To the Serene Prince Clemente  
Gian Federico D’Este

Serene Prince,

I have always been convinced of the wisdom of those authors who seek a patron they can entrust with their work once it has been completed. However, Serene Prince, I am not quite sure how I myself came to imitate those who, once they have had the inspiration for a work, make known the subject they wish to write about and who it is to be dedicated to. They might find countless obstacles in their way, delaying the work considerably, and a work that takes so long to appear is met with less pleasure.

Furthermore, when I came to Modena three years ago to offer your brother the Serene Prince my book, The Health of Princes, which I did in your presence, I am ashamed of my thoughtlessness at not having dedicated a book to You as well, first. If I had done so, I would have been able to honour you both, Serene Brothers, at the same time, offering you each your personal book. To make amends for my thoughtless behaviour, I therefore promised Your Highness that I would do the very thing I had neglected to do. Thus, when I returned to Padua, I began thinking about how I could make good my debt. But the ills I was suffering from increased and I had to stop studying and devote myself entirely to overcoming the wealth of ailments afflicting me. Finally, although my health was still a considerable source of concern, I managed to complete the work I had set myself, the notes on the treatise by Alvise Cornaro, On the Advantages of the Sober Life. This is therefore the gift I dedicate to Your Highness, Serene Prince.

I chose a subject that is useful to the upper class, and therefore even more so for Princes who are surrounded by all kinds of
comforts to ensure they can spend their days in pleasure. I would like to dedicate my efforts to You, not only as an expression of my deference, but also for Your good. I hope you do not find reading my book too demanding. On my part, I have not the slightest doubt that You will greet my gift with the same benevolence as did the Serene Prince Your Brother. The affability I myself have experienced in you is token of this, and is admired by everyone when you are in public, with your venerable actions that stem from such a generous nature. You are already of the age for such worthy actions, whether the stars have destined you for a career in the army or whether they have chosen you for the military life. For nature so generously granted you with the gifts befitting a prince, even before your education.

May you enjoy continuous good health, second in line of the Estense Family.

To your Highness

Your most humble and devoted Servant and Scholar

Bernardino Ramazzini
To the Benevolent Reader

Although it has never been my habit to write about books by other authors or comment on them, and since everything I have published so far has been the fruit of my modest experience, as I have always been mindful of what Seneca says to Lucilio in the XXXIII Epistle, that it is truly unbecoming for an old man or one who is approaching old age to put all his wisdom on display with his simple comments and notes, which is why writers of that kind are called commentators and never scholars, I would still like to undertake such a work. I therefore decided to embellish the treatise On the Advantages of the Sober Life, published by Alvise Cornaro, with my own comments and notes. This great author had the treatise published in Padua in the year 1558 by the printer Grazioso Perchacino. It was then reprinted by the Paduan typographer Pietro Maria Frambotto in 1699, with the addition of a letter by the author himself to the Reverend Barbaro, Patriarch of Aquileia, in which he exhorts him to lead a sober life.

To ensure this work was of the greatest public use and advantage, I was persuaded by the German nobleman D. Sprecher who spent several months in Padua translating everything that had been published in Italian into Latin, and he guaranteed that this book would have found favour with the Germans if written in Latin.

I am certainly greatly indebted to this nation, which has always greeted my works with cordiality and praise and they have nearly all been reprinted. For example, my work The Diseases of Workers has been translated into German, as has my book The Health of Princes, which was praised in the Acts of Leipzig and, when it was reprinted in Leipzig, the nobleman D. Michael Ettmüller added a lengthy index and introduction.
I have therefore translated into Latin all the works that have been published so far in Italian, sure in the knowledge that nobody has yet attempted such an undertaking, and have done so with the utmost diligence. It was by chance that I learned from a well-read man that the treatise *On the Advantages of the Sober Life* had been translated into Latin by the Reverend Father Leonardo Lessio, a renowned theologian, and it was placed at the end of a work on moral theology, which I read with the greatest interest. On the one hand, I thought that this learned man would have been offended if I replaced his translation with mine, but on the other, I realized that it was also to my advantage that I had been told of the translation. If I had added my own translation, some malicious critic would surely have accused me of semi-plagiarism, insinuating that I had merely copied this reverend father's best expressions. I therefore decided to simply embellish the treatise with comments or notes of a medical or philological nature, depending on the need. This is how I spent the free time I had when I did not have to hold public lectures this year.

