

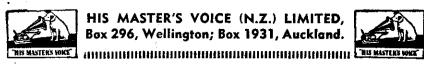


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The Art of Staying Alive

birthday recently that he had no recipe for longevity. He does not claim to have avoided liquor; he smokes black tobacco, and drinks plenty of tea. On the day after this birthday was faithfully reported in the newspapers, a Christchurch man also became a centenarian. He neither drinks nor smokes, is against gambling of any sort, and attributes his longevity to hard work. These are familiar contradictions which seem to prove nothing except that some men are tougher than others. Yet they attract notice and hopeful argument from people who, in spite of the hydrogen bomb and other deterrents (or perhaps because of them) are deeply interested in the art of staying alive.

For an art it has become. Never before has so much attention been given to physical welfare. The person who goes through life without learning frequently of dangers which lurk in the air around him, where the viruses swarm, or in the cells within his body, must be without the blessings of either radio or newspaper. We are advised what to eat, when to eat it, and how to assist the processes of digestion. Sleeping is now a sort of therapy, concerned closely with ventilation, the state of mind, and even-some would tell us-the garments to be worn in bed. Special interest is taken in people who, a little alarmed at their own imprudence, have reached the tender age of 40. They must eat less fat, take their daily ration of milk (from which, of course, the top milk has been carefully removed), ease up on smoking and drinking, and exercise their frail limbs by walking a mile or two a day, breathing rhythmically as they go. If they follow all the instructions-remembering that the advice may change a little as new scientific

N engaging old man of 105, information becomes availablenow in Blenheim, said on his and keep a sharp eve open for motorists, katipo spiders and other hazards natural to their environment, they may avoid coronary thrombosis and aspire to be an elder, perhaps even a centenarian.

> One of the hardest tasks, however, is not to worry. All the experts assure us that worry is the killer: it nourishes the peptic ulcer, the roaming clot in the blood, and the embarrassments of eczema. But how is serenity to be reached and held when we are invited to give so much thought to ailments of the flesh? It is difficult to open a newspaper without reading again that large numbers of smokers are doomed. Every cigarette, thoughtlessly lighted, becomes an anguish of the soul before it is half-smoked; and if we turn to a cigar there is certain to be a warning that only a Churchill can get away with it. And yet, if all pleasures are put aside; if the glass stays empty and the pipe unlit; if we grow our vegetables according to the phases of the moon and steam them in the approved methods of science, or eat them raw, with nuts; if we take no créam, eat no fat and obev all the rules for radiant livingwe are still unaware of what is going on in those unpredictable cities, our bodies. There are so many diseases to guard against. Is it not possible to be overtaken by the one that has somehow escaped attention?

> It is merely sensible to be temperate and careful; but interest in health, if taken too far, can become an obsession and therefore a sort of disease. And although it is often pleasant to be alive, and offensive to be reminded that presently we shall all be dead, the thought does creep in sometimes that dying is also a subject to which in odd moments we could give some attention. Or would that be an unhealthy practice? .

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 20, 1956.