

LETTER
ON CORPULENCE,

Addressed to the Public

By WILLIAM BANTING.

FOURTH EDITION

WITH PREFATORY REMARKS BY THE AUTHOUR

**COPIOUS INFORMATION FROM CORRESPONDENTS AND CONFIRMATORY EVIDENCE
OF THE BENEFIT OF THE DIETARY SYSTEM WHICH HE RECOMMENDED TO PUBLIC
NOTICE**

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Corpulence

Of all the parasites that affect humanity I do not know of, nor can I imagine, any more distressing than that of Obesity, and, having emerged from a very long probation in this affliction, I am desirous of circulating my humble knowledge and experience for the benefit of other sufferers, with an earnest hope that it may lead to the same comfort and happiness I now feel under the extraordinary change,—which might almost be termed miraculous had it not been accomplished by the most simple common-sense means.

Obesity seems to me to have been very little understood or properly appreciated by the faculty and the public generally, or the former would long ere this have hit upon the cause for so lamentable a disease, and applied effective remedies, whilst the latter would have spared their injudicious indulgence, in remarks and sneers, frequently painful in society, and which, even on the strongest mind, have an unhappy effect; but I sincerely trust this final humble effort at exposition may lead to a still more perfect ventilation of the subject and a better feeling for the afflicted.

I had only my personal experience to offer as the stepping-stone to public investigation, and to proceed with my narrative of facts, earnestly hoping that the reader would patiently peruse and thoughtfully consider it, with forbearance for any fault of style or diction, and for any seeming presumption in publishing it, which I still entreat for this further edition.

I felt some difficulty in deciding on the proper and best course of action. At one time I thought the Editor of the *Lancet* would kindly publish a letter from me on the subject, but further reflection led me to doubt whether so insignificant an individual would be noticed without some special introduction. In the April number of the *Cornhill Magazine*, 1864, I read with much interest an article on the subject—defining tolerably well the effects, but offering no tangible remedy, or even positive solution of the problem —“What is the Cause of Obesity ~“ I was pleased with the article as a whole, but objected to some portions of it, and had prepared a letter to the Editor of that Magazine offering my experience on the subject, but again it struck me that an unknown individual like myself would have but little prospect of notice; so I finally resolved to publish and circulate the Pamphlet, with no other reason, motive, or expectation than an earnest desire to help those who happened to be afflicted as I was, for that corpulence was remediable I was well convinced. The object I had in view impelled me to enter into minute particulars as well as general observations, and to revert to bygone years, in order to show that I had spared no pains nor expense to accomplish the great end of stopping and curing obesity.

Few men have led a more active life—bodily or mentally—from a constitutional anxiety for regularity, precision, and order, during fifty years' business career, from which I had retired, so that my corpulence and subsequent obesity were not through neglect of necessary bodily activity, nor from excessive eating, drinking, or self indulgence of any kind, except that I partook of the simple aliments of bread, milk, butter, beer, sugar, and potatoes more freely than my age required, and hence, as I believe, the generation of the parasite, detrimental to comfort if not really to health.

I could not presume to descant on the bodily structural tissues, nor how they are supported and renovated, having no mind or power to enter into those questions, which properly belong to the wise heads of the faculty. None of my family on the side of either parent had any tendency to corpulence, and from my earliest years I had an inexpressible dread of such a calamity, so, when I was between thirty and forty years of age, finding a tendency to it creeping upon me, I consulted an eminent surgeon, now long deceased,—a kind personal friend,—who recommended increased bodily exertion before my ordinary daily labours began, and who thought rowing an

excellent plan. I had the command of a good, heavy, safe boat, lived near the river, and adopted it for a couple of hours in the early morning. It is true I gained muscular vigour, but with it a prodigious appetite, which I was compelled to indulge, and consequently increased in weight, until my kind old friend advised me to forsake the exercise.

He soon afterwards died, and, as the tendency to corpulence remained, I consulted other high orthodox authorities (*never any inferior adviser*), but all in vain. I have tried sea air and bathing in various localities, with much walking exercise; taken gallons of physic and liquor potassæ, advisedly and abundantly; adopted riding on horseback; the waters and climate of. Leamington many times, as well as those of Cheltenham and Harrogate frequently; have lived upon sixpence a-day, so to speak, and earned it, if bodily labour may be so construed; and have spared no trouble nor expense in consultations with the best authorities in the land, giving each and all a fair time for experiment, without any permanent remedy, as the evil still gradually increased.

