Myra and Kate: The Lesson Their Story Teaches.

By "Medicus."

Do you think, doctor, that my daughter would get stronger and healthier, if she were to join the gymnasium in class?"

Had I not gotten my good breeding as to have smiled at the utter absurdity of the question, I could never have forgiven myself. But there sat the mother, handsome, almost portly, fair, and forty; and near her stood the daughter, aged about twenty, but a mere wond of a girl, weak-looking, fair, and fragile, blushing her eyes as if the summer sunshine was too strong for them. And both anxiously awaited my reply. Could the weaver be asked to teach—the willow become an oak?

"Your daughter," I said, as pleasantly as I could, "will never be an athlete; nor would it be good for her to be so. Why," I added, "will all girls nowadays hanker after muscle, and long to own biceps?" Your daughter, Mrs. N—, is far more likely to develop brain and intellect, and thus to adorn the circle in which she shall revolve like some bright star in the firmament.

That reference of mine to a star in the firmament was excessively stupid, I admit; but for the time being I think it pleased Mrs. N—, and Myra too. She smiled, and nodded at Myra, and said, "Hear that, now! Hear what the doctor says!"

Myra's eyes had a far-away look in them a moment afterwards, as she gazed away out at the green fields and the waving trees, and I felt certain she was thinking that she would far rather be a robust, healthy, muscular girl like Kate Stanley, than an intellectual star with a face—

"Sickled o'er with the pale cast of thought."

Kate Stanley was a fine specimen of a dashingly English lass, and I have seen her with one hand held that great mastiff, Tornado, whom she owns, back by the collar when he wanted to try conclusions with one of my Newfoundland dogs.

Now, I want to tell you, readers mine, the different things that Keke and Tornado taught me, and I think we can learn a useful lesson therefrom.

Kate, then, was tall, hard, and muscular, and of a fresh complexion, that needed neither rouge nor bismuth powder to bring it up or tone it down. Being well built, she did not look so tall as she really was, and if health bloomed in her face, it sparkled also in her clear blue eyes. Myra had no more colour in her
somewhat thin face than a spring lily. I think, however, she had deeper mental gifts than Kate had. You see, we are not all formed alike, and I am afraid that if two girls was this—each envied the other’s gifts. Myra would have given a good deal to possess Kate’s fine physique, and although she is not without a certain pride in her beautiful figure, she would have been a good deal happier if she could have played, sung and written verses as well as Myra did. And I am afraid that there is very little real contentment in this world.

Well, now, as regards gymnastics, such exer-
cise was eminently suited for Kate, in order to relieve her mind and to improve her figure. A slight inclination she had towards embonpoint, Kate was a healthy, hearty lass, possessed of health, I must say, yet useful gifts like the proverbial appetite; and I’m not sure she was not at times given to indulging it needlessly. However, if she had not taken abundant exercise, she would have formed adipose tissue instead of red flesh or muscle.

I don’t believe all the food in the world would ever have caused Myra to form either fat or muscle. At any rate, she was not disposed to take a deal, and most of the assimilated nutrition was burned away in that ever-active brain of hers. The world, mind you, is far more interested in the nervous temperament than in the nervous temperament, like Myra, than to people with splendid health, muscle, beauty, and all that, such as Kate had. Kate went grizzled at the mill, but Myra could invent the healthiest text of a novel. Of course, she would never produce any Myras, but only Kates, mankind would be pounding corn between two stones to this day, instead of making flour by steam-power.

Myra’s muscles were of the slenderest, and I do believe the tendons that held them to the bone were the thinnest that ever held fre-
string. Now, as we cannot expect a fibre-
string to support a clock-weight, you will not be surprised to be told that when Myra did join that gymnasium, in spite of either my advice or her mother’s, she strained herself—she snapped something; and I had a very interesting patient for many weeks afterwards. Of course when I heard of the accident, and was told the cause of it, I was in a pretty, fine mood, and went to the house fully intending to boil over, and give vent to some straight talking; but when I saw Myra looking so wan and “wae”—for really her face was as pale as her pillow—my anger all melted away at once.

But Myra received a lesson I never forgot. Myra was a great lover of gymnastics and healthy exercise, and taken to writing verses and reading all kinds of thought-stimulating books, she was also probably have had another very interesting patient. Only Kate had far more solid sense.

Besides, I told Kate’s mother—I really didn’t like to tell her myself, because I’m the most shy man in the world—when she took unlimited exercise and limited diet for four or five years to come, she would really have felt she was a kind of a model, and kept feeling around for another word, till “plump” came to my rescue.

I do not know how Mrs. Stanley worked the information to Kate, though I expect she did not mince matters, nor go far about the bush. So poor Katie had ever dangling before her mind’s eye, an apparition of her future self the other side, so that she was constantly afraid to look at herself in the mirror.

Now you must note here, that Kate’s com-
plaint—embonpoint really is a disease—was only to the right side, and I was very well enough to take advice, and to regulate her diet and her daily exercise as to avert the bulky consequences. There may be, however, some who fall ill on these lines who have already crossed the Rubicon, and who are already rotund. Is there hope for them? Undoubtedly there is, or I would not trouble myself to write this paper. Some years ago I had an article in these columns on this very subject, I make no apology for recurring to it, for instance, the world is getting wiser; and since I wrote that article several very eminent medical men in this country and in Germany have made the same point of view, if not more so, in my subject, because I note in the advertisement sheets of many newspapers that quacks have taken the subject up, and are selling notions wholesale under various suggestive titles. I intend to try towards the beware of such advertisers, or they may repeat it all their brief lives.

