

Essay XLII.

OF YOUTH AND AGE

By

Sir Francis Bacon

Introduction

Sir Francis Bacon, the great English essayist and philosopher of the Renaissance, was deeply interested in observing human nature and practical life. In his essay "*Of Youth and Age*," he presents a thoughtful comparison between the qualities of young and old people. Bacon examines how the energy and imagination of youth differ from the wisdom and caution of age. He does not favour one over the other but shows how both have strengths and weaknesses that balance each other. The essay reflects Bacon's practical wisdom and his belief that the best results in life and business come when the enthusiasm of youth is guided by the experience of age. Through vivid examples from history and his keen understanding of human behaviour, Bacon teaches that every stage of life has its own value and purpose.

Essay: "*Of Youth and Age*,"

A man who is young in age can still be old in wisdom and experience, if he has not wasted his time. But this rarely happens. Usually, youth is like first thoughts—not as wise as later ones. For there is a kind of youth in our thinking as well as in our age. Yet, young men have livelier invention than old men; their imagination flows into their minds more freely and almost divinely.

People who are naturally full of strong desires, heat, and emotional disturbances are not ready for action until they have passed the middle of their lives. This was true of Julius Caesar and Septimius Severus. About the latter it was said, "*Juventutem egit erroribus, imo furoribus, plenam*" (He spent his youth full of errors, even of madness). And yet, he was one of the ablest emperors of all.

But calm and peaceful natures can do well even in youth, as we see in Augustus Caesar, Cosmus, Duke of Florence, Gaston de Foix, and others. On the other hand, a lively and energetic spirit in old age is an excellent quality for business.

Young men are better at inventing than judging; better at doing than at advising; and better for new projects than for established business. **The experience of old men** guides them well in known matters, but in new matters it often misleads them. **The mistakes of young men destroy business, but the mistakes of old men only mean that the work could have been done better or faster.**

Young men, when they lead or manage affairs, **take on more than they can handle**, cause more trouble than they can calm, rush to the end without thinking of the proper steps, follow a few ideas they happened to find, foolishly, like to make changes without seeing the problems those changes bring, use extreme solutions immediately, and—worst of all—they refuse to admit or correct their mistakes. They are like an untrained horse that will neither stop nor turn. Old men, on the other hand, **object too much, think too long, take too few risks, repent too quickly, and rarely carry business through to full success;** they are satisfied with **average results.**

Surely, it is best to combine the strengths of both young and old. Such a **mix is good for the present because the virtues of one age correct the faults of the other. It is good for the future, because young men can learn while old men act. It is also good for public matters, because authority belongs to old men, while favour and popularity belong to youth.**

Morally, perhaps **youth is better**, while in politics **age is superior**. A certain rabbi, commenting on the text *“Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams,”* said that **young men are nearer to God than old**, because **a vision is clearer than a dream**. Indeed, the more a man drinks from the world, the more **it intoxicates him;** and **age improves the understanding,** but not the **virtues of the will or emotions.**

Some people become **mature too early**, but their talents **fade quickly**. These are of three kinds:

- 1) Those with **sharp but fragile minds**, which soon lose their strength—like **Hermogenes the rhetorician**, whose books are very subtle, but who later became dull.
- 2) Those whose **natural gifts suit youth better than age**, such as a **fluent and rich style of speaking**, which is charming in youth but not in age. So **Tully (Cicero)** said of **Hortensius**, “*Idem manebat, neque idem docebat*” (He remained the same man, but did not teach the same way).
- 3) Those who **aim too high at first**, showing great courage or ambition which **their later years cannot maintain**—as with **Scipio Africanus**, of whom **Livy** said in effect, “*Ultima primis cedebant*” (His later deeds were less than his earlier ones).

Conclusion

From my point of view, I, **Dr. T. S. Brahmbhatt**, find that Bacon’s essay “*Of Youth and Age*” gives a balanced and realistic understanding of human life. He neither praises youth blindly nor shows complete preference for age. Instead, he recognises that both stages have their own power and limitation. Youth is marked by imagination, energy, and daring action, while age brings wisdom, experience, and careful judgement. When these qualities work together, life and society move forward successfully. I believe Bacon’s message remains true even today: every generation needs the creative spirit of the young and the mature guidance of the old. His essay teaches us to value cooperation between enthusiasm and experience, and to respect the natural strengths that each period of life contributes to human progress.