I am under obligations to most of those advisers for the pains and interest they took in my case; but only to one for an effectual remedy.

When a corpulent man eats, drinks, and sleeps well, has no pain to complain of and no particular organic disease, the judgment of able men seems paralyzed,— for I have been generally informed that corpulence is one of the natural results of increasing years; indeed, one of the ablest authorities in the land as a physician told me he had gained 1 lb. in weight every year since he attained manhood, and was not surprised at my condition, but advised more bodily exercise— vapour-baths and shampooing, in addition to the medicine given. Yet the evil still increased, and, like the parasite of barnacles on a ship, if it did not destroy the structure, it obstructed its fair, comfortable progress in the path of life.

I have been in dock, perhaps twenty times in as many years, for the reduction of this disease, and with little good effect—none lasting. Any one so afflicted is often subject to public remark, and though in conscience he may care little about it, I am confident no man labouring under obesity can be quite insensible to the sneers and remarks of the cruel and injudicious in public assemblies, public vehicles, or the ordinary street traffic; nor to the annoyance of finding no adequate space in a public assembly if he should seek amusement or need refreshment, and therefore he naturally keeps away as much as possible from places where he is likely to be made the object of the taunts and remarks of others. I am as regardless of public remark as most men, but I have felt these difficulties and therefore avoided such circumscribed accommodation and notice, and by that means have been deprived of many advantages to health and comfort.

Although no very great size or weight, still I could not stoop to tie my shoe, so to speak, nor attend to the little offices humanity requires without considerable pain and difficulty, which only the corpulent can understand; I have been compelled to go down stairs slowly backwards, to save the jar of increased weight upon the ankle and knee joints, and been obliged to puff and blow with every slight exertion, particularly that of going up stairs. I have spared no pains to remedy this by low living (*moderation and light food* was generally prescribed, but I had no direct bill of fare to know what was really intended), and that, consequently, brought the system into a low impoverished state, without decreasing corpulence, caused many obnoxious boils to appear, and two rather formidable carbuncles, for which I was ably operated upon *and fed into increased obesity*.

At this juncture (about nine years back) Turkish baths became the fashion, and I was advised to adopt them as a remedy. With the first few I found immense benefit in power and elasticity for walking exercise; so, believing that I had discovered the “philosopher’s stone,” I pursued them three times a-week till I had taken fifty, then less frequently (as I began to fancy, with some reason, that so many weakened my constitution) till I had taken ninety, but never succeeded in losing more than 6 lbs. weight during the whole course, and I gave up the plan as worthless;

though I have full belief in their cleansing properties, and their value in colds, rheumatism, and many other ailments.

I then fancied increasing obesity materially affected a slight umbilical rupture, if it did not cause it, and that another bodily ailment to which I had been subject was also augmented. This led me to other medical advisers, to whom I am also indebted for much kind consideration, though, unfortunately, they failed in relieving me. At last finding my sight failing and my hearing greatly impaired, in August, 1862, I consulted an eminent aural surgeon, who made light of the case, looked into my ears, sponged them internally, and blistered the outside, without, the slightest benefit, neither inquiring into any of my bodily ailments, which he probably thought unnecessary, nor affording me even time to name them.

I was not at all satisfied, but, on the contrary, was in a worse plight than when J went to him; however, he soon after left town for his annual holiday, which proved the greatest possible blessing to me, because it compelled me to seek other assistance, and, happily, I found the right man, who unhesitatingly said he believed my ailments were caused principally by corpulence, and prescribed a certain diet,—no medicine beyond a morning cordial as a corrective,—with immense effect and advantage both to my hearing and the decrease of my corpulency.

