



SOCRATES

"Life ends, but no one must say so"

find her answer in the bucket. Against bucket logic I have no technique.

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NOTHING has surprised me more in these notes than the resentment of readers of my own age when I confess to my years. It may be bad taste to turn myself outside in, and inside out, in public, and if it is, all personal diaries are vulgar. But it is not my taste of which my contemporaries complain. It is what they call my age-complex, by which they, of course, mean my failure to keep secrets even to myself. They know that life ends, but no one must say so. They know that 70 is well on the way to the end, but that must never be admitted. They don't deny that a prudent man looks about him as he travels, but they are horrified if he looks ahead.

AUGUST 23

It is a strange attitude to me, and a kind of false pretence. When one of my children was three he was afraid of cows. If I had to take him past a cow he would hold his hand over that side of his face on which the cow was and turn his head the other way. That is what I am asked to do with the calendar. But I am a day or two past three now and that childish pretence no longer steadies my feet.

I think of Socrates on his last day, waiting for the cup, and explaining to his friends as he waited why he believed that the soul survived the body. The case, as he presented it, seemed to himself unanswerable. But Cebes and Simmias talked for a little by themselves. They would have liked to put further questions to him, but shrank from asking him to prolong such a painful discussion as they thought he must be finding it. In the end they said so, and Socrates was both surprised and amused.

"Dear me, Simmias," he replied. "I shall find it hard to convince other people that I do not consider my fate a misfortune when I can't convince even you. You seem to think me inferior in prophetic power to the swans, which, when they find that they have to die, sing more loudly than they ever sang before for joy that they are about to depart into the presence of God, whose servants they are."

Socrates died nearly 400 years before the birth of Christ. He was then about my age. If his last day had come to him this year, and his last words by some strange chance had found their way into these notes, some of my readers would have called him a silly old man who did not know when to close his mouth.

(To be continued)

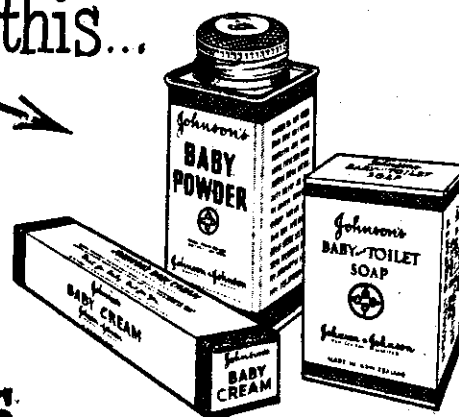
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