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AGE, CHANGE AND THE ADAPTED LIFE¹

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THE interest in ageing which has expressed itself here in such a happy and helpful fashion during the past two days is not new as an intellectual adventure. The application of such understanding is in the period of its anticipated commencement. To date it has not related itself to life in the form of a basic consideration of such a process on which and from which specific interpretations of the varied manifestations of life at different age periods may be considered. The average individual, too frequently the biologist and usually the pathologist, limits his interest and confines his intelligence of ageing to narrow categories of thought. He fails to appreciate the yearning of tissues for life and the amazing chemical and structural modifications they may participate in, even gross structural changes designated disease, in order to bring about organ adaptation and the adaptation of

the individual as a whole to those changes which occur as the life span progresses. The certainty of the termination of this life span and the fact that all living things are concerned with it has stimulated the imagination of poets and philosophers. Their inquisitiveness has been either romantic or dominated by resignation and has not been demonstrably helpful. Another period which concerns itself with the facts of life is in its beginning, and as these facts accumulate through chemical, biological and psychical research the romance of life will find sound ground on which to express its related beauty. Ultimate resignation will become lost in an interest in the transitory prolongation and effectiveness of the different periods of the life span. The Browning concept of the "last of life for which the first was made" will assume tangible significance.

For centuries before Cicero's great statement concerning old age thought had been given to this state of man, but only in what may be designated recent

¹ An address at the Symposium on Ageing, Washington University Medical School, Saint Louis, March 24 and 25, 1944.

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