For the sake of argument and illustration I will presume that certain articles of ordinary diet, however beneficial in youth, are prejudicial in advanced life, like beans to a horse, whose common ordinary food is hay and corn. It may be useful food occasionally, under peculiar circumstances, but detrimental as a constancy. I will, therefore, adopt the analogy, and call such food human beans. The items from which I was advised to abstain as much as possible were :-

Bread, butter, milk, sugar, beer, and potatoes, which had been the main (and, I thought, innocent) elements of my subsistence, or at all events they had for many years been adopted freely.

These, said my excellent adviser, contain starch and saccharine matter, tending to create fat, and should be avoided altogether. At the first blush it seemed to me that I had little left to live upon, but my kind friend soon showed me there was ample. I was only too happy to give the plan a fair trial, and, within a very few days, found immense benefit from it. It may better elucidate the dietary plan if I describe generally what I have sanctioned to take, and that man must be an extraordinary person who would desire a better table

For breakfast, at 9.00 A.M., I take five to six ounces of either beef mutton, kidneys, broiled fish, bacon, or cold meat of any kind except pork or veal; a large cup of tea or coffee (without milk or sugar), a little biscuit, or one ounce of dry toast; making together six ounces solid, nine liquid.

For dinner, at 2.00 P.M., Five or six ounces of any fish except salmon, herrings, or eels, any meat except pork or veal, any vegetable except potato, parsnip, beetroot, turnip, or carrot, one ounce of dry toast, fruit out of a pudding not sweetened

any kind of poultry or game, and two or three glasses of good claret, sherry, or Madeira—Champagne, port, and beer forbidden; making together ten to twelve ounces solid, and ten liquid.

For tea, at 6.00 P.M., Two or three ounces of cooked fruit, a rusk or two, and a cup of tea without milk or sugar; making two to four ounces solid, nine liquid.

For supper, at 9.00 P.M. Three or four ounces of meat or fish, similar to dinner, with a glass or two of claret or sherry and water; making four ounces solid and seven liquid.

For nightcap, if required, A tumbler of grog—(gin, whisky, or brandy, without sugar)—or a glass or two of claret or sherry.

This plan leads to an excellent night's rest, with from six to eight hours' sound sleep.

With the dry toast or rusk at breakfast and~ tea, I generally take a table spoonful of spirit to soften it, which may prove acceptable to others. Perhaps I do not wholly escape starchy or saccharine matter, but scrupulously avoid those beans, such as milk, sugar, beer, butter, &c., which are known to contain them.

On rising in the morning I did take a table spoonful of a special alkaline corrective cordial, in a wine-glass of water, a grateful draught, as it seemed to carry away all the dregs of acidity left in the stomach after digestion, which, after the first year's practice I left off gradually, and seldom now use.

Experience has taught me to believe that, these human beans are the most insidious enemies man, with a tendency to corpulence in advanced life, can possess, though eminently friendly to youth. He may very prudently mount guard against such an enemy if he is not a fool to himself, and I fervently hope this truthful unvarnished tale may lead him to make a trial of the plan, which I sincerely recommend to public notice,— not with any ambitious motive, but in sincere good faith, to help my fellow-creatures to acquire the marvelous blessings I obtained within the short period of a few months.

I do not recommend every corpulent man to rush headlong into such a change of diet (*certainly not*), but to act advisedly and after full consultation with a physician.

My former dietary table was bread and milk for breakfast, or a pint of tea with plenty of milk, sugar, and buttered toast; meat, beer, much bread (of which I was always very fond) and pastry for dinner, the meal of tea similar to that of breakfast, and generally a fruit tart or bread and milk for supper. I had little comfort and far less sound sleep.

It certainly appears to me that my present dietary table is far superior to the former—more luxurious and liberal, independent of its blessed effect—but when it is proved to be more healthful, comparisons are simply ridiculous, and I can hardly imagine that any man, even in sound health, would choose the former, even if it were not an enemy; but, when it is shown to be, as in my case, inimical both to health and comfort, I can hardly conceive there is any man who would not willingly avoid it. I can conscientiously assert that I never lived so well as under the new plan of dietary, which I should have formerly thought a dangerous extravagant trespass upon health; I am very much better, bodily and mentally, pleased to believe that I hold the reins of health and comfort in my own hands, and, though at seventy-two years of age, I cannot expect to remain free from some coming natural infirmity that all flesh is heir to, I cannot at the present time complain of any, although six years older than when I wrote my first edition. It is simply miraculous, and I am thankful to Almighty Providence for directing me, through an extraordinary chance, to the care of a man who could work such a change in so short a time~

Oh! that the faculty would look deeper into, and make themselves better acquainted with, the crying evil of obesity—that dreadful tormenting parasite on health and comfort. Their fellow-men might not then descend into premature graves, as I believe many do, from what is termed apoplexy, and certainly would not, during their sojourn on earth, endure so much bodily and consequently mental infirmity.