There are a great number of causes of obesity, and the cause may be either from the chemistry; or physiology of adipose tissue production, I may mention one or two of these. The first is heredity, or it might be better, not called, idiosyncasy. At all events, we may find two children in the same family, both living on precisely the same diet, and each exactly eating about the same quantity of food, yet the one remaining thin and the other growing rapidly obese.

Those who lead a quiet, uneventful life, and who are not overburdened with toil or anxiety, and no worry, are more liable to the complaint than they would otherwise be. Those of the nervous temperament, on the other hand—like Myra, for example—but little likely even to become obese.

There are also certain times of life during which obesity is more likely to occur than at other times. I would not, of course, say it, because it is absurdly, stout. It is worse, however, when the girl in her teens begins to develop what she may be pleased to call flesh.

And now I would notice this, that although I believe I am doing nothing more than my duty in vouchsafing some advice on a very important subject, I should earnestly advise girls who have already acquired excess of flesh without discomfort, to put themselves forthwith under the guidance of some medical man, preferably their own family doctor. In a case of this kind there is no time to lose. You must look upon this growing trouble as the greatest foe to your health, to your happiness, to your prospects in life, and to length of life itself; for I do assure you, obesity shortens your life, one day. Besides, the longer one delays to make an attack on the stronghold of the enemy, the more it gains in strength, and the more difficult will be to root out.

The very fact that obesity may be caused either by poverty of blood or a too great consumption of rich food, and that is not to be treated accordingly makes it still more apparent that it is better far to consult a physician than to depend on self-treatment entirely. How often do we not see our friends who have complaints like bladders of lard, and others again always rosy, but getting ten times more red or rosy if they keep over a fire, or be used for any kind of exposure of the sun. It must be evident to all that at least the medical treatment of any two such cases should differ diametrically.

One cause of obesity is the simplest of all, though I have not yet mentioned it. In plain language, it is eating too much. It is all very well to say you don’t eat much. The very fact that Nature puts a certain portion of the food consumed and assimilated away on the shelf as it were, in the shape of fat, proves that some of us are getting more support than we can comfortably use of half the food. And the repair of tissue. The learned authority, Ebstein, in his treatment, starts from the fact that adipose tissue is increased through too little exercise, and so he first and foremost reduces the diet.

"With this, however, a state of exhaustion must be produced which substitutes the albumen in the blood must not be reduced. Further, the patient should lose superfluous flesh very gradually, and the regimen imposed should be such that it may be continued for the rest of the life."

This at the very outset may seem a stag-
ent way to afford any chance of happiness. "What?" the patient exclaims, "I am by rule all my life? Au! It is bad enough," she may add, "to have to live by rule even for a week, all my life?"

"Stay," I cry; "do not be rash. Habit in a few months becomes second nature; and in a few months' time too, so much happier and lighter in body and mind will you become that you will have no desire to change the new regime for the old."

While, then, Ebstein’s treatment is in many respects different from all those that have gone before, if my memory serves me aright, I gave in a former article—Ebstein allows the patient to munch butter, meat, fat, stout, marrow, rich soups, fat sausages, and vegetables cooked in butter; but, on the other hand, he allows only about three ounces of bread a day, and forbids sugar, pastry, and potatoes.

It is said that "the feeling of hunger is lessened by the ingestion of fat, not so much that it interferes with the powers of digestion and assimilation, but that it economises the decomposition of aliment and stored fat, and thereby lessens that desire for compensation of the consumed matter which we call hunger."

Thus, the two latter forms of the predilection of diction in that last sentence. Well, it isn’t mine. I believe in the light and airy and graceful, and really think it conveys quite as much.

But to proceed. Ebstein allows plenty of fat, and he allows also to grown-up people, if so desired, two or three glasses of light wine and several large cups of tea without milk, but no malt liquor. He does not allow nearly so much meat as Hasting.

Well, on the whole Ebstein has been successful, I think, but there are some who, I am afraid, believe I should think it would be unwise to continue such treatment longer than is necessary.

Concerning the medical treatment of obesity I desire here to say nothing, because I do not think it by any means safe for a girl, whatever her age, to attempt self-doctoring; and besides, I don’t think I should care even more.

But there are accessories in the way of treatment. Even diet is not everything. A patient in advance, should not indulge in too much sleep; she should keep the mattress—hard but perfectly level—and with a spare allowance of bed-clothing.

The sleep should be well ventilated, and if possible a cold bath should be taken in the morning; anyhow, let it be as nearly cold as can be borne without inducing a chill.

As for exercise or gymnastics, I think with certain restrictions both are good. In my own plan of treatment I advocate the reduction of fat coupled with the accession of red flesh or muscle.

Some girls who have the misfortune to be stout think if they reduce themselves, their faces will be simply a bag of wrinkles. But these avoid this if, during all your process—which should be slow—they take abundant healthful exercise. They ought thus to fill out with flesh the vacancies left by the adipose tissue.

Cycling, I have taken occasion to remark before, is glorious and most wholesome exercise. I believe there will never reduce fat unless it goes hand in hand with a regulated and restricted diet.

If you will but bear this in mind, my present article I have not been written in vain. I have not forgotten the toilet paper promised; and I have, moreover, in preparation an article on gymnastics exercises at home. In a class of its own, and I hope for girls, both of which I hope will appear in due time.