What is one of the most unpleasant discoveries we make about ourselves as we get older?

At the age of twelve years, the human body is at its most vigorous.

It has yet to reach its full size and strength, and its owner his or her full intelligence; but at this age, the likelihood of death is least.

Earlier, we were infants and young children, and consequently more vulnerable; later, we shall undergo a progressive loss of our vigor and resistance which, though imperceptible at first, will finally become so steep that we can live no longer, however well we look after ourselves, and however well society, and our doctors, look after us.

This decline in vigor with time is called aging.

It is one of the most unpleasant discoveries that we all make that we must decline in this way, that if we escape wars, accidents, and diseases we shall eventually 'die of old age', and that this happens at a rate which differs little from person to person so that there are heavy odds in favor of our dying between the ages of sixty-five and eighty.

Some of us will die sooner, and a few will live longer, into a ninth or tenth decade.

But the chances are against it, and there is a virtual limit on how long we can hope to remain alive, however lucky and robust we are.

Normal people tend to forget this process unless and until they are reminded of it.

We are so familiar with the fact that man ages, that people have for years assumed that the process of losing vigor with time, of becoming more likely to die the older we get, was something self-evident, like the cooling of a hot kettle or the wearing-out of a pair of shoes.

They have also assumed that all animals, and probably other organisms such as trees, or even the universe itself, must, in the nature of things, wear out.

Most animals we commonly observe do in fact age as we do if given the chance to live long enough; and mechanical systems like a wound watch, or the sun, do in fact run out of energy in accordance with the second law of thermodynamics (whether the whole universe does so is a moot point at present).

But these are not analogous to what happens when a man ages.

A run-down watch is still a watch and can be rewound.

An old watch, by contrast, becomes so worn and unreliable that it eventually is not worth mending.

But a watch could never repair itself as it does not consist of living parts, only of metal, which wears away by friction.

We could, at one time, repair ourselves well enough, at least, to overcome all but the most instantly fatal illnesses and accidents.

Between twelve and eighty years, we gradually lose this power; an illness which at twelve would knock us over, at eighty can knock us out, and into our grave.

If we could stay as vigorous as we are at twelve, it would take about 700 years for half of us to die, and another 700 for the survivors to be reduced by half again.

The likelihood of death is least when we are twelve because that is the age when the human body is at its most vigorous.

There are heavy odds in favor of our dying between the ages of sixty-five and eighty because that is the age range in which most people die of old age.

Between the ages of twelve and eighty, we gradually lose the power to repair ourselves, fight illnesses, and win.

There’s very little likelihood of rain in the next few days.

Very young birds are extremely vulnerable to attacks from other birds and animals.

There was an almost imperceptible change in the patient’s breathing, but enough to tell the nurse that he was improving.

Most people begin to experience a certain decline in vigor between the ages of sixty and seventy.

The rocket rose slowly but soon accelerated at an incredible rate.

The old man was already 85, but he was extremely robust and walked three or four kilometers every day.

It’s self-evident that she won’t pass the exam, so why are they letting her enter?

It is a moot point whether the Prime Minister’s latest speech about the situation will really make much difference.

The swimmer was involved in a fatal accident: as he dived in, he hit the bottom, lost consciousness, and drowned.

Not only have we assumed for years that the process of aging is self-evident, but we have also assumed that all other living things, animals, trees, and so on, wear out in the same way.

Mechanical systems also wear out, but they are different from ours because they cannot repair themselves.

Early in life, human bodies can repair themselves (except, of course, for fatal illnesses and accidents), but we gradually lose this power between the ages of twelve and eighty, so that a non-fatal illness at twelve can kill us at the age of eighty.

Few people in the past died of old age.

Life is now easier and less barbaric.

Most people now eat a better diet.

Many people lead a healthy life.

In many countries, we have better healthcare.

We have a better lifestyle—heating and/or air-conditioning in homes, vaccination against diseases that used to be fatal, etc.

In the past, it was quite unusual for a person to live a long life and die of old age in their own bed.