Corpulence, though giving no actual pain (as it appears to me), must naturally press with undue violence upon the bodily viscera, driving one part upon another, and stopping the free action of all. I am sure it did in my particular case, and the result of my experience is briefly as follows

I have not felt better in health than now for the last twenty-six years.

Have suffered no inconvenience whatever in the probational remedy or since.

Am reduced nearly 13 inches in bulk, and 50 lbs. in weight.

Can perform every necessary office for myself.

The umbilical rupture is cured.

My sight and hearing are surprising at my age.

My other bodily ailments have become mere matters of history.

I placed a thank-offering of £50 in the hands of my kind medical adviser for distribution amongst his favourite hospitals, after gladly paying his usual fees, and still remain under obligations for his care and attention, which I can never hope to repay. I am most thankful to Almighty Providence for mercies received, and determined still to press the case into public notice as a token of gratitude.

I am fully persuaded that thousands of our fellow-men might profit equally by a similar course to mine; but, constitutions not being all alike, a different course of treatment may be advisable for the removal of so tormenting an affliction.

My kind and valued medical adviser is not a doctor for obesity, but stands on the pinnacle of fame in the treatment of another malady, which, as he well knows, is frequently induced by the disease of which I am speaking, and I most sincerely trust my corpulent friends (and there are thousands of corpulent people whom I dare not so rank) may be led into my tramroad.

The very gradual reductions in my weight which I am able to show, may be interesting to many, and I have great pleasure in stating them, believing that they serve to demonstrate further the merit of the system pursued.

My weight on August 26, 1862, was 202 lbs.
On September 7, it was 200, having lost 2

27	,,	197	,,	3 more.
October 19	,,	193	,,	4
November 9	,,	190	,,	3
December 3	,,	187	,,	3
24	,,	184	,,	3
Jan 14, 1863	,,	182	,	2
February 4	,,	180	,,	2
25	,,	178	,,	2
March 18	,,	176	,,	2
April 8	,,	173	,,	3
29	,,	170	,,	3
May 20	,,	167	,,	3
June 10	,,	164	,,	3
July 1	,,	161	,,	3
22	,,	159	,,	2
August 12	,,	157	,,	2
26	,,	156	,,	1
September 12	,,	156	,,	0

Total loss of weight in 12 months.. 46 lbs.
I have subsequently lost 4 lbs. more.

My diminished girth, in tailor phraseology, was hardly conceivable even by my own friends, or my respected medical adviser, until I put on my former clothing, over what I now wear, which is a thoroughly convincing proof of the remarkable change. These important desiderata have been attained by the most easy and comfortable means, with but little medicine, and almost entirely by a system of diet, which formerly I should have thought dangerously generous. I am told by all ~ho know me that my personal appearance greatly improved, and that I seem to bear the stamp of good health; this may be a matter of opinion or friendly remark, but I can honestly assert that I feel restored in health, "bodily and mentally," appear to have more muscular power and vigour, eat and drink with a good appetite, and sleep well. All symptoms of acidity, indigestion, and heartburn (with which I was frequently tormented) have vanished. I have left off using boot-hooks, and other such aids, which were indispensable, but being now able to stoop with ease and freedom, are unnecessary. I have lost the feeling of *occasional faintness*, and what I think a remarkable blessing and comfort is, that I have been able safely to leave off knee-bandages, which I had worn *necessarily* for many years, and given up the umbilical truss.

