

PSYCHOLOGY

# Teaching The Middle-Aged How To Be Truly Young

## California Clinic Finds It Possible To Keep People At Peak of Their Powers While the Years Increase

By MARJORIE VAN de WATER

IN THE CITY of San Francisco a unique school has been started—a school for teaching youth to those of middle age and beyond. In charge of the “classes” is a woman who has herself most ably followed her own prescriptions. Dr. Lillian J. Martin was retired from employment fourteen years ago when she was made professor emeritus of psychology at Stanford University where she had previously taught for twenty-seven years. But she has gone right on working. Now, at 79, she is a pioneer in this unexplored field of research.

And a very fertile field she has found it. Employers, as well as the old people who have gone to her for advice, are enthusiastic about what she has done. Some large industrial concerns are sending to the clinic, as a matter of routine, all those middle-aged and elderly workers who are beginning to drop below their previous standards of efficiency.

It is Dr. Martin's belief, based on the results she has obtained from her work, that almost every worker can be held at the peak of his powers for a far longer period than had ever been thought possible. And her attempts to demonstrate her beliefs are welcomed by employers, for it is becoming more and more necessary for industry either to employ the middle-aged and old or to contribute directly or indirectly to their support.

For America is growing old. Dr. Warren S. Thompson, as a result of his research as director of the Scripps Foundation for Research in Population Problems, has come to the conclusion that only thirty or forty years from now we will have twice as many old people as today.

“Children will be relatively about three-fourths as numerous as now,” he says, “and old people will be nearly twice as numerous. It will be as though we took about one-fourth of our children today and by some hocus-pocus transmuted them instantaneously into

men and women who had passed their fiftieth year.”

When the person applies to the clinic for advice or treatment, Dr. Martin first makes what she calls a psychodiagnosis of the case. She does not content herself with finding out the surface troubles which have been worrying the patient—the lowered output of work, the wandering attention, or the lack of ever-necessary “pep.” She looks beyond all these symptoms for the underlying cause. This often involves a study of the history of the patient way back to his infancy, for it has been found that many of the troubles of old age have their origin in the nursery.

Fears, Dr. Martin has discovered, that have their origin in early youth and which are not overcome at that time, may remain submerged during middle life and become intensified again as the afflicted person approaches old age. These fears, whether they are of falling from a high place, of being run over by an automobile, of making errors, of being robbed, of being rebuked, or of becoming ill, may become so intense and persistent as to interfere seriously with the efficiency of the worker.

One fear that physicians have encountered so often that it is probable that nearly everyone is worried by it at one time or another, is the fear of heart disease. A pain in the arm, even though it may be sharp, is usually dismissed from the mind as unimportant. But when you feel a twinge in the left side of your chest, you do not regard it so slightly.

Lack of co-ordination of the muscles, Dr. Martin believes to be responsible for a multitude of ills, including timidity, dependence, and lack of initiative and self-confidence. She points out that these traits, though they are generally characteristic of aging people, are also found in children and adolescents. The child who stands about unwilling to join the other children, and the one who seems afraid to start on any adventure, is often the child who is physically awkward and muscularly untrained.



DR. LILLIEN J. MARTIN

*A pioneer in the unexplored field of research—the psychology of old age.*

And finally, Dr. Martin found that old age is blamed for a falling off in quantity and quality of work which is in reality due to emotional strain either in the home or at work.

She tells in her book, “Salvaging Old Age,” the story of a woman bookkeeper who had kept her books perfectly for years. She then became conscious of a deterioration in her work. She made errors, and had to work early and late to keep her records up to date. The woman blamed her health, but a physical examination proved that there was nothing wrong with that. The real cause was found to be a series of nightly quarrels with her husband.

This case Dr. Martin believes to be typical of many in all branches of industry. “It is the lack of adjustment in the family relation,” she says, “that plays perhaps the most common and absorbing role in fears and complexes, so that for every family squabble there is an actual loss in money to industry.”

An investigation of causes of slowed production in the plant of the Western Electric Company recently conducted by G. A. Pennock showed that while fatigue was important in this connection, and rest periods greatly improved the efficiency, the emotional state of the employee was much more vital.

“Home conditions,” said Mr. Pennock, “and other outside influences tended to create either a buoyant or a depressed spirit which modified production. Emotional status was reflected in performance; and the major component

of this emotional condition was attitude toward supervisor."

Here are some rules which Dr. Martin prescribes for the rehabilitation of old people and for the postponement of oncoming old age. You may try them yourself if you wish to preserve that schoolgirl reaction.

First, increase the speed with which you react to a signal. At the U. S. Bureau of Standards recently tests were made to see how quickly automobile drivers apply the brakes after they see a danger signal. Even if you respond to a danger signal within a half second, your car might have gone thirty feet during that time. That is the distance covered in a half second at forty miles an hour. But some drivers did not push down on the brake until one second had gone by. Their cars went 60 feet before the brakes were even touched. How far would your car go?

