has no remedy as it comes from nature. And that is, that every year, from the beginning of July throughout the month of August, I have been unable to drink any kind of wine, no matter where from, because of the harm it causes to my stomach. Thus by being deprived of my milk, since wine is really the milk of men, and being unable to drink anything but water which does not have the same virtues as wine, and does me no good at all, my stomach is so upset I can only eat very little; as a result, eating so little and not drinking any wine, by the middle of August I am in a state of such mortal weakness that not even capon broth or any other kind of remedy is able to restore my health and I find myself at death's door, and for no other reason than such a state of weakness. And should the new wine in September be late, it would surely be my death, and they would not have believed that this new wine had the power to restore me to good health in just two or three days, if they had not seen it with their very own eyes. 

"And for years and years", they would say, "and although several of us doctors have observed this, and already ten years ago we believed it impossible for him to live just one or two more years with such a mortal affliction, we can still see that this year you are not as weak". This and many other graces observed in me led them to believe that such grace was thanks to heaven or nature. And since they wished to prove this was the case (mistakenly, because it is not founded on sound reasoning but on mere opinions), they were forced to say beautiful things with extreme eloquence. There is no doubt, my Lord, that eloquence is extremely powerful in men of
great intellect, so much so that it is able to convince people of something that is untrue. I found great pleasure and enjoyment while listening to their reasoning and the like.

Another source of great pleasure was the observation that with experience, long life has the power to make an unlearned man learned, because it is the true foundation of science, and I knew this conclusion was wrong. So you can see, my Lord, how men are mistaken in their opinions, if they are not really founded on true facts. And wishing to enlighten and assist them, I told them their conclusion was wrong, as I can show them. This is because the grace in me is nothing special but is something general that can be enjoyed by everyone, because I am just a simple man, just like everybody else, made of the four elements, and in addition to my life and very existence, I also have my senses, intellect and reason. For each and every man is born with intellect and reason because God wanted to give man, whom he loves so much, more of these graces, so that they can live longer. So this universal grace is the bounty of God and not from nature or the heavens. But when man is young, he follows his senses more than reason and when he reaches the age of forty or fifty he should know that he has spent half his life succumbing to the joys of youth and the stomach, natural favours be had no difficulty in embracing, but which he finds more difficult to release in the face of death and old age, and old age is the opposite of youth, just as temperance is the opposite of intemperance. So one must change one's lifestyle as regards eating and drinking, as this is what a long, healthy life depends upon. And since the former was a sensual life of excess, the second must be regular and based on reason, because without reason, nothing can be preserved, and certainly not the life of man, as can be seen by the fact that irregularity is harmful while regularity does only good, and it is impossible for someone who wants to satisfy his senses and appetite not to be intemperate. Thus, I devoted myself to a regular, sober life to ensure I avoided any intemperance, and have reached my ripe old age.

It is true that at first it was not easy to follow the sober life, and at first I prayed to God to grant me the virtue of temperance, knowing he would hear my prayers. Then, in the knowledge that when a man wishes to do good, something he knows he can do even though it is difficult, he can make it easier by insisting, and therefore does so, which is what I did. I thus began to distance myself from a life
of excess and began to adopt the sober life, little by little. And this was not difficult, although I was very careful regarding both the amount and quality of what I ate and drank since I was of a sickly constitution. But if those who are healthy can eat and drink many other kinds of foods and wine and in greater quantities, and although their life will be a sober one, it will not be as restricted as mine is broad.

And once they had heard my reasoning and seen the results, they came to the conclusion that what I was saying was the truth. But one man, a younger one, conceded that such grace was universal but that I had been given a particular grace that had allowed me to pass from one lifestyle to another with the greatest ease, while this was something he had had great difficulty in doing. I replied that since we were both human, I myself had found it no easy task, but this should not stop a man from a task that is both glorious and practical, on account of the difficulties. And this was God’s desire, as he originally wanted man to live to be a hundred, and we should all enjoy the full advantage of his intentions, in the knowledge that when a man has passed the age of eighty, he may be exempt from sensual longings and govern himself entirely by the dictate of reason. And since God wishes us to live a long life, he has ordained that all those who reach their natural term should end their days without sickness, but by mere dissolution, the natural way; the wheels of life quietly stopping, and man peacefully leaving this world, to enter upon immortality, as will be my case, and I am sure I shall die singing my prayers. Nor do thoughts of death trouble me, even though I know that it is not far off, as I was born to die and many others before me have died at a much younger age. And I am not troubled by another worry, one that accompanies the thought of death, namely the fear of the punishment wicked men are liable to, because I believe that being a Christian, I shall be saved by the virtue of the most sacred blood of Christ, which he freely shed in order to save those who trust in him.