After publishing my Pamphlet, I felt constrained to send a copy of it to my former medical advisers, to ascertain their opinions on the subject. They did not dispute or question the propriety of the system, but either dared not venture its practice upon a man of my age, or thought it too great a sacrifice of personal comfort to be necessary advised or adopted, and none of them appeared to feel the fact of the misery of corpulence. One eminent physician, as I before stated, assured me that increasing weight was a necessary result of advancing years; another equally eminent to whom I had been directed by a very friendly third, who had most kindly but ineffectually failed in a remedy, added to my weight in a few weeks instead of abating the evil. These facts led me to believe the question was not sufficiently observed or even regarded.

The great charm and comfort of the system is, that its affects are palpable within a week of trial, which creates a natural stimulus to persevere for few weeks more, when the fact becomes established beyond question.

I only entreat all persons suffering from corpulence to make a fair trial for just one clear month, as I am well convinced, they will afterwards pursue a course which yields such extraordinary benefit, till entirely and effectually relieved, and be it remembered, by the sacrifice merely of simple, for the advantage of more generous and comforting food. The simple dietary evidently adds fuel to corpulent fire, whereas the superior and liberal seems to extinguish it.

Many are practising the diet after consultation with their own medical advisers; some few have gone to mine, and others are practising upon their own convictions

of the advantages detailed in the Pamphlet, though I recommend all to act advisedly, in ease their constitutions should differ from mine.

I am now in that happy comfortable state that I do not hesitate to indulge in any fancy in regard to diet, but watch the consequences, and do not continue any course which adds to weight or bulk and consequent discomfort.

Is not the system suggestive to artists and men of sedentary employment who cannot spare time for exercise, consequently become corpulent, and clog the little muscular action with a superabundance of fat, thus easily avoided?

Pure genuine bread may be the staff of life as it is termed. It is so, particularly in youth, but I feel certain it is more wholesome in advanced life if thoroughly toasted, as I take it. My impression is,

that any starchy or saccharine matter tends to the disease of corpulence in advanced life, and whether it be swallowed in a direct form or produced in the stomach by combination, that all things tending to these elements should be avoided, of course always under sound medical authority.

A kind friend has furnished me with a tabular statement in regard to weight as proportioned to stature, which may be interesting and useful to corpulent readers

STATURE.		WEIGHT.			
5 feet	1	should be	8 stone	8	or 120 lbs.
5 "	2	"	9	0	" 126 "
5 "	3	"	9	7	" 133 "
5 "	4	"	9	10	" 136 "
5 "	5	"	10	2	" 142 "
5 "	6	"	10	5	" 145 "
5 "	7	"	10	8	" 148 "
5 "	9	"	11	8	" 162 "
5 "	10	"	12	1	" 169 "
5 "	11	"	12	6	" 174 "
6 "	0	"	12	10	" 178 "

This tabular statement, taken from a mean average of 2,648 healthy men, was formed and arranged for an Insurance Company by the late Dr. John Hutchinson. It answered as a pretty good standard, and insurances were regulated upon it. His calculations were made upon the volume of air passing in and out of the lungs, and this was his guide as to how far the various organs of the body were in health, and the lungs in particular. It may be viewed as some sort of probable rule, yet only as an average,—some in health weighing more by many pounds than others. It must not be looked upon as infallible, but only as a sort of general, reasonable, guide to Nature's great and mighty work.

On a general view of the question, I think it may be conceded that a frame of low stature was hardly intended to bear very heavy weight. Judging from this tabular statement I ought to be lighter than I am; I shall not, however, covet or aim at such a result, nor, on the other hand, feel alarmed if I decrease a little more in weight and bulk.

I am certainly more sensitive to cold since I have lost the superabundant fat, but this is remediable by another garment, far more agreeable and satisfactory. Many of my friends said, as I progressed, "Oh! you have done well so far, but take care you don't go too far." I fancy such a circumstance, with such a dietary, very unlikely, if not impossible, and I now say this after six years' experience ; but feeling that I have nearly attained the right standard of bulk and weight proportional to my stature and age, I should not hesitate to partake of a fattening dietary occasionally, to preserve that happy standard, if necessary; but I shall always keep a careful watch upon myself to discover the effect, and act accordingly, so that, if I choose to spend a day or two with Dives, so to speak, I must not forget to devote the next to Lazarus.

Little do the faculty imagine the misery and bitterness to life through the parasite of corpulence or obesity.

