

# TREATISES ON FRIENDSHIP AND OLD AGE

Marcus Tullius Cicero



# **Treatises on Friendship and Old Age**

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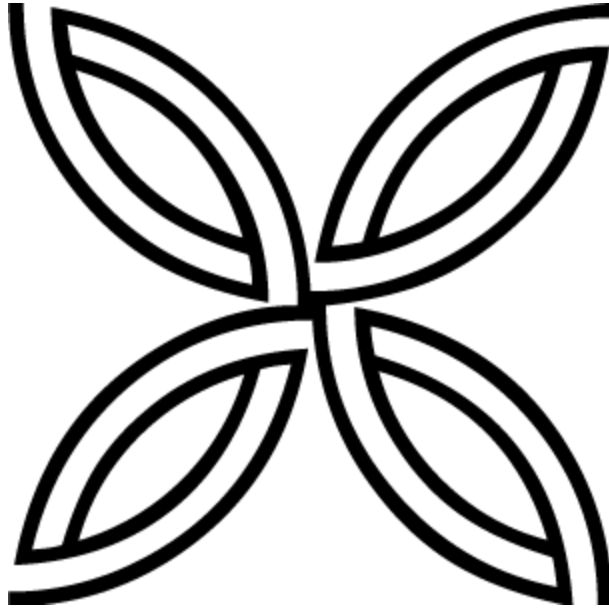
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# **Treatises on Friendship and Old Age**

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# INTRODUCTORY NOTE

*MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, the greatest of Roman orators and the chief master of Latin prose style, was born at Arpinum, Jan. 3, 106 B.C. His father, who was a man of property and belonged to the class of the "Knights," moved to Rome when Cicero was a child; and the future statesman received an elaborate education in rhetoric, law, and philosophy, studying and practising under some of the most noted teachers of the time. He began his career as an advocate at the age of twenty-five, and almost immediately came to be recognized not only as a man of brilliant talents but also as a courageous upholder of justice in the face of grave political danger. After two years of practice he left Rome to travel in Greece and Asia, taking all the opportunities that offered to study his art under distinguished masters. He returned to Rome greatly improved in health and in professional skill, and in 76 B. C. was elected to the office of quaestor. He was assigned to the province of Lilybarum in Sicily, and the vigor and justice of his administration earned him the gratitude of the inhabitants. It was at their request that he undertook in 70 B. C. the Prosecution of Verres, who as Praetor had subjected the Sicilians to incredible extortion and oppression; and his successful conduct of this case, which ended in the conviction and banishment of Verres, may be said to have launched him on his political career. He became aedile in the same year, in 67 B.C. praetor, and in 64 B. C. was elected consul by a large majority. The most important event of the year of his consulship was the conspiracy of Catiline. This notorious criminal of patrician rank had conspired with a number of others, many of them young men of high birth but dissipated character, to seize the chief offices of the state, and to extricate themselves*

*from the pecuniary and other difficulties that had resulted from their excesses, by the wholesale plunder of the city. The plot was unmasked by the vigilance of Cicero, five of the traitors were summarily executed, and in the overthrow of the army that had been gathered in their support Catiline himself perished. Cicero regarded himself as the savior of his country, and his country for the moment seemed to give grateful assent.*

*But reverses were at hand. During the existence of the political combination of Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus, known as the first triumvirate, P. Clodius, an enemy of Cicero's, proposed a law banishing "any one who had put Roman citizens to death without trial." This was aimed at Cicero on account of his share in the Catiline affair, and in March, 58 B. C., he left Rome. The same day a law was passed by which he was banished by name, and his property was plundered and destroyed, a temple to Liberty being erected on the site of his house in the city. During his exile Cicero's manliness to some extent deserted him. He drifted from place to place, seeking the protection of officials against assassination, writing letters urging his supporters to agitate for his recall, sometimes accusing them of lukewarmness and even treachery, bemoaning the ingratitude of his' country or regretting the course of action that had led to his outlawry, and suffering from extreme depression over his separation from his wife and children and the wreck of his political ambitions. Finally in August, 57 B. C., the decree for his restoration was passed, and he returned to Rome the next month, being received with immense popular enthusiasm. During the next few years the renewal of the understanding among the triumvirs shut Cicero out from any leading part in politics, and he resumed his activity in the law-courts, his most important case being, perhaps, the defence of Milo for the murder of Clodius, Cicero's most troublesome enemy. This oration, in the revised form in which it has come down to*

*us, is ranked as among the finest specimens of the art of the orator, though in its original form it failed to secure Milo's acquittal. Meantime, Cicero was also devoting much time to literary composition, and his letters show great dejection over the political situation, and a somewhat wavering attitude towards the various parties in the state. In 55 B. C. he went to Cilicia in Asia Minor as proconsul, an office which he administered with efficiency and integrity in civil affairs and with success in military. He returned to Italy in the end of the following year, and he was publicly thanked by the senate for his services, but disappointed in his hopes for a triumph. The war for supremacy between Caesar and Pompey which had for some time been gradually growing more certain, broke out in 49 B.C., when Caesar led his army across the Rubicon, and Cicero after much irresolution threw in his lot with Pompey, who was overthrown the next year in the battle of Pharsalus and later murdered in Egypt. Cicero returned to Italy, where Caesar treated him magnanimously, and for some time he devoted himself to philosophical and rhetorical writing. In 46 B.C. he divorced his wife Terentia, to whom he had been married for thirty years and married the young and wealthy Publilia in order to relieve himself from financial difficulties; but her also he shortly divorced. Caesar, who had now become supreme in Rome, was assassinated in 44 B.C., and though Cicero was not a sharer in the conspiracy, he seems to have approved the deed. In the confusion which followed he supported the cause of the conspirators against Antony; and when finally the triumvirate of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus was established, Cicero was included among the proscribed, and on December 7, 43 B.C., he was killed by agents of Antony. His head and hand were cut off and exhibited at Rome. The most important orations of the last months of his life were the fourteen "Philippics" delivered against Antony, and the price of this enmity he paid with his life.*

*To his contemporaries Cicero was primarily the great forensic and political orator of his time, and the fifty-eight speeches which have come down to us bear testimony to the skill, wit, eloquence, and Passion which gave him his pre-eminence. But these speeches of necessity deal with the minute details of the occasions which called them forth, and so require for their appreciation a full knowledge of the history, political and personal, of the time. The letters, on the other hand, are less elaborate both in style and in the handling of current events, while they serve to reveal his personality, and to throw light upon Roman life in the last days of the Republic in an extremely vivid fashion. Cicero as a man, in spite of his self-importance, the vacillation of his political conduct in desperate crises, and the whining despondency of his times of adversity, stands out as at bottom a patriotic Roman of substantial honesty, who gave his life to check the inevitable fall of the commonwealth to which he was devoted. The evils which were undermining the Republic bear so many striking resemblances to those which threaten the civic and national life of America to-day that the interest of the period is by no means merely historical. As a philosopher, Cicero's most important function was to make his countrymen familiar with the main schools of Greek thought. Much of this writing is thus of secondary interest to us in comparison with his originals, but in the fields of religious theory and of the application of philosophy to life he made important first-hand contributions. From these works have been selected the two treatises, on Old Age and on Friendship, which have proved of most permanent and widespread interest to posterity, and which give a clear impression of the way in which a high-minded Roman thought about some of the main problems' of human life.*