Dear reader, take pleasure from my efforts for the common good, and for the recommendation of a sober life.

May you enjoy good health.
There is no doubt that in time, custom becomes second nature, forcing men to use what they have become accustomed to, whether good or bad. There are a great many instances in which habit overcomes reason and this cannot be denied. On the contrary, all too often we can see a virtuous man who keeps company with a wicked one follow the very same lifestyle as the latter. The opposite can also be seen, that is, that good habits become evil, just as evil becomes good, for we can observe that a wicked person, who once used to be good, will do so once more if the company he keeps is good. And this only occurs by force of habit, which is truly remarkable. Observing and reflecting on all of this, not all that long ago three bad habits introduced themselves in Italy. The first is adulation and ceremony. The second is living according to Lutheran beliefs, which is becoming second nature to some, albeit wrongly so. The third is intemperance. These three vices, which are actually cruel fiends of human life, have diminished the sincerity of a civil lifestyle, the religion of the soul and the health of the body. I have therefore decided to write on the latter and show that poor health is actually a case of abuse but one that can be overcome, which is also in accordance with Lutheran beliefs. As regards the third, adulation, I am convinced that some kind spirit will take it upon himself to criticize and remove it from the earth. Thus, I hope that before I die, I shall see these three vices removed from Italy, so that all its former beautiful and healthy customs may be returned to the country.

Comments

It is right to call custom second nature. Its power is so great and exceptional that it is capable of influencing not only the body but also the mind. Hippocrates’ thoughts on the subject of poor foods that are commonly eaten are well-known. They cause less harm than nutritious food because the gastric ferments, which consist mainly of what remains of the food that has been eaten, have no difficulty in digesting foods that are commonly eaten. And this can be observed in women, in particular young ones who have no
appetite and an atonic stomach – they are often allowed to eat a moderate amount of lime and coal to make sure they do not faint. In the same fashion, those who are used to working and are of a weak constitution suffer less than those who are more robust. This can be observed in those who accompany their singing with the cittern – the animal spirits tend to flock to the muscles, organs and the apparatus that work the most. Habit is to blame for good men becoming evil and vice-versa. "Nobody becomes evil overnight", the poet of satire says. The opposite is also true – nobody becomes good from one day to the next. However, it is more likely that a good man becomes bad than a bad man becoming good since, owing to their inherent defects, they are disposed towards evil. An example can be seen in those who have embraced a religious order of some kind and who spent almost one entire year living a life of temperance and obedience. In the very moment they abandon that rigorous order and return to secular life, they fall back into their old habits. Not only men are conditioned by habits, but also animals and even plants. It is now possible to make plants adapt to our needs and make them produce fruits earlier. For example pears, which once used to grow on large trees, now grow on smaller trunks and are riper earlier, almost as if they are offering them to their farmers. Virgil’s comment on the subject is extremely apt when he says that thanks to the assiduity of its work, “the harvest becomes richer than even the greediest farmer could have hoped for”. Habit can play a great role in all kinds of things. In his comment on Af. 50, Sect. 1, Galen mentions this book on habits; unfortunately it is one of those that no longer exist. However, in Qu. 93, Camp. Elys., Gaspar de los Rejes offers excellent examples of the force of habits. This great writer therefore begins his work on the study and practice of the sober life, beginning with none other than the force of habit.
I shall therefore begin with the subject I intend to speak about, and that is that intemperance is a vice that has eradicated and enslaved the sober life. Now, although everybody agrees that intemperance results from gluttony and sober living from abstemiousness, owing to the power of custom, intemperance is considered to be a virtue while sober living is shameful and a characteristic of avarice. So many men are blinded and obsessed to such an extent that by the time they reach forty or fifty, they are suffering from such uncommon and painful illnesses that they have become infirm and useless. Whereas if they had led a sober life, at the age of eighty they would still have been flourishing and not reduced to infirmity by this ruinous intemperance.

