

## CLASSICS OF SCIENCE:

## William Banting on Corpulence

Diet

"This letter is respectfully dedicated to the public simply and entirely from an earnest desire to confer a benefit on my fellow creatures."—WILLIAM BANTING.

LETTER ON CORPULENCE, addressed to the Public. By WILLIAM BANTING. London, 1863.

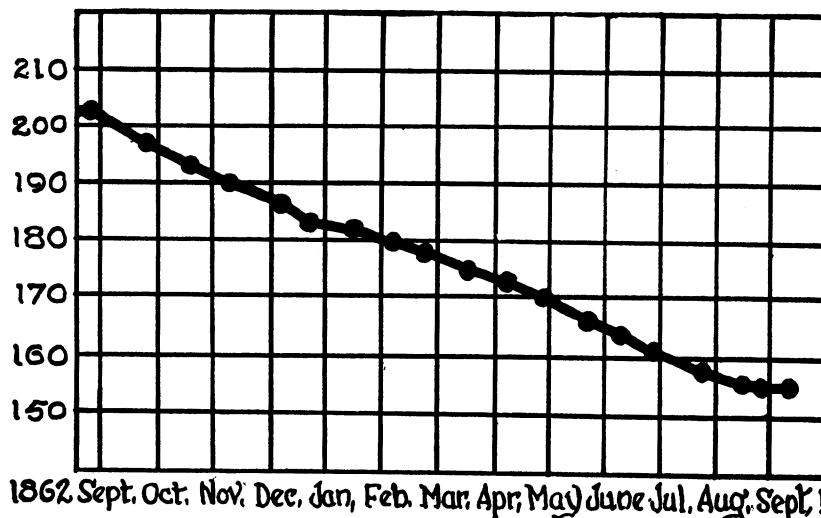
*Corpulence*

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 just emerged from a very long probation in this affliction, I am desirous of circulating my humble knowledge and experience for the benefit of my fellow man, with an earnest hope 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. \* \* \*

I am now nearly 66 years of age, about 5 feet 5 inches in stature, and, in August last (1862), weighed 202 pounds, which I think it right to name, because the article in the *Cornhill Magazine* presumes that a certain stature and age should bear, ordinarily, a certain weight, and I am quite of that opinion. I now weigh 167 pounds, showing a diminution of something like 1 pound per week since August, and having now very nearly attained the happy medium. I have perfect confidence that a few more weeks will fully accomplish the object for which I have labored for the last thirty years, in vain, until it pleased Almighty Providence to direct me into the right and proper channel—the "tram-way," so to speak—of happy, comfortable existence.

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 have now retired, so that my corpulence and subsequent obesity was 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 aged nature required, and hence, as I believe, the generation of the parasite, detrimental to comfort if not really to health. \* \* \*

None of my family on the side of either parent had any tendency to corpulence, and from my earliest



HOW BANTING LOST WEIGHT drawn from data given in the second edition of the *Letter on Corpulence*, November 1863

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 labors began, and 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 vigor, 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. \* \* \*

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 as a physician in the land told me he had gained 1 pound in weight every year since he attained manhood, and was not surprised at my condition, but advised more bodily exercise—vapor-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. \* \* \*

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 last, finding my sight failing and my hearing greatly impaired, I consulted, in August last, 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 I went to him; however, he soon after left town for his annual holiday, which proved the greatest possible blessing—(Turn to next page)

## Banting on Corpulence—*Continued*

ing 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 existence, 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, and 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 sanction to take, and that man must be an extraordinary person who would desire a better table:

For breakfast, I take four or five ounces of beef, mutton, kidneys, broiled fish, bacon, or cold meat of any kind except pork; a large cup of tea (without milk or sugar), a little biscuit, or one ounce of dry toast.

For dinner, five or six ounces of any fish except salmon, any meat except pork, any vegetable except potato, one ounce of dry toast, fruit out of a pudding, any kind of poultry or game, and two or three glasses of good claret, sherry, or Madeira—champagne, port and beer forbidden.

For tea, two or three ounces of fruit, a rusk or two, and a cup of tea without milk or sugar.

For supper, three or four ounces of meat or fish, similar

to dinner, with a glass or two of claret.

For nightcap, if required, a tumbler of grog—(gin, whiskey, 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. The dry toast or rusk may have a tablespoonful of spirit to soften it, which will prove acceptable. Perhaps I did not wholly escape starchy or saccharine matter, but scrupulously avoided those beans, such as milk, sugar, beer, butter, etc., which were known to contain them.

On rising in the morning I take a tablespoonful of a special corrective cordial, which may be called the Balm of Life, in a wine-glass of water, a most grateful draught, as it seems to carry away all the dregs left in the stomach after digestion, but is not aperient; then I take 5 or 6 ounces of solid and 8 of liquid for breakfast; 8 ounces of solid and 8 of liquid for dinner; 3 ounces of solid and 8 of liquid for tea; 4 ounces of solid and 6 of liquid for supper, and the grog afterwards, if I please. I am not, however, strictly limited to any quantity at either meal, so that the nature of the food is rigidly adhered to.

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 my plan, which I sincerely recommend to public notice—not with any ambitious motive, but in sincere good faith to help my fellow creatures to obtain the marvelous blessings I have found 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 and 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 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 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, and pleased to believe that I hold the reins of health and comfort in my own hands; and, though at sixty-five 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 one. 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. \* \* \*

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 sincerely trust most of my corpulent friends (and there are thousands of corpulent people whom I dare not so rank) may be led into my tramroad. To any such I am prepared to offer the further key of knowledge by naming the man. It might seem invidious to do so now, but I shall only be too happy, if applied to by letter in good faith, or if any doubt should exist as to the correctness of this statement.

WILLIAM BANTING, Sen.,  
Late of No. 27, St. James Street,  
Piccadilly, Now of No. 4, The Terrace,  
Kensington.  
May, 1863.

**William Banting** was born in 1797 and died in 1878. He was an English merchant whose chief claim to fame lies in his having been too fat. This week's classic tells how he reduced his weight to normal by cutting down the carbohydrate content of his diet. He was the first to use that procedure and from his name the English have coined the verb "to bant." "Banting" in English is the same as "dieting" in American speech.