

THAT "SLIGHT INCLINATION" TO EMBONPOINT.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



MUST confess that I hesitated for some little time over the title of my present article. Several names suggested themselves, and I reviewed them in my mind one by one. "Corpulency" is too broad a word; besides, a person may be corpulent, properly speaking, without being fat. "Obesity" is better, but the Latin *obesus* means gross, &c., as well as fat, so "obesity" does not sound polite. "Katasarcia," or "polysarcia" (from the Greek *κατὰ* or *πολὺς* and *σάρξ*), signifying over-much flesh, is not clear and truthful enough; it is liable also to misapprehension, in this way: many people who are positively so fat, so stout, or so obese, if you like the word, that they have some little difficulty in getting about, will pinch their arms, or ask their friends to "just feel that," and boldly affirm that it is "good solid flesh." "Too solid," you think, if you do not say so; and you are well aware the speaker himself would not mind much if it melted. A man who talks about only being in good condition when he is positively—fat, is living in a fool's paradise, and the sooner he knows this the better.

Well, as there really is, at times, something in a name, I have taken refuge in French—*Embonpoint!* The word is a pretty one, not to say musical. It often implies a compliment; it never could give offence, for a certain amount of *embonpoint* is rather to be desired, either in a person or—in a partridge.

There are also some advantages inseparable from the condition under discussion. Well, to begin with, I dare say appearances go for something in this world; curves are more pleasant to the eye than angles are; and unless a man be in first-class muscular form, he looks all the more presentable if slightly inclined to *embonpoint*.

Talking about fat, a well-known physiologist makes the following remarks:—"Deposits of fatty matter answer several important objects: they often assist the action of moving parts, by giving them support without interfering with their free motions; thus, the eyes rest on cushions of fat, on which they can turn freely, and through which the muscles pass that keep them in play. Fat also affords, by its power of resistance to the passage of heat, a warm covering to animals that are destined to live in cold climates, and it is in these that we find it accumulated to the largest amount. Further, being deposited when nourishment is abundant, it serves as a store of combustive material, which may be taken back into the system and made use of in time of need."

From this we might reasonably infer that stout people can stand cold better than their brethren of the lean kine. Facts hardly, I think, bear this out; and

the reason is not, probably, far to seek, for neither the nerves nor the muscles of those who may be called obese are in such good form as they would otherwise be. But I cannot forget that not only the lower animals, but even the human beings, who dwell in such countries as Greenland, are all reasonably plump, while our own sailors begin to accumulate "flesh," as they call it, after they have resided but a very short time in the Arctic regions.

A stout person is not only, generally speaking, of a more contented disposition than a slender one, but he is capable of bearing the deprivation of food better. Your fat friend might be cast away on a desert island, and live for a considerable time without eating, but your friend the thin man is like a mole: he needs to be fed once a day at all events, else he will go to the wall. As, however, comparatively few fat people are cast away on desert islands to become Crusoes, obesity from this point of view may be looked upon as a doubtful advantage. But in many cases of accidents or illnesses, the person who, as the saying is, has "something to go and come upon," has more chance of ultimate recovery than he who may be defined as somewhat linear.

Whether an accumulation of fat on the body blunts the mind and dulls the intellect, is a question I prefer not to enter upon.

Now, while granting that a certain amount of *embonpoint* is not only advantageous, but a sign of good health and sound constitution, especially in people about forty years of age, it cannot be denied that too much adiposity constitutes a disease, and—there is no use mincing matters—often a very serious one.

Stoutness certainly does not conduce to long life. Every one will admit that much, only stout people rest their minds—if, indeed, stout people's minds ever do need resting—by imagining that they will not always be fat, that "one of these days," and so on. But here I must confess my belief that our fat friends are usually inclined to be apathetic about their condition, and that, to a good many of them, "one of these days" never does arrive in the sense they meant it to.

The disadvantages of obesity are numerous, its dangers to both health and life not a few. One of the very least of the former is the difficulty a fat person has in getting about, and in taking that amount of exercise without which the body cannot long be maintained in the only state which can with propriety be called condition. Exercise alone will not reduce a man's weight, though people usually believe so, but exercise will retard the accumulation of fat.

Adipose tissue is, in those inclined to corpulency, usually deposited not only under the skin—it would be well, indeed, if this were all—but in the spaces between the various muscles of the limbs, all round the heart

and the kidneys, and in many other vital positions that need not be named.