Oh poor and wretched Italy. Do you not see that every year intemperance kills more people than any serious plague or war? Indeed, the weapons are none other than those ruinous banquets, being so lavish and intolerable that the tables are unable to bear the endless dishes served upon them, and where plates have to be placed one upon the other, such are the amounts served. And who is able to live with such contradiction and excess? Take care, for the love of God, but I am sure that there is no vice He disapproves of more than this.

This new form of death is to be ousted, never to return, as was the case with the plague, since the disease that caused such harm in just one instant was expelled and now causes very little harm, if at all, thanks to the good custom of healthy provisions. There is therefore also a remedy to oust intemperance and it is one that can be used by everyone, as all it requires is that men live in accordance with the simplicity of nature, which teaches us to be content with little and to get used to eating no more than is absolutely necessary for life, in the knowledge that any kind of excess causes illness and death; for it is only the fleeting delight of fine food that then harms and disagrees with the body, killing both body and soul. I have seen so many of my friends, men of the highest intellect and amiable disposition, killed while at the peak of their manhood because of excess and overeating and who, had they been temperate, would now be alive and ornaments to society and whose company I would enjoy with as much delight as I am now deprived of it with grief.
Therefore, in order to put a stop to such evil, I have decided, in this brief discourse, to show that intemperance is an abuse which may be eliminated and replaced by the good old sober living. And I am even happier to do this as many young men of the highest intellect have urged me to do so.

Comments

Intemperance, a vice that can never be criticized enough and which we will never eradicate completely is, as our writer says, something that is similar to the plague; on the contrary, it is a plague, and one that is even worse. It spreads and slaughters more and more victims. What is surprising is that common people are not affected as much by this pestilence as illustrious men and the effects it causes are devastating. Indeed, it is not to be found in farmers' huts or artisans' workshops, but in lavish palaces and courts. The word intemperance usually describes an excessive overindulgence in eating and drinking but it would be more accurate to use it in reference to the drunkenness caused by drinking wine. This last definition can be clearly seen in an aphorism (5, 5. Sect.) when Hippocrates writes that those who are drunk suddenly become unable to speak and die of convulsions unless a fever sets in and they are able to speak again before the alcohol fumes have dissipated. Galen's interpretation in his comment is identical. In reference to this observation several doctors have suggested acrepali medicinals, as described by Giovanni Gorreo in his Medical Definitions, and which either stop one becoming drunk or alleviate the state once it has arisen. Such medicinals are also called "amethyst". Amongst the preparations Gorreo recommends for preventing or allaying drunkenness, is one made with absinth to be taken before meals; another is one made with myrtle flowers, myrrh or rue ground in water. Cabbage and lettuce should be eaten at the end of the meal. They should then smell flower of amethyst and adorn themselves with either a crown of saffron flowers, twigs from a nutmeg plant or use any other substance that prevents or dissipates the fumes. Amethyst stone can be used for the same purpose as it is believed that it wards off drunkenness. Of interest is what Plutarch writes about the doctor staying with Druso, son of Tiberius Caesar,
(Quaestionum Convivalium Book I. c. 6.). He encouraged everyone to drink but he himself would eat five or six bitter almonds beforehand as a preventive measure. Once he was discovered, he could no longer resort to his secret remedy and thus showed that he was unable to tolerate even the smallest drop of wine. To prevent drunkenness, Ettmüller (Schod. Morellam de compos. medic. p. 313) recommended the use of aleofangine pills if it was necessary to drink in excess. Their bitter taste, which almost borders on repugnance, is probably the explanation. After having described the advantages of these pills, the author then rightly added: “should it be necessary to drink to excess”. This is because there can be occasions when one has to participate in symposia and adapt to the norms that apply. One therefore participates in this socially joyful occasion and ends up drinking more than one usually would. It should also be said that sobriety is generally frowned upon on such occasions. Those who are habitually happy to submit to Bacchus’ will are sincere and say whatever comes to mind, while those who are careful about how much they drink and never let themselves go completely, end up being hated by the others. Hence the saying, “I cannot bear a drinker who does not forget” and the other, “If you don’t want to drink, go away”. Martial makes fun of someone called Procillus to great effect. He had had dinner with the poet and both had drunk heavily. Martial invited him to dinner the following evening and Procillus did not forget. When he then arrived at the poet’s home the following evening, Martial sent him away without anything to eat adopting the popular saying, “I cannot bear a drinker who does not forget”: “Last night, after ten pints, I think, I told you that you would dine with me today, Procillus. You immediately thought the matter was finished, and you held me to my drunken words. A very dangerous precedent. I cannot bear a drinker who does not forget, Procillus”.

