

fitted out an expedition at his own cost to search amidst the wilds of Florida for the fountain of perpetual youth. His days were cut short by the impact of an Indian arrow, and the fountain still remains undiscovered. We are still seeking the secret of length of days; some in the elixirs or cure-alls of charlatans as brazen-faced as Arnoldus de Villa, Eugenius Philateles, or Thomas Vaughan; others in the retort and the bacteriological laboratory. The judge from the literature of the subject, a strange fascination seems to surround even the study of cases of great longevity. When Sir G. Cornwall Lewis was canvassing Herefordshire in 1852 he was up to the eyebrows in an inquiry into the truth of alleged cases of centenarianism. On one occasion a Tory voter hotly declined to support his candidature. Sir George was undisturbed, and placidly replied: 'I'm very sorry you can't give me your vote; but perhaps you can tell me whether any person has died in your parish at an extraordinary age.' Sir George was one of the writers in *Notes and Queries* who did much in the way of 'establishing truth and startling error' by sifting many alleged cases of romantic centenarianism out of the realm of veracious history.

Some cases of alleged centenarianism are patent absurdities. Others are improbable or difficult of verification. Still others have been proved to be untrue. And a considerable number have been placed beyond the reach of all doubt. It would require—as someone said—an ostrich's stomach to digest the story of the fabulous number of years claimed by Astephius and by a withered old sheik who lived at Smyrna early in the nineteenth century. Like the Irish jarvey, those ancient romancists had too much regard for truth 'to be draggin' her out on every paltry occasion.' There is a forbidding air of improbability about the story of the South Carolina centenarian who caught measles at the age of 99; about that of one Mary Costello's 125 year old grandmother who had to be rocked in a cradle when she got far into the sere and yellow leaf; and about the tale which tells how John Weeks—who is said to have lived 114 years—celebrated his tenth marriage, in his 106th year, with a blushing maiden of sweet sixteen. It is clearly impossible to verify at this distant date the following statement of Pliny: 'The year of our Lord 76 is memorable, for in that year there was a census from which it appears that in the part of Italy lying between the Apennines and the River Po there were found fifty-four 103 years old; fifty-seven 110 years old; two 120 years, four 130 years; four 135 years; and three 140 years each.' 'In the eighteenth century,' says Mulhall, 'Séjournet published a list of forty-nine persons who had died between the ages of 130 and 175 years.' This is one of the statements regarding centenarians which one feels disposed to take with a peck of salt. In the matter of age as well as of personal virtue, tombstones have been known to lie above regarding those who lie beneath. One at Clave Prior, Worcestershire, credits a rude forefather of the hamlet with an age of 309 years. But the historian empties all the romance out of the inscription with the following explanation 'The village chiseller, hazy about numeration, wished to score 39, and engraved 30 first and 9 afterwards.' At St. Leonard's, Shoreditch, a wag, by altering a 1 to a 2 upon a tombstone, credited a buried worthy with an age of 200 years. It is just possible that the unwarranted addition of the figure 1 may account for the patriarchal age—146 years—attributed to Peter Borlan by a gravestone in the cemetery of Sligo Abbey. Somebody has said that when a woman is past 90 she is proud of her age. One Miss Mary Bilinge, an aged English dame, laid claim to have weathered 112 years. But a keen-scented investigator reduced her tally to the relatively mere 'lusty winter, frosty but kindly,' of 91. A famous Cornish grandame, Dolly Pentreath, had her claim of 102 years doctored by at least eleven years. And a goodly percentage of reputed cases of centenarianism rest upon nothing more substantial than mere guesswork or the hollow-sounding shell of common hearsay.

THE number of genuine cases of centenarianism is very great. There are a few stock names in this connection that cannot be passed over. The two most notable well-established cases of ultra-longevity are those of the Countess of Desmond and Old Parr. A good deal of romance has been spun like a fuzzy cocoon about those two animated mummies; but, even allowing for a reasonable margin of exaggeration, there can be no well-grounded doubt as to their great age. The Countess (Katherine Fitzgerald) was an Irishwoman. She is credited with having been 20 years old at the time of Bosworth Field in 1485. Sir Walter Raleigh—who, by the way introduced the 'divine weed' (tobacco) and the potato into Ireland—knew her in 1589, when she was supposed to be in her 124th year, and Fynes Morrison, the traveller, speaks of her as being alive, if not particularly lively, during his visit to Ireland in the years 1599 to 1603. Bacon, in his *Natural History*, says that the aged Irish dame cut a new set of teeth in her old age, and sundry writers in the Second Series (vol. vii) of *Notes and Queries* and in the *Quarterly Review* for

March, 1853 (all of which are before us), pretty conclusively settle the question that she lived to the extraordinary age of 140 years. The manner of death of this giddy old centenarian is thus described by a modern humorist, who said

That she lived to much more than a hundred and ten,
And died from a fall from a cherry tree then.

