

**ON CORPULENCE IN
RELATION TO
DISEASE: WITH
SOME REMARKS ON DIET**

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On Corpulence in Relation to Disease: With Some Remarks on Diet by William Harvey

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WITH SOME REMARKS ON DIET.

BY

WILLIAM HARVEY,

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GREAT NORTHERN HOSPITAL, AND SURGEON TO THE ROYAL DISPENSARY FOR DISEASES
OF THE EAR.



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P R E F A C E.

SEVERAL years have passed away since Mr. Banting consulted me for Deafness, the treatment of which led to his publishing a pamphlet on Corpulence. It was not my intention to appear in print on this subject, but for an inconvenient correspondence, and which I find is but of little avail to reply to by letter. I therefore think it expedient to give a brief outline of the views which led to the treatment of his infirmity, which may interest the reader, and possibly prevent much misunderstanding.

Few who have passed many years in the practice of medicine but must have been aware how little attention had been directed to this painful condition of the human body, more especially with reference to its dietary treatment. Indeed, the medical history of former years is so unsatisfactory on this point, that it was considered a most singular disease, with but little hope of relief, the main reliance for its cure or mitigation being placed on the exhibition of drugs, and certainly those of the most nauseous description. The marvel is that any one was found

with sufficient resolution to persevere in a treatment of this character, and even when rigidly followed, rarely resulting in cure. The advance made in physiology and animal chemistry of late years has thrown light on the treatment of this disease, and has happily now enabled us to explain those hitherto chance recoveries on rational and definite principles. My own special attention was drawn to this subject in consequence of its frequent occurrence in connexion with defective hearing in one or both ears—most probably arising from stealthy and insidious depositions in the canals leading to the air-passages of the nose and throat—and had Mr. Banting not suffered from deafness, the probability is that his pamphlet would not have appeared.

In this essay I shall endeavour to show how much the treatment has been misapplied in many cases, particularly by those who have rashly and indiscreetly adopted a system which required the greatest caution by their medical adviser. It was also natural to expect that a pamphlet on a dietary for the cure of Corpulence, coming from a lay source, would not have found much favour with the profession, and that it would receive some severe criticism. By some it has been highly lauded; by others, blamed: on the whole, it may be said that it now holds a place in every issue or monograph from the medical press relating to diet and nutrition.

The history of medicine contains numerous instances of extraordinary cases of Corpulence, and an immortality attaches to some persons, solely on account of their special aptitude for the development of fat. It is not in reference to such exceptional examples as some of the earlier records of medicine unfold that the practitioner is likely to be consulted, but the cases are not infrequent in which his aid may be solicited in mitigating the inconveniences which excessive adipose development entails.

The sufferers from this disease are found most frequently among those on whom fortune has smiled, whose incentives to physical exertion are in abeyance, while the inducements of the table are in excess. Nevertheless, among the out-patients of hospitals we occasionally notice cases in which Corpulence has been the cause of a variety of subjective symptoms which have made life wretched.

There may be others, and probably many, in private life, who doubtless have had good sense and courage enough to adopt a line of conduct which resulted in cure; but the instances on record are, I believe, sufficiently rare to authorize a publication altogether devoted to the subject. But as the history of persons who have actually died from great accumulation of fat, for the most part only excites a temporary surprise, it may at least be worth the attempt, to see what may be effected by an accurate account of others, who

have successfully struggled against a laborious existence and premature death.

The extraordinary case of the late Mr. Lambert, and of John Bright, of Malden, whose weight was, the first fifty-four stone, the other forty-three, are forcible examples in point. From the detail of their lives it does not appear that any decided attempt was ever made to arrest the progress of the disease, which, from an early period, seemed rapidly to increase, and the termination of which must have been foreseen. But whether this inattention arose from *ignorance*, or from the common *prejudice* that the complaint is so connected and interwoven with the constitution as to be irremediable, is matter of conjecture; and we are only left to wonder that these prodigies of clogged machinery should have continued to move, live, and have their being for so many years. And these points I hope to show ought of necessity to be observed in the treatment of this distressing disorder of the human economy.

It is only by returning to the views and opinions of medical authorities a century ago that we can duly appreciate the vast service Chemistry has rendered physiology, and, indirectly, practical medicine. The influence of *respiration* in removing carbonaceous materials from the blood, and the possibility of the production of fat *from farinaceous and saccharine bodies*, are so familiar to us now that we wonder at the absence of knowledge on these subjects displayed

by the older writers ; they all insisted on a non-nutritious diet for the cure of Corpulence, meaning thereby an avoidance of meat, and an indulgence in milk and a farinaceous diet. A great mistake was also made in supposing that the urine was the only outlet for fatty matters, while they ignored that by the lungs.

Until corpulence is far advanced, persons rarely become objects of attention ; many have even congratulated themselves on their comely appearance, not seeking advice or a remedy for that which they did not consider an evil ; but it must not be supposed that it is a matter of little moment, nor ought we to be satisfied in postponing its remedial treatment.

Although the views herein offered may, even if practically and judiciously carried out, fail to prolong the natural term of existence, still they afford us the satisfaction of knowing that we may ward off those accidents which would otherwise lead to its premature termination. We cannot of course augment the allotted measure of our vital energy, but we can, at least, learn to husband its resources, and not to consume with wanton indifference the unrecruitable oil by which the lamp of life is supported.

In Sir John Forbes' work, "Nature and Art in the Cure of Disease," are the following observations, which I take leave to quote in this place:—"All well-informed and experienced members of the medical profession are painfully aware of the great imperfection of their art, and of its inadequacy to fulfil in a satisfactory