Book Review

Enjoy Old Age: A Program of Self-Management by B. F. Skinner and M. E. Vaughan

Fred S. Keller

Enjoy Old Age is a good book. (One of the senior author's oldest friends could not say less!) It is also a small book, hard-cover, neatly bound, with the title in five colors on the jacket. There are 153 pages of text, plus a Preface and a short Appendix. There are 12 chapters and 57 sections, all with titles. The print is pleasingly large and faintly old-style.

The chapter headings are simple and intriguing: Thinking about old age—Doing something about old age—Keeping in touch with the world—Keeping in touch with the past—Thinking clearly—Keeping busy—Having a good day—Getting along with people—Feeling better—“A Necessary End”—Playing old person—A great performance.

It's an elegant little book, refined and dignified, sprinkled with allusions to great figures in our past (Browning, Carlyle, Dickens, Emerson, and Franklin; for example—Shakespeare gets 13 mentions), but it is also down-to-earth and personal in its style. The sentences are short, the examples homely, and there's enough redundancy to sustain the major theme: *You may add to the enjoyment of old age by making little changes in the world about you.*

The book is mainly for the educated reader, well-to-do and healthy, but no longer young (“old” is 65 or more, according to my dictionary). It can, however, be of value earlier than that for persons nearing their retirement and for anyone who would like to know about some common changes in behavior that accompany the aging process.

The tone of the book is positive throughout. Scores of useful tips and

pieces of advice are given in the spirit of “Enjoy your meal!” or “Have a nice day!”—suggestions that aim to counteract in some degree the dulling of the senses, the failures to remember, the blockages in thinking, and the feelings of ineptitude or loneliness in the aging person.

Many of their devices I had discovered by myself, but the effect of the book upon me has nevertheless been great. I have now decided to move more slowly (I bump into and break a lot of things); to buy a pen with a flashlight in it (to write in bed or read the menu); to use a cane (a walking-stick in London); to eat nothing on my plate unless I can identify it; to check up on my body odor; to desist in back-seat driving and in responding thereto; to stop my carping about “computers in education,” musical commercials, and cheer-leaders on TV who never lead the cheers. These changes, I am sure, will bring me some enjoyment—not hilarious enjoyment, but at least a little.

At first I thought *Enjoy Old Age* would make the New York Times bestseller list. There are millions who could profit from it. It seemed like just the sort of book that you would pick up at the airport or would send to a friend at Christmas. Or would you? The title in large letters on the jacket can be read by everyone around you on the plane, possibly arousing some conjecture; and the recipient of the gift may wonder why you picked on him or her. “Is there a message here?”

On further thought, however, I concluded that you might remove the jacket, disclosing covers in unlettered gray that should excite no comment. And, in the

manner of the donors of my copy of the book, you might inscribe it: "To —, who really doesn't need it."

I guess we'll have to wait and see. Meanwhile, I intend to use the book in my projected course on *regressive education*.