I have never been able to observe that those so-called acrepali medicinals actually achieve the effects that are claimed. One thing I am sure of is that if they were capable of preventing drunkenness, and if they were able to produce a certain action or stop someone becoming drunk or dissolve the alcohol fumes, they should still be regarded as dangerous since they stop the wine from making good the changes it has induced. Indeed, as the saying goes, wine itself cures the harm it causes.
This is because many of their parents died while they were still young whilst I remain sound and healthy at the age of eighty-one. These young men have expressed the desire to live to the same ripe old age, since Nature does not forbid us to do so. Also because old age is a period when prudence can be exercised best and the fruits of other virtues enjoyed with the least opposition, as the senses are subdued so man gives himself up to reason alone. They urged me to let them know which method I pursued to achieve this and since I was overcome by such true desire, I would like to help both them and others and I shall also describe the causes that led me to abandon intemperance and follow a sober life, how I achieved it and the good effects it has had on me. This will make it clear just how easy it is to renounce the abuse of intemperance. I shall conclude by illustrating the countless advantages and blessings of a sober life.

Comments

With great wisdom the author says old age is the best part of life since that is when men are less subject to the whims of the body and are more inclined to be prudent and virtuous. In Epistle LXIX Seneca writes that there is general disagreement as to whether old age is to be considered the lees of life or the purest and most radiant part. I personally believe that there should be no doubt since old age becomes the lees of life for those who abandoned themselves to Bacchus, Venus and other carnal delights while for those who lived more frugally when they were younger, it becomes the most radiant part. A centenarian philosopher lamented he had to die just when he had learned how to live. Physical and spiritual energy cannot express themselves with the same vigour at the same time. Plato says that “the virtue of the spirit asserts itself when bodily strength diminishes”. This is in agreement with the saying by Heraclitus that goes: “dry eyes, noble spirit”. Since the elderly are less conditioned by the passions of the body, they are more inclined to the contemplation of the sublime, thus the sentence “action is for the young, advice for the elderly”. This is why
Agamemnon would say that if he had had ten men like Nestor, he would have been able to take Troy in an instant. There is no lack of writers who published outstanding works in their old age. For example, when Sophocles’ *Oedipus* was performed, it was met with great applause and put an end to the defamation of his children. Cicero wrote a book on old age at a ripe old age. When Varrone was eighty he wrote his book on agricultural life. Ottavio Ferrari, a former professor of rhetoric at the University of Padua was over seventy when he wrote various books including a detailed lecture on the advantages of old age. Our author is therefore correct to claim that old age is the most beautiful fruit life has to offer. Indeed, at that age, man is unburdened of his passions, full of all kinds of experience, and knows he is safe while the others are still out at sea and fighting against calamity. It is none other than medical observations that show us how old age after a life lived in soberness is the true fruit of human life. At that age the circulation of the blood and other fluids is calmer and more regular while in the young it is more turbulent and unbalanced. The violence of the bile is checked by the melancholy mood that dominates in old age and it is known that the melancholy surpass in intellect. Their temperament becomes more essential and the mind more rational so that, freed of the influence of the humours, it can set about its own tasks with more determination.
I can therefore say, that the infirmity that unluckily afflicted me was actually my reason for renouncing intemperance - the excessive eating and drinking I had become accustomed to, and that had resulted in various ills; stomach pains and frequent pains in my side, the onset of gout and worse, with an almost continuous fever, but above all, a badly upset stomach and constant thirst. In the face of all these ailments, in such terrible health, the best I could hope for in life was death, so far off by nature but so close because of my intemperate lifestyle. Now, finding myself in such unfortunate circumstances between my thirty-fifth and fortieth year, having tried all sorts to try and restore my health but all to no avail, the doctors told me that there was only one cure for my ills, providing I promised to try it and persevere with great patience. The cure was to live a sober and regular life, which would prove extremely effective and was just as effective as a lifestyle of intemperance and excess, but to the opposite effect, since the latter had reduced me to infirmity. For it is well-known that such a life would keep away a sickly constitution and decrepitness while those who persist in a lifestyle of intemperance become infirm during the very years that are meant to be their best. This is in accordance with the laws of nature, according to which contrary actions result in contrary effects, and follows the art and progress of nature, since correcting vices and natural defects is also an art, as can be seen clearly in agriculture and the like. They also added that if I did not try this remedy, within just a few months there would be no hope left, and I would have only several months left to live. Since I had absolutely no desire to die at such a young age and was afflicted by one ill after the other, in order to avoid both illness and death, I was persuaded to follow a regular course of life. When I asked them what rules I was to follow, I was told that I was only allowed to eat and drink what is normally given to the sick, and both sparingly. If I am truthful, I had been given these instructions before but I had been headstrong and had continued to eat and drink whatever I wished in abundance. Furthermore, since I always felt parched, I drank great quantities of my favourite wines without saying anything to the doctors, as the sick tend to do. However, once I had resolved to follow a sober lifestyle,
I saw that it was not at all that difficult. On the contrary, such a regular lifestyle soon proved greatly beneficial to my health and after not even one year (and some might find this hard to believe), all my ills had been cured.

