Manuscript: Radio talk, A defense of old age, November 27, 1936

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The Editor of the Magazine of the Air seems to think that you his subscribers will be interested in a greeting from one whose chief claim to be heard is that though entering her eightieth year she is still at work. In this he differs from the editors of the magazines of the earth who all agree that the interest of their readers are strictly limited to the doings of youth and of active middle life.

The species of embargo that is raised against old age sometimes amazes, sometimes amuses and sometimes chagrins me. I see nothing exceptional in being as active now in my eightieth year as I was at thirty, forty, sixty. Look about you and I doubt if there is one of you that will not recall some man or woman older than I am leading quite as active a life. There are plenty of people, however, who think that all of us oldsters should be out of the game. Some of them even warn us that we are defying the Lord by over-staying our time so busily and cheerfully. Holy writ is against us, they say, it limits us to three score years and ten and tells us that if by reason of strength we run on to four score years there still will be labor and sorrow. They seem to think that ought to scare us to inactivity. After three score years and ten, streaked with more or less labor and sorrow why should we expect anything else in our last decades? And what poor stuff we must have
been if we have not learned to take it.

Then there are the people who are rearranging the Social system. Anybody who works after sixty five is taking bread out of the mouth of the unemployed, they tell me. By sixty five you either should have provided a sufficient competence to live without productive work or you should have been to it that you are taken care of by some of the many pension schemes in operation. But supposing you haven't been able to set aside enough to provide for your living and to fulfill your obligations without piecing out work and supposing you have been a free lance and are not eligible for a pension - even under the present far-flung Social Security Act - are you a poacher if you work? Should I feel guilty?

When I insist that I find in these late years of activity a peculiar and satisfying adventure my younger friends hoot at me. They too seem to see life after seventy five as sterile - no fresh experience - no zest - no enjoyment of its own. They think I am putting up a bluff, that at best old age can be nothing more than a camouflaged middle age - a pathetic and sometime a ludicrous imitation of youth. But I am not patterning my present years after any decade gone before. I find the period interesting and fertile in itself. It has its own pleasures, its own possibilities, its own needs of adaptation to the new situations which a changing world produce.
just as
it is full of problems and hopes as any other decade only
the problems are peculiar to late life. The hopes have a
security in them those of youth lack. They are less delusive,
more tempered by experience, more serene.

No, I refuse to accept the silly taboos against
old age which have grown up in the past. I am too busy following
the adventure, making the most of that which comes to me,
whether it be grave or gay. )