Ou Sont les Neiges d'Antan?*

Dr. Stephens's editorial (p 64) provokes many comments and observations. He cites the Golden Age of ancient Greece and Rome. The allusion here is to the time in classical mythology that began when Saturn (Cronus) was overthrown by his son, Jupiter (Zeus); Saturn then fled to Italy and brought in the Golden Age. The Golden Age refers to a particular *mythological* era of the Gods when peace and prosperity reigned. It was a *season* of "everlasting spring," when rivers of milk and honey flowed and the verdant oak dripped with honey. It was in Ovid's words, ". . . the Golden Age that without lord or law kept justice of its own accord." Hesiod, the Greek pastoral poet, wrote, ". . . like Gods they lived with calm untroubled minds."

Stephens reminds us the Golden Age was pure myth, but men lived and still live by myths and parables. One should not despair of the "good days" being only in the distant past. Certainly, those of us who have lived through childhood and far into adulthood often look back to the "good old days." We, along with Stephens, get nostalgic about the era of Koch, Pasteur, and Osler and their contemporaries and think that medicine must have been fun in those days. But—these idols of ours often watched helplessly as the patient died because they had none of the diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities we enjoy today. Those of us who lived through World War II are well aware of the awesome and significant changes that have occurred in medicine since 1945 as sequelae—the advent of antibiotics, blood replacements, nuclear medicine (a harvest of the frantic work to produce the war-ending, but unfortunately destructive, atomic bomb), computers, and other technologies. Was pre-World War II a Golden Age? Life seemed more serene in the early part of the century. Yet today we don't have to stoke furnaces all hours of the day in our homes or read by gaslight or candlelight or be restricted from seeing loved ones who live hundreds of miles away; we now have thermostatically controlled houses and offices that we enjoy; we have the brightest incandescent lights to read by; and we can visit anyone on the face of this earth within a short period of time, thanks to jets. Golden Age?

Stephens points out the difference in the Greek words meaning time. As the expression goes, "the Greeks had a word for it." *Chronos* means time with boundaries, with *duration* (e.g., a century is 100 years); in short, a quantitative definition. On the other hand, *Kairos* is qualitative or opportune time, time marked by events or characteristics, a "season" (Christmas season; spring*time*; Golden Age). The root word *Kairos* is further modified in the sense of "season" as noted in the word *Eukairos* denoting *in season* and *Akairos* as *out of season*. In further delineation, the Greeks were even more specific: in reference to *times* of long ago—"old *times*"—the word *Palai* may be used (paleontology); in the sense of old or "original" times, and persons belonging to a past age such as the inhabitants of the world before the floods, the Greek word could be *Archaios* (from *Arche*; a "beginning" as in menarche).

Stephens, addressing particularly the young physicians, tells us that, "belief in Golden Ages can be quite useful and sustaining." What is occult in his editorial is a sound, ancient wisdom telling that in every one of us, there is (was) a "Golden Age"; nothing wrong with that. The past is not, as has been described, a "bucket of ashes"; neither is it a consuming fire that destroys today and tomorrow. Perhaps it is a bucket of embers that warms us from time to time. We have a tendency to overromanticize past pleasantries; the more distant the episode in the past, the more wistful we become. Time—*Chronos*—has its way of blurring our yesterdays. Warming as nostalgia may be, and should be, we give heed to the advice of Tasso in his pastoral drama, *Aminta*, to ". . . live after the manner of the ancient race of men . . . since the life of man has no truce with years and soon departs." The ancient savants cherished the past knowing that ties with our past secure our future, yet they admonished us to live today; "*Carpe diem*." From the Sermon on the Mount, we are reminded to "take therefore no thought of the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." If we, as physicians, do what is decent and right by our patients *today*, we will be creating, albeit imperceptibly, a "Golden Age" within ourselves and collectively within the profession once known as an ancient and revered profession. We forge our character in the crucible of our daily actions and if those actions are noble, then we become as noble alchemists, begetters of a Golden Age. Our progeny, many seasons henceforth, will read as we did from Milton that, "Time will run back, fetch the age of gold."

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*"Where are the snows of yesteryear?"

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