People generally tended to die young, or at least well before they were middle-aged; they died of some terrible disease, in battle, of starvation, in childbirth, and many were executed for petty crimes (since death was the penalty for many crimes which we would not even regard as crimes now).

People aged, of course, but it was not so noticeable as it is now, since that ageing process was cut short by sudden death in one form or another.

In many countries today, life is much easier and far less barbaric than it was in, say, medieval England.

People expect to, and indeed do, live much longer.

So, what are some of the reasons?

One very important reason is that many people now eat a much better, more varied diet than they used to; many eat a good balance of meat, fish, vegetables, and dairy products, while others eat an equally good vegetarian diet.

Perhaps the important thing is that people tend to think about what they eat, how much, and when.

At the same time, many lead a healthier life.

Whatever they do, and many lead a sedentary life at work, lots of people make an effort to exercise in order to keep fit and healthy.

In many countries, of course—and this is another very important reason why we live longer nowadays—we have better health care than we have ever had in the past.

Years ago, people died from illnesses and diseases that we can now cure and from accidents that would not be fatal.

We enjoy a better lifestyle in many countries now, too.

Just to mention three things, we have central heating or air-conditioning in our homes, children are vaccinated against diseases that used to be fatal, and most of us work in much better conditions than our ancestors did.

And just as important, of course, we know so much more about the way the human body works, what can go wrong, and how to cure it.

However, while we can expect to live longer than our ancestors, we must remember that there are two things we can do nothing about.

Nature is still dangerous and can kill.

Not only are there dangerous insects, reptiles, and animals that can kill humans, but there are also natural disasters—earthquakes, storms, fire, and floods—which still kill thousands of people every year and which we can do nothing about.

And then, of course, there is the process of aging, which we cannot stop.

It is one of the most unpleasant discoveries that we all make.

Most animals we commonly observe do, in fact, age as we do.

Death is something that most people fear.

Make the most of what you’ve got.

Most of the things I’ve got were bought overseas.

There is a virtual limit on how long we can hope to remain alive, however lucky and robust we are.

No one will deny that many of the programs shown on television are very poor. There are, however, a fair number that are very fine indeed.

However rich you may be, it doesn’t mean that you will be happy.

Living in the country has a lot of advantages. There are also, however, quite a few disadvantages.

The State provides a program of health checks for all infants up to a year old.

We were inoculated against diphtheria when we were babies.

The changes, at first so small as to be imperceptible, become more obvious as time passes.

So much money was involved that it was impossible for the forgery to remain unperceived.

It was a surprise to learn that he had just died since I hadn’t realized he was still alive!

Until August 1997, the oldest living person was a French woman from Arles, aged a hundred and twenty-two.

Look out! There’s a bus coming!

I am looking forward to the summer holidays.

Everybody looks at him as a leader.

If there are any words in the passage you don’t understand, look them up in the dictionary.

Business was very slack before Christmas, but things are looking up now.

I shall certainly look up all my old friends when I go back home.

Why don’t you look in next week? I’m sure he’ll be back by then.

My new car hasn’t been run in yet.

That little boy was nearly run over by a bus.

He ran through all the money he had inherited in less than a year.

While on holiday in Spain, we ran into our next-door neighbors.

Look at that lamp post. It looks as if a car ran into it.

There’s so much work to do in the office these days, I never knock off before six o’clock.

Our first twelve years are succeeded by a gradual aging process.

No matter how lucky and robust we are, we cannot avoid the aging process.

The process in humans and animals of losing vigor with time is not something we question very much.

Humans could live for very long periods indeed if they retained the capacity for self-repair they enjoyed at twelve.

It still hasn’t reached its full size and strength.

At this age, the possibilities of death are the fewest.

We can live no longer, no matter how much we look after ourselves.

So familiar are we with the fact that man ages, that...

The body has yet to arrive at its full size.

They run out of energy in line with the second law of thermodynamics.

Whether the whole universe runs out of energy is a moot point.

A watch could never repair itself – it is not made of living parts.