

**HEALTH, BEAUTY AND THE  
TOILET:  
LETTERS TO LADIES  
FROM A LADY DOCTOR**

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Health, Beauty and the Toilet: Letters to Ladies from a Lady Doctor by Anna Kingsford

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**ANNA KINGSFORD**

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# HEALTH, BEAUTY, AND THE TOILET.

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## I.

### ON OBESITY.

MY DEAR JULIA,—Your account of your struggles with the demon of obesity is really amusing, and were it not that you might consider me heartless, I should be tempted to poke fun at you about the various and incongruous dietary experiments you so graphically, and withal so dismally, record. Indeed it is laughable to think of you in the character of a female Sancho Panza, compelled at the stern bidding of science to relinquish the enjoyment of your favourite dishes. And, notwithstanding all these heroic sacrifices at the shrine of Comfort and Beauty, you add pathetically, that you believe you are growing fatter than ever! And no wonder, considering the injudicious manner in which you appear to have regulated your daily *menus*. “Nothing,” you plaintively aver, “but bread and potatoes, with a milk soup or tapioca pudding!” Why, Julia, such a regimen as that, is, under the circumstances, sheer suicide! Instead of checking your disorder, you are doing your utmost to aggravate it. Dire indeed

might the results of such "treatment" prove were it to be continued a few weeks longer.

But before I proceed to details in regard to diet I must stop to answer your questions about specific medicines for the mitigation or removal of obesity. On this point my advice will be emphatic. Abjure all drugs, patented or otherwise. Hitherto your general health has been fair, you have not suffered from headache, lassitude or faintness. But I cannot promise you a continuance of so satisfactory a state of things if you have recourse to chemical preparations, of the nature and action of which you know nothing. There is a more excellent way of treating your infirmity than that you contemplate, and even though it should prove a little more troublesome than the operation of swallowing twice a day some unknown compound, the method I am about to expound to you has at least the merit of absolute safety, besides being surer, because more permanent, in its effects, than any merely medicinal treatment.

Obesity is, as no doubt you know, produced by the accumulation of fat in the cellular tissue of the body, and it is an infirmity due usually to hereditary predisposition, often combined, as in your case, with a persistent and incorrigible placidity of temper. The really sad thing about you, Julia, is that you are never seriously disturbed or ruffled about anything. You are plaintive sometimes, it is true, under circumstances which would render ordinary human beings wholesomely indignant, but you do not know what it is to be nervous, worried, or fidgety. If it were in the power of science to change your temperament, and to endow you with a tolerable portion of the fretful and irritable idiosyncrasy of your sister-in-law, Lady Teazle, your deliverance from the burden of a too generous *embonpoint* would be assured



without further trouble. But as we no longer live in the days of enchantment, the remedy I shall suggest will necessarily be less radical and immediate in its operation, though, I trust, scarcely less efficacious.

And first, my dear friend, you must resolve to become an early riser. Yes, you must positively forego your extra hour in bed after the maid has "called" you; you must take your early cup of tea while dressing, and not while reclining delightfully inert among your pillows. Your hours of slumber must be restricted to seven, and immediately after completing your toilette you must, in fine weather, go out into the garden and take a brisk walk before breakfast; or, should it be wet, you must employ yourself vigorously for half-an-hour with some such game as battledore and shuttlecock, or even undertake a serious bout with little Fanny's skipping-rope. When you have quite exhausted yourself, go and breakfast, beginning with ripe uncooked fruits if possible,—figs, nectarines, greengages, grapes. Take no milk or cream in your tea, drink it weak, and *very sparingly*. You might advantageously adopt the Russian custom of putting sliced lemon instead of milk in your tea. I assure you this is very refreshing. Perhaps it would be too much to ask you to dispense altogether with sugar, but, indeed, you must considerably reduce your allowance of it, as well as of bread. Bear in mind that your mortal foes are, chemically speaking, the *carbo-hydrates*, or in more homely language, all sugary and starchy aliments. Eat biscuits, rusks, or toast rather than ordinary bread; avoid farinaceous dishes, such as sago, tapioca, vermicelli, macaroni, &c.; take no sweets or pastry of any kind, and never taste cocoa, beer, or liqueurs. Drink toast-and-water at dinner, or, if you prefer it, lemonade, into half a tumbler full of which you

may put a small pinch of bicarbonate of soda. But do not drink more than half a tumbler full of liquid at any repast; in fact, the less liquid you consume, the better.

Drinking notoriously increases corpulence, especially if indulged in between meals. The mineral waters of Châtel Guyon are said to be efficacious against obesity; and the Friedrichshall bitter water, Tarasp, Æsculap and Hunyadi Janos are recommended for the same purpose. Probably their beneficial action is chiefly owing to their aperient qualities, for no habit of body so surely promotes obesity as that of constipation. If you are subject to this complaint, I recommend you to make a practice of taking, every morning before you leave your room, instead of tea, which is astringent, a plateful of stewed prunes, soaked figs, or ripe pears.

Green vegetables you may eat at discretion, but potatoes, on account of the large quantity of starchy matter they contain, should be wholly excluded from your dietary. White fish, grilled or baked (not salmon or cod), raw fruit, salad, pickles, and vegetables, such as tomatoes and herbaceous *légumes*, should form the staple of your food. Vinegar and oil may enter largely into your salad-dressing, and your dishes may, if you like, be flavoured with onion, sage, mint, or parsley. I do not think you will be inclined to partake too freely of such aliments as these, so it is hardly necessary, my dear Julia, to counsel you against over-indulgence as to quantity. If you find it necessary, however, to add more substantial dishes to your *menu*, you may eat about five or six ounces daily of game or poultry, preferably *cold*. All forms of pork, ham, and bacon must be scrupulously avoided.

Dr. Ebstein, who is an authority on corpulence, does

not prohibit the use of fats, butter, oil and foods generally included under the term *hydro-carbons*, but only of sugary and starchy aliments, the *carbo-hydrates*. Let me add a special word of warning against *white* bread, and particularly the spongy form of it known as *rolls*. They are both indigestible and constipating. Eat toasted *brown* bread, or if the bread be perfectly light and dry you may dispense with toasting it. But in either case let it be *brown* bread, and prefer it stale or at least a day old to new. Remember, the bran is what you need, and you may, with advantage, add bran to ordinary "seconds" flour.

I do not know whether you are accustomed to take wine; if so, a single glass of Bordeaux or sherry at dinner, is all that in future you may permit yourself. And if you can dispense even with this, so much the better. Trousseau, a celebrated French physician, advised his corpulent patients to take at each meal two grammes (thirty-one grains) of bicarbonate of soda; or fifty grammes (one ounce and three-quarters) of lime-water (liquor calcis) in case the soda should be found objectionable. But as lime-water is usually administered in milk, and has, moreover, very often an undesirable effect on the digestive processes, I think the bicarbonate of soda preferable.

Three meals a day, breakfast, lunch and dinner, are quite sufficient for you. Do not indulge yourself in any stray cakes or cups of tea between your regular repasts. If you dine at seven and retire for the night about half-past eleven or twelve, you may take a light supper of wine and water (Bordeaux), and some rusks, toast or biscuits. But be careful not to exceed the regulation half-tumbler full, and let three or four rusks or biscuits suffice. So much for diet.

Now, when you return to town, you can add to this