Thus, the beauty of my life! How happy my end!

In reply to this the young man had nothing more to say, but that he would endeavour to follow the sober life, as I had done, to take a step forward, as I had done, and one that was just as important since he so longed for his old age, he wanted to age slowly so he could enjoy such an agreeable old age.
The great desire I had, my Lord, to converse with you, has made me verbose and I have not yet finished. There are some sensualists, my Lord, who say I have wasted my time and efforts in writing this treatise on the Sober Life, as they believe it is impossible to follow. So my treatise must answer as little purpose as that of Plato on the Government, who went to great pains to recommend something that was so impracticable. This surprises me greatly as they may see that I lived a sober life for many years before I wrote this treatise, and I would never have done so if I had not been convinced that it was a life that any man might lead. One that is of great benefit, a life full of virtue, and since I felt I had to follow it, I felt I had to write about it so everyone could know its true nature. And I know that many people, after having read my treatise, have followed the same path, so that the objection regarding Plato on Government is of no force against my case.

But sensualists are enemies to reason and slaves to their passions, enjoyment and the appetite, and they excuse and defend their vices, which are the very ones that kill men as they grow older, because it is impossible that those who yield to their passions, enjoyment and appetite can avoid illness and death, as we witness daily. And to avoid acknowledging the disgrace, when a young man dies, they say he died because his time had come, in accordance with the wishes of God, and they quote the Holy Bible where it is written that God has decided when a man's life is to end, and beyond this he cannot go. This is true, but that is not what they mean when someone dies, and in the Holy Bible this is not what is written, as the end in question is a general one, which applies to all men. It is the end that is determined by God, which is that a man may live to the age of a hundred, and this is what one cannot go beyond, either living a life of excess or one of temperance. And if they were right, saying that when one dies before his time would be like acting as a sort of God and incorrect, taking away one's life before his time has come, and not allowing him to enjoy the most perfect of health after the age of eighty, because that is the age that is full of reason, experience, knowledge, goodness and charity, free of all sins and this is why God loves it so much. And God wishes that every man should reach such an age and this is why he gave him reason and intellect, so that he might do so. But the man who does not wish to abandon passion, enjoyment or appetite, will die before his time.
Our author writes that he has observed two things of great importance that he would not have believed if he himself had not experienced them. The first was that he noticed that cinnamon warms the body more than pepper; the second, that during the months of July and August, he would have such an aversion to any kind of wine that he became completely abstemious. As a result, he would lose his appetite and be reduced to such a state of weakness that his life was in danger. However, once those months had passed, thanks to the arrival of the new wine, his health would miraculously be restored. I am not at all surprised that cinnamon creates more heat than pepper. This is because pepper is too hard and compact to be able to be solved easily by the gastric juices. Indeed, if it is swollen whole, it comes out again whole. And it is impossible to make oil from it either. While cinnamon is oleous and therefore enters the bloodstream with great ease and is a vital source of nourishment. On the other hand, we know that pepper is more commonly used when moderately ground rather than in the form of fine particles.