The accumulation of fat on and around the muscles naturally prevents activity of motion; but it does more and worse, for it throws a serious obstacle in the way of those muscles receiving a due amount of nutrition; they are therefore weakened and rendered flabby. And here let me point out a fact to those of my readers who may meditate treating themselves for the reduction of obesity. You may sometimes hear an expression like the following from a stout man in the prime of life:—

"If I could get rid of two or three stones of 'flesh' [such people will persist in calling it flesh] what I could do!"

"Yes, my friend," I should reply, "and, pray, what could you do? For if you were to get rid of nearly all the fat that is on you to-morrow or the day after, you would not be able to walk twice the length of your own garden for cold and fatigue. Your muscles are attenuated and flabby, and if deprived suddenly of their cushions of fat they would be of very little use indeed. That really is the truth, whether you like it or not."

The deposition of fat round the kidneys or on the heart comes, in time, to interfere very seriously with the functions of those organs, and to engender diseases which ultimately lead to dropsy of a fatal character. If the heart is prevented from acting as it ought to, the health cannot be long maintained. If it be a flabby heart, the blood will be impoverished; the person will have a sallow look, and be more or less bloated in appearance. If the heart is enlarged or hypertrophied, we may expect much difficulty in breathing, especially if the patient attempts quick walking or hurried climbing of stairs, and perhaps frequent attacks of palpitation, with now and then swimming in the head, and a sensation of falling, even in dreams at night.

The fat is sometimes not merely deposited on the heart, but among its muscles, causing degeneration of the walls of that organ, rendering the sufferer quite unfit for any of the more active duties of life.

The respiration of fat people is very much interfered with; indeed, one might say it is seldom or never carried on with a complete feeling of comfort. Nor, on the other hand, is the digestion strong, nor the appetite either, unless excited by hot sauces or vinous stimulants.

If we glance for a moment or two at the most common causes of corpulency, we shall, I think, get hints as to the most rational plan of treatment.

Corpulence is often constitutional; but even if it be, that is no reason, remember, that it should not be kept within due bounds. A too easy mind, and a sanguine manner of looking at the every-day personal occurrences of life, is a cause over which one has little, if any, control. Success in life is wished for devoutly by all, but it often has the effect of rendering people who are constitutionally inclined to be so, very corpulent. Well, people cannot be expected to manu-

facture small worries for themselves in order to keep within due bounds corporeally, but they can avoid the pleasures of the table, however well off in the world they may be. Indulgence in beer, stout, and in wine and spirits, has a tendency to increase the amount of fat; so has the use of sugar, which experiments seem to prove is often turned into fat in the system, and even drinking too much water. Age has something to do with the accumulation of fat, men generally giving evidence of this condition of body between thirty and forty, and women between forty and fifty, if not before.

If we consider obesity a disease—and if it be not actually so, it is at least a very distressing state of body—then we ought to be able to find out some scheme for its general treatment. And here the question naturally arises, Is it safe for a stout person to use means to reduce his system? As a rule it is, provided no extra harsh means is adopted for that purpose.

I have not Banting's "Essay on Corpulency" by me, or I might be tempted to make some extracts therefrom. I can only, therefore, recommend its perusal to all whom it may concern. If I remember rightly, however, the scale of diet which was prescribed for Mr. Banting himself, when suffering from obesity, and which certainly had the happy effect of restoring him to health and comfort, was somewhat as follows—the principle, at all events, being the same:—

For breakfast he was allowed white fish, a little bacon or cold beef, broiled kidneys, or lean meat any kind, with a small piece of toast or crust of loaf, and tea without either sugar or milk.

His dinner consisted of white fish, a little toast and green vegetables, poultry or game, with a very little tart fruit to follow. Tea in the afternoon, but neither sugar nor milk; and a light supper, consisting of meat or fish.

Now, the reader will observe that the forbidden articles of diet were—1. The oily fishes (such as salmon, herring, eels, &c.). 2. Bread and butter. 3. Milk. 4. Sugar. 5. Potatoes and farinaceous vegetables generally.

The danger in diminishing the quantity of fat in and on the body is trifling if it be gradually accomplished. The person about to undergo the process of reduction should be carefully weighed every week, and the weight noted, being particular to wear exactly the same amount of clothes each time. Some of the bitter tonics may be at the same time used with advantage so long as they do not constipate, because, while reducing fat, our object is to brace and tone muscle and nerve. Plenty of exercise should at the same time be taken in the open air, but this should not be carried to the verge of fatigue. Over-indulgence in bed should be avoided, and the use of the tepid or cold sea-salt bath will be found to do much good, so too will an occasional Turkish bath; but on this point one's own medical adviser should first be consulted. I have no hesitation in saying that perseverance in this plan of treatment will work wonders.