If you are one of the type with slow "pick-up," when you grow old this failing will probably be exaggerated. Now is the time to test yourself, and speed up if necessary.

Games requiring fast thinking and alertness are recommended for this purpose. Double solitaire is better than the slow moving chess. Tennis will help more than golf.

Next, give attention to your muscles and develop co-ordination in them. Regular physical exercise should be taken, although this need not necessarily be strenuous. The simple movements involved in shuffling cards made one old lady's wrists and fingers more flexible and added greatly to the facility with which she could use her hands.

The next step is to develop your powers of observation. Most people form habits of observation dependent upon their particular interests. In walking down the same street, the engineer may see only the type of construction used in the buildings, the architect will notice also the carvings about the doorways, the silk merchant may pay attention to the material in the ladies' dresses, while the physician will see none of these things but will be able to tell you of the physical defects of those who walk by.

As people grow older, their interests are inclined to narrow, and their field of observation likewise. To overcome this it is necessary to train yourself to look for some type of object to which you ordinarily pay no attention. If you practice this daily, and gradually add new groups, you will open up for yourself whole new fields of interest.

Perhaps the most helpful rule of all is one which it is most difficult to follow—learn to keep your mind on the present task. As exercises for this purpose, Dr. Martin recommends the learning of some new skill. Typewriting, until it reaches the automatic stage, is fine training. Learning to drive an automobile she regards as by far the best way to learn to concentrate the attention on the present and the world of reality outside one's own mind, imagination, and feelings. Reading is good training for mental alertness, if one reads comprehendingly.

Dr. Martin accompanies her prescriptions with the caution not to be discouraged if the improvement seems slow. It takes a good deal longer for grown people to learn than it does for children, but if they have sufficient interest and a little persistence they can learn well.

She began to learn to drive an automobile when she had passed her seventy-sixth birthday. She was seventy-seven and had had more than fifty hours of driving instruction before she obtained her driver's license. But now she drives better than many who learned at a much earlier age.

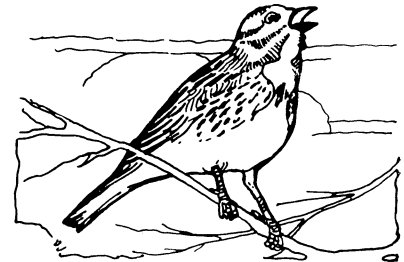
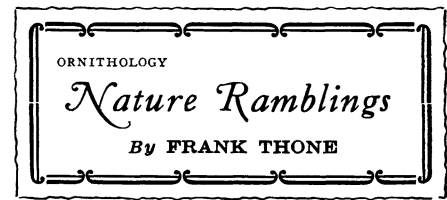
Can rehabilitated old people find places in industry? Dr. Martin says yes. Considerable success has rewarded her efforts at placing those who have been made able to deliver the goods. But the better time to think about readjustment is before the separation from employment takes place. Many firms today offer old age pensions, and they naturally prefer to have these go to those who have spent long service with them.

Old people, when they are at their best, can offer to the business world something which no one younger can. America showed her appreciation of maturity when she set a minimum age of 35 for her highest official—the President.

Thomas A. Edison, America's great inventor, and Paul von Hindenburg, Germany's great soldier and president, are each 83, and both are most active. George Bernard Shaw at 74 has just written perhaps his most scintillating play. Dr. A. A. Michelson, at 77, is still one of the world's greatest physicists. John R. Voorhis, who is 101, is still active as Grand Sachem of Tammany Hall. George F. Baker at 90 still keeps a firm grasp on his many financial interests. Sir Oliver Lodge is 79.

These men are young and active even at advanced ages.

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Song Sparrow

**I**N the parts of the country where the winter is mild he stays with us all year round, and even in regions with more vigorous climates he goes away for only a little while, returning while lion and lamb are still contending for mastery in the air. The song sparrow is an unobtrusive little bird, apt to be taken for a common English sparrow by city dwellers, though he is much lighter in color, and incomparably above that slum-dweller in cleanliness, manners and morals.

He does not come into cities, anyway, except where there are large parks with good thickets for shelter and foraging grounds, for he is a bird of the wood-edges and brush-lined country roadsides. The grubbing hoe is a worse enemy to him, as to many of his small fellows, than is the small boy's gun or even the wandering cat.

Like the horned lark, he has but a small song, though that is to be prized for its being heard when other birds are gone or silent. It usually starts off with three soprano syllables: "See? see? see?" followed by a little ecstatic warble that varies a good deal in different individuals, and then begins all over again.

The song sparrow is a bird of wide climatic tolerance. It breeds in Canada from Great Slave Lake to Cape Breton Island, and thence south to Nebraska, Kentucky and the mountains of North Carolina. Its northern range in winter is about identical with its southern summer range, and thence south to the Gulf Coast.

*Science News Letter, March 21, 1931*

A young porcupine's voice has been described as a peculiar little call somewhat like the crooning of a human baby.