



Maturity
is more
than age

ONE OF the most widely used terms of our day is "maturity." It has different nuances of meaning relating to the process of development and expansion; cultivation, and refinement; growth and ripening.

Maturity, like a precious gem, has many facets — many directions from which it sheds its light upon human existence. Maturity is not discovered in what we have, but in what we are.

To mature is to reach a state of completeness of growth. Man has been endowed with a longer period of infancy and childhood than any other creature. Yet he is far more complex than any other. As Shakespeare exclaimed, "What a piece of work is man!"

He requires time, training and discipline to grow out of childhood and to enter the world of adulthood not only physically, but mentally, emotionally and spiritually. It is a movement marked by self-mastery, by discovery of life and the world and by acceptance of relationships with others.

THE HUMAN BEING is born ignorant. He must acquire knowledge that connects him with his environment, both physical and social.

The human being is born irresponsible. He must grow from dependence to independence, from helplessness to competence, from irresponsibility to responsibility.

The human being is born inarticulate. He must learn how to communicate his thoughts and feelings with clarity and cogency.

The human being is born self-centered. He must create bonds with others by the qualities of imagination, empathy, loyalty and affection. He becomes part of a community of experience marked by shared beliefs, shared memories and shared values.

THE WISDOM of maturity is often equated with age. It is true that a certain duration of human life yields a considerable harvest of discoveries and insight.

But maturity is not necessarily related to chronological age. In a novel by Louis Untermeyer, the leading character reflects upon the meaning of his life:

"But with me there was no growth. There was no creation. In all my life there had never been, until I was near to middle age, either the necessity or the desire to think. I had already lost nearly 20 years which should have been employed in thinking, and because those years had been wasted, I had never attained any real maturity. I had merely grown older, an like all those who constantly cling to their youth or return to it at college reunions and Legion conventions, I had merely withered."

ON THE OTHER hand, Erich Hoffer, in "The Temper of the Times" expresses the opinion that "History is made by men who have the restlessness, impressionalibility, credibility, capacity for make-believe, ruthlessness and righteousness of children."

Hoffer asserts that we can hardly understand much of history unless we keep in mind that, generally speaking, those juveniles who made those events happen. He reminds us that until relatively recent times man's life, judged by today's standards, was short.

He points out that the armor of fighting men preserved from the Middle Ages was remarkably small. People were shorter in those days than they are now, but the reason for the surprising smallness of their armor is that it was worn by young men who had not yet achieved their full growth.

"They were married at 13; were warriors and leaders in their teens; and senile at 35 or 40 . . . yellowed, wrinkled-faced and toothless," said Hoffer.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT was in his early 30s when he complained that he had no more worlds to conquer.

Napoleon was still in his 30s when he became "emperor of the French" and almost master of all Europe.

The fathers of our own American Revolution were in their 20s and 30s when they led the bold break from England.

In the Bible, God's prophets are often portrayed as being comparatively young. Amos, Hosea and Jeremiah, among others, delivered their most fateful messages during the period of their youth.

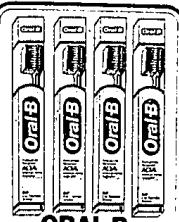
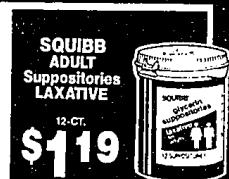
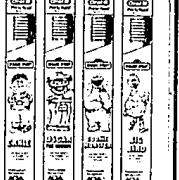
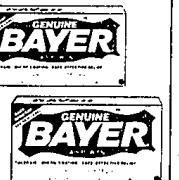
Age is not to be identified with maturity. There are adults who remain in a state of perpetual childhood and young people who possess wisdom far beyond their years.

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