

19th Century literary non-fiction

Source B

This is an extract from a pamphlet published in 1863. The writer had successfully dieted – with medical guidance – to cure his corpulence (an old word for obesity). The pamphlet was addressed “to the public”, because Bantling wanted to help other people suffering from the condition by offering advice about his own cure.

Letter on Corpulence

- 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
5 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 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.
- 10 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
15 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*.
- [...]
- 20 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 descend into early premature graves, as I believe many do, from what is termed apoplexy*, and certainly would not, during their sojourn³ on earth, endure so much bodily and consequently mental infirmity.
- 25 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:–
- 30 I have not felt so well as now for the last twenty years.
Have suffered no inconvenience whatever in the probational* remedy.
Am reduced many inches in bulk, and 35lbs. in weight in thirty-eight weeks.

Come down stairs forward naturally, with perfect ease.
Go up stairs and take ordinary exercise freely, without the slightest inconvenience.
Can perform every necessary office for myself.

35

The umbilical rupture is greatly ameliorated*, and gives me no anxiety.
My sight is restored – my hearing improved.
My other bodily ailments are ameliorated; indeed, almost past into matter of history.

40

I have 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 overwhelming obligations for his care and attention, which I can never hope to repay. Most thankful to Almighty Providence for mercies received, and determined to press the case into public notice as a token of gratitude.

Glossary

- * ancle – old-fashioned spelling of ‘ankle’
- * apoplexy – what we would today call a stroke
- * probational – subject to testing, an experimental trial period
- * ameliorated – improved, made better

This extract is from ‘Letter on Corpulence, addressed to the public’ by William Bantling (1863) and the full text of the third edition can be found online at <https://archive.org/details/letteroncorpulen00bant>

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