

PREPARING FOR OLD AGE.

Socrates was once asked by a pupil, this question: "What kind of people shall we be when we reach Elysium?"

And the answer was this: "We shall be the same kind of people that we were here."

If there is a life after this, we are preparing for it now, just as I am today preparing for my life tomorrow.

What kind of a man shall I be tomorrow? Oh, about the same kind of a man that I am now. The kind of a man that I shall be next month depends upon the kind of a man that I have been this month.

If I am miserable today, it is not within the round of probabilities that I shall be supremely happy tomorrow. Heaven is a habit. And if we are going to Heaven we would better be getting used to it.

Life is a preparation for the future; and the best preparation for the future is to live as if there were none.

We are preparing all the time for old age. The two things that make old age beautiful are resignation and a just consideration for the rights of others.

In the play of Ivan the Terrible, the interest centers around one man, the Czar Ivan. If anybody but Richard Mansfield played the part, there would be nothing in it. We simply get a glimpse into the life of a tyrant who has run the full gamut of goosedom, grumpiness, selfishness and grouch. Incidentally this man had the power to put other men to death, and this he does and has done as his whim and temper might dictate. He has been vindictive, cruel, quarrelsome, tyrannical and terrible. Now that he feels the approach of death, he would make his peace with God. But he has delayed that matter too long. He didn't realize in youth and middle life that he was then preparing for old age.

Man is the result of cause and effect, and the causes are to a degree in our hands. Life is a fluid, and well has it been called the stream of life we are going, flowing somewhere. Strip Ivan of his robes and crown, and he might be an old farmer and live in Ebenezer. Every town and village has its Ivan. To be an Ivan, just turn your temper loose and practise cruelty on any person or thing within your reach, and the result will be a sure preparation for a querulous, quarrelsome, pickety, snipity, fussy and foolish old age, accented with many outbursts of wrath that are terrible in their futility and ineffectiveness.

Babyhood has no monopoly on the tantrum. The characters of King Lear and Ivan the Terrible have much in common. One might almost believe that the writer of Ivan had felt the incompleteness of Lear, and had seen the absurdity of making a melodramatic bid for sympathy in behalf of this old man thrust out by his daughters.

Lear, the troublesome, Lear to whose limber tongue there was constantly leaping words unprintable and names of tar, deserves no soft pity at our hands. All his life he had been training his three daughters for exactly the treatment he was to receive. All his life Lear had been lubricating the chute that was to give him a quick ride out into that black midnight storm.

"Oh, how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child," he cries.

There is something quite as bad as a thankless child, and that is a thankless parent an irate, irascible parent who possesses an underground vocabulary and a disposition to use it.

The false note in Lear lies in giving to him a daughter like Cordelia. Tolstoy and Mansfield ring true, and Ivan the Terrible is what he is without apology, excuse or explanation. Take it or leave it if you do not like plays of this kind, go to see Vaudeville.

Mansfield's Ivan is terrible. The Czar is not old in years not over seventy but you can see that Death is sniffing close upon his track. Ivan has lost the power of repose. He cannot listen, weigh and decide he has no thought or consideration for any man or thing this is his habit of life. His bony hands are never still the fingers open and shut, and pick at things eternally. He fumbles the cross on his breast, adjusts his jewels, scratches his cosmos, plays the devil's tattoo, gets up nervously and looks behind the throne, holds his breath to listen. When people address him, he damns them savagely if they kneel, and if they stand upright he accuses them of lack of respect. He asks that he be relieved from the cares of state, and then trembles for fear his people will take him at his word. When asked to remain ruler of Russia he proceeds to curse his councilors and accuses them of loading him with burdens that they themselves would not endeavor to bear.

He is a victim of amor senilis, and right here if Mansfield took one step more his realism would be appalling, but he stops in time and suggests what he dares not express. This tottering, doddering, slobbering, sniffing old man is in love he is about to wed a young, beautiful girl. He selects jewels for her he makes

remarks about what would become her beauty, jeers and laughs in cracked falsetto. In the animality of youth there is something pleasing it is natural but the vices of an old man, when they have become only mental, are most revolting.

The people about Ivan are in mortal terror of him, for he is still the absolute monarch he has the power to promote or disgrace, to take their lives or let them go free. They laugh when he laughs, cry when he does, and watch his fleeting moods with thumping hearts.

He is intensely religious and affects the robe and cowl of a priest. Around his neck hangs the crucifix. His fear is that he will die with no opportunity of confession and absolution. He prays to High Heaven every moment, kisses the cross, and his toothless old mouth interjects prayers to God and curses on man in the same breath.

If any one is talking to him he looks the other way, slips down until his shoulders occupy the throne, scratches his leg, and keeps up a running comment of insult "Aye," "Oh," "Of course," "Certainly," "Ugh," "Listen to him now!" There is a comedy side to all this which relieves the tragedy and keeps the play from becoming disgusting.

Glimpses of Ivan's past are given in his jerky confessions he is the most miserable and unhappy of men, and you behold that he is reaping as he has sown.

All his life he has been preparing for this. Each day has been a preparation for the next. Ivan dies in a fit of wrath, hurling curses on his family and court dies in a fit of wrath into which he has been purposely taunted by a man who knows that the outburst is certain to kill the weakened monarch.

Where does Ivan the Terrible go when Death closes his eyes?

I know not. But this I believe: No confessional can absolve him no priest benefit him no God forgive him. He has damned himself, and he began the work in youth. He was getting ready all his life for this old age, and this old age was getting ready for the fifth act.

The playwright does not say so, Mansfield does not say so, but this is the lesson: Hate is a poison wrath is a toxin sensuality leads to death clutching selfishness is a lighting of the fires of hell. It is all a preparation cause and effect.

If you are ever absolved, you must absolve yourself, for no one else can. And

the sooner you begin, the better.

We often hear of the beauties of old age, but the only old age that is beautiful is the one the man has long been preparing for by living a beautiful life. Every one of us are right now preparing for old age.

There may be a substitute somewhere in the world for Good Nature, but I do not know where it can be found.

The secret of salvation is this: Keep Sweet.