

as to their truth. The late Sir George Cornwall Lewis expressed the opinion that one hundred years must be regarded as a limit which very few, if indeed any, human beings succeed in reaching, and he supported this view by several cogent reasons. He pointed out that almost all the alleged instances of abnormal longevity occurred among the humbler classes, and that it was difficult, if not impossible, to obtain any exact information as to the date of birth and to identify the individuals with any written statements that might be forthcoming.

The French naturalist, Buffon, believed that, if accidental causes could be excluded, the normal duration of human life would be between ninety and one hundred years.

If we seek historical evidence, and from it attempt to discover the extreme limit of human life, we are puzzled at the differences in the ages said to have been attained. The longevity of the antediluvian patriarchs when contrasted with our modern experience seems incredible. When we look at an individual, say ninety years of age, taking even the most favorable specimen, a prolongation of life to ten times that number of years would appear too absurd even to dream about. There is certainly no physiological reason why the ages assigned to the patriarchs should not have been attained, and it is useless to discuss the subject, for we know very little of the conditions under which they lived. It is interesting to notice that after the Flood there was a gradual decrease in life. Abraham is recorded to have died at one hundred and seventy-five; Joshua, some five hundred years later, "waxed old and stricken in age" shortly before his death at one hundred and ten years; and his predecessor, Moses, to whom one one hundred and twenty years are assigned, is believed to have estimated the life of man at threescore years and ten—a measure nowadays pretty generally accepted.

There is no reason for believing that the extreme limit of human life in the time of the Greeks and Romans differed materially from that which agrees with modern

experience. Stories of the attainment of such ages as one hundred and twenty years and upward may be placed in the same category as the reputed longevity of Henry Jenkins, Thomas Parr, Lady Desmond, and a host of others. With regard to later times, such as the middle ages, there are no precise data upon which any statements can be based, but there is every reason to believe that the average duration of life was decidedly less than it is at present. The extreme limit, indeed, three or four centuries ago, would appear to have been much lower than it is in this century. At the request of Mr. Thoms, Sir J. Duffus Hardy investigated the subject of the longevity of man in the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, and his researches led him to believe that persons seldom reached the age of eighty. He never met with a trustworthy record of a person who exceeded that age.

A short account of the experience of a few life-assurance companies will conclude this part of my subject. Mr. Thoms tells us that down to 1872 the records of the companies showed that one death among the assured had occurred at one hundred and three, one in the one hundredth, and three in the ninety-ninth year. The experience of the National Debt Office, according to the same authority, gave two cases in which the evidence could be regarded as perfect: one of these died in the one hundred and second year, and the other had just completed that number. In the tables published by the Institute of Actuaries, and giving the mortality experience down to 1863 of twenty life-assurance companies, the highest age at death is recorded as ninety-nine; and I am informed by the secretary of the Edinburgh Life Office that from 1863 onward that age had not been exceeded in his experience. In the valuation schedules, which show the highest ages of existing lives in various offices, the ages range from ninety-two to ninety-five. It is true that one office which has a large business among the industrial classes reports lives at one hundred and three, and in one instance at one