The approach of corpulence is so gradual that, until it is far advanced, persons rarely become objects of attention. Many may have even congratulated themselves on their comely appearance, and refrained from seeking advice or a remedy for that which they did not consider an evil, but an

evil I can say most truly it is, when in much excess, and, in my opinion, it must arrive at that point, unless obviated by proper means.

Some, I believe, would willingly submit to even a violent remedy, so that an immediate benefit could be produced; this is not the object of the treatment, as it cannot but be dangerous (in my humble opinion) to reduce a disease of this nature suddenly; they are probably then too prone to despair of success, and consider it as unalterably connected with their constitution. *Many under this feeling doubtless return to their former habits, encouraged so to act by the ill-judged advice of friends who, I am persuaded (from the correspondence I have had on this most interesting subject), become unthinking accomplices in the misery of those whom they regard and esteem.*

It has also been remarked that such a dietary as mine was too good and expensive for a poor man, and that I had wholly lost sight of that class; but a very poor corpulent man is not so frequently met with, inasmuch as the poor cannot afford to procure the means for creating fat; but when the tendency does exist in that class, I have no doubt it can be remedied by abstinence from the forbidden articles, and a moderate indulgence in such cheap stimulants as may be recommended by a medical adviser, whom they have ample opportunities of consulting gratuitously.

I have a very strong feeling that gout (another terrible parasite upon humanity) might be greatly relieved, if not cured, by this proper natural dietary, but not without advice.

The word "*parasite*" has been much commented upon, as inappropriate to any but a living creeping thing (of course I use the word in a figurative sense, as a burden to the flesh), but if fat is not an insidious creeping enemy, I do not know what is. I should have equally applied the word to gout, rheumatism, dropsy, and many other diseases.

One material point I should be glad to impress on my corpulent readers—it is, to get accurately weighed at starting upon the fresh system, and continue to do so weekly or monthly, for the change will be so truly palpable by this course of examination, that it will arm them with perfect confidence in the merit and ultimate success of the plan. I deeply regret not having secured a photographic portrait of my original figure in 1862, to place in juxta-position with one of my present form. It might have amused some, but certainly would have been very convincing to others, and astonishing to all, that such an effect should have been so readily and speedily produced by the simple method of exchanging a meagre for a generous dietary *under proper advice*.

I shall ever esteem it a great favour if persons relieved and cured, as I have been, will kindly let me know of it; the information will be truly gratifying to my mind. That the system is a great success, I have not a shadow of doubt from the numerous and grateful reports sent to me.

Some doubts have been expressed in regard to the vanishing point of such a descending scale, but it is a remarkable fact that the great and most palpable diminution in weight and bulk occurs within the first forty-eight hours, the descent is then more gradual. My own experience, and that of others, assures me that if medical authority be first consulted as to the complaint, and such slight extraneous aid obtained as medicine can afford, nature will do her duty, and only her duty first, by relieving herself of immediate pressure she will be enabled to move more freely in her own beautiful way; and secondly (the same course being pursued by the patient), to work speedy amelioration and final cure. The vanishing point is only when the disease is stopped and the parasite annihilated.

In my humble judgment, the dietary is the principal point in the treatment of Corpulence, and it appears to me, moreover, that if properly regulated it becomes in a certain sense a medicine. The system seems to me to attack only the superfluous deposit of fat, and, as my medical friend

informs me, purges the blood, rendering it more pure and healthy, strengthens the muscles and bodily viscera, and, I feel quite convinced, sweetens life, if it does not prolong it.

As I find there are more Mr. Harveys than one concerned in the question of the cure for Corpulence, and as I have been much troubled by correspondents on the subject, I am glad of this opportunity to repeat that the medical adviser to whom I am so much indebted, is Mr. **WILLIAM HARVEY**, F.R.C.S., of No. 2, Soho Square, London, W.

I have now finished my task, and trust my humble efforts may prove to be good seed well sown, that will fructify and produce a large harvest of benefit to my fellow-creatures. I also hope the faculty generally may be led more extensively to ventilate this question of corpulence or obesity, so that instead of a few able practitioners, there may be hundreds distributed in the various parts of the United Kingdom. In such case, I am persuaded that these diseases will be very rare.

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May, 1869.