

G.K Chesterton's On the Pleasures of no Longer Being Very Young

Brief Analysis

Chesterton's essays have got a charm of their own. His essays do not only persuade but are highly enjoyable also. His prose is characterised by frequent allusions, paradoxes, ready wit and humour. 'On the Pleasures of not Being Very Young' is one such essay. In this essay Chesterton enumerates the advantages of being old. This essay was written after the great economic depression in the 1930s when the new industrial economies had completely collapsed and modern man had learnt the lesson of being too proud of his knowledge.

Chesterton argues that people look at the advantages of old age in a sentimental way. Their description of old age is likened to snowy beards of Santa Claus and old men possessing the wisdom of Nestor. Chesterton argues that old age is actually the time to be romantic and adventurous. Old people know that they are not aware of many new things but they are happy in their fool's paradise as they can go on bearing new things.

Chesterton further argues that only old people are capable of realising the real value of traditions and proverbs as they, through their advancing years, realise the truth hidden in the gems of traditions. He humorously refers to how he did not understand the proverb of 'dog in the manger' until he owned a dog. Chesterton says that proverbs are not simply important because they are proverbial. They are proverbs because they have practical values attached to them. Young people think them to be stiff and stale thus fail to realise the wisdom of them.

Chesterton understands why young people don't realise the wisdom of old things as they consider them to be stiff and stale as the old dusty labels on objects from antiquity. Chesterton likens old age to second childhood that sees everything with

new interest and realizes that 'life itself has never died'. It is an irony of life that "even as we are dying the whole world is coming to life."

Chesterton in his own paradoxical way concludes the essay thus:

" the very repetition of these truths will sound like the old interminable repetition of the truisms. And yet they are to me, at this moment, like amazing and startling discoveries, for i have lived to see the dead proverbs come alive."

The scholarly tone of Chesterton is never amiss since he proves his arguments with classical, biblical, historical and literary allusions. The spin on the proverbs used in the essay are calculated to have the desired effect and command the attention of his readers.