Comments

As is right for the great, the author explains the mistakes and difficulties he encountered with a full, detailed confession when he made the decision to change from a life of intemperance and excess to a frugal and sober one. Saint Augustine did the same with his *Confessions*, when he described his suffering when he decided to abandon the aberrations of his past and embrace true religion. Cornaro made the decision to convert following the indications of the doctors, who made it clear to him that it was only by following a sober life of moderation that he could hope to avoid death. In just a few days he was forced to admit that moderating his diet had improved his health and after just one year, he realized that his health had been restored since all the ailments he had been suffering from before, continuous fever, gout and everything else, had all disappeared and once again he could enjoy perfect health. As far as gout is concerned, we have countless testimonies from authors who describe the advantages of a frugal diet and abstinence. It suffices to mention Gasp. de los Rejes (*Camp. Elys. Jucund. quaest.* 87) and Dressellio (*Ginn. Pat.*). The renowned Francesco Pecchio also describes how he lived off bread and water for nineteen years and was cured of the gout that had tormented him in the past. This case is worthy of compassion but is also curious and deserves to be repeated, as important authors have done in the past. This famous Italian gentleman was fifty years old and was travelling when he was captured after being betrayed by a certain marquis who hated him. He was sent to a terrible, fetid prison where the gaoler was instructed to give him nothing more than a piece of bread and a little water each day so that his death would be prolonged and he would feel his strength ebbing away day by day. Thanks to this diet, the prisoner survived in the prison for nineteen years until the French took the prison by storm and found the illustrious recluse, with a beard that had grown down to his chest, dressed in rags and more
like a larva than a man. It was as if he had been released from the after life and once he was set free, in perfect health and completely cured of his gout, he returned to his homeland where everyone was amazed to see him walking so imposingly, since they remembered him as one who could barely walk with the aid of a walking stick. There is no doubt that it was thanks to the frugal diet that was forced upon him that Francesco Pecchio regained such good health. Sound reasons and countless testimonies therefore support the benefits of adopting a sober life so the letter Sperone Speroni wrote to our author, with its various arguments that question the advantages of the sober life, is particularly surprising.