However, it is more surprising that Cornaro's stomach developed such an aversion to old wine during those two months while the new wine, prepared in September, was more a friend than a medicine. We know that all prudent men who use their common sense, unless forced otherwise, abstain from new wines as far as possible: In *Casina* Plauto says, "Wise are those who drink old wine". There is a similar passage in Luke (Ch. 5), giving our Redeemer's opinion on old wine: "Nobody who drinks an old wine, will want a new one immediately afterwards", which leads us to deduce that old wine is better. Let us therefore see if we can put forward a plausible hypothesis regarding our author's anomaly. I believe the main reason for this uncommon, bothersome annual affliction lies in the author's lean physique, which resulted from his following the sober life. As he was born with a very weak body and went from a life of excess to one of temperance, he became as lean and thin as a rake. This condition would reach its peak in the summer, when the number of arid days rises. In such conditions, owing to its very nature because of the spirits it contains, rather than reviving and nourishing them, wine destroys body heat and gastric juices. Thus, according to Celsus, in the summer it is better to drink more dilut-
ed wine, and in winter undiluted. As a result, during the height of summer, all the more prudent people abstain from wine and rush to the taverns and other places where they can delight in drink, to drink infusions and other drinks made of the juice of lemons, oranges, cherries and strawberries. I also believe that the reason new wine did our author such good and helped his stomach recover so quickly was thanks to the volatile acid it contains, which is very strong in grapes that are not yet completely ripe. It should also be known that the wines from the Padua countryside, which our Noble Patient drank, have the following characteristic: they contain a considerable amount of volatile acid and therefore ferment in the vats very quickly and with great vigour. Then, after a couple of days, once they have cooled down, they become clear because the particulate has settled. This is why not only the country folk, but also those in the city, drink the new wines that have been prepared in August and September. I have observed that in these wines, as soon as they have fermented for around two weeks in the vats, fermentation ceases. Furthermore, once sealed tightly they are left to rest, something that is not done in other regions where wine is left to ferment in the casks for nearly the whole winter, before they are perfectly purified. It is not surprising that the body of someone who is particularly lean should start nourishing itself again in the warmest months of the year, when the gastric juices that had been destroyed by the old wine are restored by the more pleasing acidity of the new wine. The same can be observed in those who are afflicted by some kind of intestinal ailments together with a formerly inexistent acid eructation, and despite their frailty, are restored to their former healthy appearance.
CONSTITUTIONUM EPIDEMICARUM MUTINENSIVM ANNORUM QUINTI

Etiitio Scandti

BERNARDINI RAMAZZINI
In Patavino Gymnasio Præstæ Medicinae Professoris Primarii.

ACCEIT

DISSERTATIO EPistolAris DE

ABUSU CHINÆ CHINÆ

AD

D. BARTHOLOMÆUM RAMAZZINI

Mutine Medicinam FACIENS

PATAVII, MDCCXIV.

Ex Typographia Io: Baptista Comazzi.

SUPERIORUM PERMISSU.
Epidemic Constitutions of Modena over a five-year period

(Constitutionum epidemicarum mutinensium annorum quinque, 1714)
BERNARDINI RAMAZZINI,
Professoris Primarii, &c.

CONSTITUTIONES
Epidemicae Mutinenses annorum quinque.

ACCEDIT DISSERTATIO EPISTOLARIS
De abusui Chinae Chinas

AD D. BARTHOLOMÆUM RAMAZZINI,
Mutinae Medicinam facientem

ILLUSTRISISSIMIS ATQUE ECELLENTISSIMIS DOMINI
EQUITIBUS, D. MARCI PROCURATORIBUS,
ET PATAVINI GYMNASII MODERATORIBUS,
D. CAROLO RUIZINO, D. FRANCISCO LAURÉANO,
D. ALOYSIO PISANO.

BERNARDINUS RAMAZZINI F.

Constitutiones meas Epidemicas, quas initia fecundum, ut aliquando Medicos, qui
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Dabam patavii die ac. Julii. 1714.
To the Illustrious, Excellent Cavaliers, Procurators of Saint Mark's, and the Rectors of the University of Padua, Carlo Ruzino, Francesco Lauredano, Luigi Pisano, with the kindest regards from Bernardino Ramazzini.

It was my wish to reprint my *Epidemic Constitutions*, which were first published at the end of the last century and which I called “of Modena” as they concerned the diseases that afflicted first the area around Modena and then the city itself. However, I wanted this to be under the patronage of your names, Magnificent Rectors of the University of Padua, and I personally would not be deterred by the fact that the work is not new. Indeed, I am aware that your authority is such that it also grants “favours to old studies and things that cast light on what is dark”.

Padua, 20 July