Old Thomas Parr was a contemporary of the Countess of Desmond. He was born at Alberbury, Salop (England), in 1483; married at 80, and again at 120; and was brought to Court and kept there as a natural curiosity by Charles I. But Old Tom missed his cheese and onions and hairy bacon and dose of milk or whey or ale, and died prematurely in 1635, at the respectable age of 152 years. Parr, by the way, was not the only centenarian Lotherio who led a bride to the altar. A case is recorded in the Greenwich register of 1685 of one Thomas Cooper, aged 108, who wedded a well-seasoned spinster of 80. Two centenarians were married within recent years in the United States—the one (William Sexton, aged 108) at Knoxville, Tennessee, on New Year's Day, 1897; the other (John Clews, 102) at Franklin, Pennsylvania, in the following year.

At least two Anglican clergymen are numbered among the gaunt company of centenarians: Rev. Peter Alley, who died at Dunamony, Ireland, in 1763, at the age of 111 years, and Rev. W. Davis, incumbent of Staunton-on-Wye, England, who flitted Beyond in 1790 after having spent 105 years in this 'wale of tears.' Which reminds us that Father Sebastiano Gigli, parish priest of Monastero di Ombrone, in Italy, is hale and hearty and 101, reads without spectacles, and still faithfully discharges all the duties of his sacred ministry. 'Lady' Lewson, an eccentric old widow, died in London in 1806 at the ripe age of 106. A curious interest attaches to the undoubted case of Miss Elizabeth Grey, which is mentioned in the first volume of Chambers' *Book of Days* (p. 463). She was born in May, 1748, and died in Edinburgh on April 2, 1856, aged 108 years. 'She survived her father one hundred years, and, stranger still, was buried beside a half-brother who had been dead 128 years.' One of the few odd millions of John Smiths is recorded to have died on the north-west coast of Tasmania last year at the ripe age of 110. One Peggy McQuaid died in 1896 near Enniskillen after a life that had dragged its slow length through 106 years. Her husband died in 1894 at the age of 104. The *Fort Myers Press* credits John Gomez with an age of 122 years. An American exchange records how James Cavanagh, of Watertown, New York, celebrated his 100th birthday on Christmas Day, 1899. And another American paper on our exchange list claims for Noah Raby, of the Piscatawna Township Poorhouse, the distinction of being 'the oldest man alive.' His age is given as 129. Dr. Charles Smith, an American physician, pushes Raby tolerably closely, it, as is asserted on what is termed 'evidence of the most unimpeachable character,' his years number 125. In Mulhall's *Dictionary of Statistics* (pp. 356, 357) we find the following: 'Among centenarians of recent date were Mrs. Anne Butler, daughter of Admiral Winn, died at Portsmouth, January, 1883, aged 103 years; and Mrs. Betty Lloyd, at Ruabon, Wales, March, 1883, aged 107.' Mulhall then adds: 'According to Dr. Farr's tables, of one million male and female persons born, 77 males and 147 females will reach 100 years; but the newer tables of Dr. Ogle give only 41 males and 112 females.' 'Levasseur,' says the late distinguished statistician, 'gives a table of 1474 centenarians in twenty years ending 1884, from which it appears that 28 men and 46 women die yearly over 100 years of age.' The figures of the English census of 1891 show that out of 66 persons who were 100 years old and upwards 43 were women and only 23 of the sex that is variously termed 'stronger' and 'sterner.' Thus it seems, after all, that the 'weaker' sex is made of tougher fibre than the lord of creation. Our list of Irish centenarians is a very lengthy one. And Ireland, Spain, and France furnish the highest number of persons of 100 years old and upwards. The *Journal des Debats* (quoted by Mulhall) published in November, 1898, the following statement of centenarians then known to be living in Europe: Ireland, 578; Spain, 401; France, 243; England, 146; Germany, 75; Scotland, 46.

WHAT IS THE SECRET OF great length of days? Alack, the 'doctors' differ hopelessly. Porridge, says one. Regularity of diet and exercise, say others. Others still place

attention to personal and domestic hygiene in the forefront of causes of longevity. And from the a thousand mouths comes the cry: Temperance. But Macklin, the centenarian actor 'never ate or drank at set times, but as inclination or appetite prompted.' Of the centenarian Rev. Peter Alley it is written: 'For the last thirty-five years of his life he took little in-door, and no out-door, exercise. He lived well and ted heartily, taking buttered rolls for breakfast, and hot roast meat for supper.' In the second volume of his *Code of Health and Longevity* Sir John Sinclair cites the example of 'a hard-drinking smuggler' and 'a soaking, fox-hunting squire' who