

AUTHENTICATED CENTENARIANS.

NOT ONLY A LONG LIFE BUT A COMFORTABLE AND HAPPY ONE. FROM THE BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL.

THE belief in centenarianism has now pretty well recovered from the shocks it received a few years ago. Those shocks and the resulting scepticism were not a little due to the exaggerated statements made, and the insufficient data upon which accounts of extreme age were accepted. It was only to be expected that the narratives respecting Herbert Jenkins, reputed to have died in 1670 at the age of 169; of Old Parr, who is said to have died in 1635, at the age of 152; of the Countess of Desmond, at 140, and the like, often repeated, should bring centenarianism into disrepute, and throw a doubt upon all who laid claim to it, and should even lead to the question as to the possibility of human life being so far extended. Lady Smith at length came to the rescue, and by an unquestioned prolongation of life and health to 103, made an onslaught on the sceptics, in which she was followed by Miss Hastings at the same age, and Sir Moses Montefiore at 100. Several well authenticated cases have been given by Professor Humphrey in his work on *Old Age*, based upon the results of inquiries made by the Collective Investigation Committee of the British Medical Association; and many more might be added; indeed, we are hearing of them every day, and the more correct registration of births and deaths will enable a truer estimate of the proportion of centenarians to the rest of the population to be formed. One of the interesting and cheering results of that investigation is not only that persons frequently attain to the age of a hundred (women more often than men), but that those who do so are commonly cheerful and happy, without malady, enjoying the evening shade of life and the tranquility that accompanies it, and that they, in most instances pass away without struggle, and without the tedium of long illness. The candle often goes out with scarcely a flicker. The old man is comfortable and happy one day and is gone the next. Perhaps he goes to sleep and does not wake, or a slight cold, or in-

digestion, a little over-fatigue, even a fit of laughing or a fit of choking or coughing shakes out life's flame, and brings about the dissolution after a manner much to be envied by those who traverse the longer and more painful roads to the same end.

All qualities and tendencies are more or less hereditary, and longevity is well known to be so in a marked degree. It hence follows that there are probably racial predispositions influencing the duration of life. The Irish, as far as evidence at present goes, seem remarkable for a large proportion of centenarians, and the same is stated with regard to natives of certain districts of South America and Jamaica. There are not, however, at present sufficient data to make sure of this; and many other circumstances and surroundings, as climate, mode of life, diet, and occupation, must be taken into account.

It is not a little curious that many persons have attained to great age under very insanitary conditions—in defiance of them as it were; and we not infrequently hear the great ages of certain persons in a district, or graven upon the stones in a churchyard, quoted as evidence of the sanitary state of the village or town, and as an argument against the necessity of improvement in that particular, and the expenditure of money upon it, whereas a further investigation may not improbably show that the death-rate by no means accords with the inference. A large proportion may have died young, while some survivors, inured to the evil surroundings, may have attained to great age, thus exemplifying the ability of the human body to adapt itself to varying and even unfavourable conditions. It is, as we know, upon the sensitive and receptive frames of the young that noxious agencies most exert their killing influence; and the immunity of old persons from them is no evidence of their non-existence. A man may live to 100 in the very house in which he had typhoid fever himself