

Obesity and genius.

Contributors

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183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
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DANIEL LAMBERT.

Obesity and Genius.



N. PAGANINI.

IT has passed into an aphorism. Through the literature of the world, of every country, of every age, there runs the implication that a fat body and a lean wit are allied. *Vice versa*, a thin body, say the wiseacres, accompanies a clever intellect. No one is so fond of harping on this string as Shakespeare, with his blundering Falstaff, his gaunt and enterprising Cassius. And it is the same with unwritten wisdom—the universal folk-lore—with its “Fat and folly are ever mated,” “A fat paunch and a lean pate,” “The world to win you must be thin,” “Fat feeds on brains,” and such-like proverbs by the score. You remember Byron’s horror of growing corpulent and his saying to Rogers, “The moment a man becomes fat Death has already come to that man.” Frederick the Great, too, said on one occasion, “There are two kinds of men in the world—fat and thin—and none of the fat ones command my regiments.”

Such, touched on briefly, is the situation so far as public opinion generally regards obesity. And now comes along the German Professor Bertholdt, with the startling dictum that the world, perhaps (there is much virtue in that *vielleicht*), owes most to its fat men, that obesity is one of the greatest blessings that Providence has sent to man, and that with

it come perseverance, virtue, and contentment. All this was occasioned by a Socialist gibe at the German Chancellor, Prince von Bülow, for being corpulent—“battening,” sneered the Chancellor’s enemy, “on the wrongs and necessities of the poor.” “Evil the day,” continued Professor Bertholdt, “when we Germans become a lean race like some of our neighbours. As for great deeds and high scholarship, I have known many noble men and sound scholars and they have nearly all been fat.”

Have we here a paradox? Is it really true that fatness and genius are allied? One knows the persistence of popular delusions, of unjust dicta that hold good for ages just because someone uttered them hundreds of years ago and people go on repeating the legends. Then, full of suspicion and a brand-new idea, we turn to the great critic Lessing, and find him actually delivering his opinion that Shakespeare was a “large, stout man.” Think of it—Shakespeare, who was always poking fun at stout men, a fat man himself! Yet there is something certainly of confirmation in the Stratford bust, and the Garrick theory that he died of apoplexy (although, by the by, the author of “Sherlock Holmes,” in his last book, deduces the fact that really the bard succumbed to locomotor ataxy).

Albeit, once we have struck out on this

"What do you mean?" demanded the captain, gripping the arms of his chair.

"Sellers is a little bit premature," said Mr. Truefitt, coughing. "There is nothing settled yet, of course. I told him so. Perhaps I oughtn't to have mentioned it at all just yet, but I was so pleased to find that it was all right I had to tell somebody."

"What are you—talking about?" gasped the captain.

"Told her? Told her what?" cried the captain.

"Told her that you said you were not worthy of her," replied Mr. Truefitt, very slowly and distinctly.

The captain took his pipe out of his mouth, and laying it on the table with extreme care listened mechanically while the clock struck five.

"What did she say?" he inquired, hoarsely, after the clock had finished.

Mr. Truefitt leaned over, and with a trembling hand patted him on the shoulder.

"She said, 'Nonsense,'" he replied, softly.



"SHE SAID, 'NONSENSE,'" HE REPLIED, SOFTLY.

Mr. Truefitt looked up, and by a strong effort managed to meet the burning gaze before him.

"I told Susanna," he said, with a gulp.

The captain rose and, putting on his cap—mostly over one eye—put out his hands like a blind man for the door, and blundered out into the street.

(To be continued.)



DR. JOHNSON.



DANTE.

new line one hardly knows how to encounter all the rude surprises that greet the man who foolishly clings to the centuries-old fable (was it not Carlyle who said it, and Tolstoi who quotes it maliciously?) that "no fat fellow ever did anything in the world that was really worth the doing." What a jump from this to our German savant's *obiter dictum* that the fat men have done nearly everything worth doing!

But first a word as to the mystery of fat. You meet a man in the street and put the question to him, and lo! it is no mystery at all. "If a man eats and sleeps and loafs he gets fat. That's why I believe in dieting and hard work." Could anything be more absurd than this theory? Was Napoleon, working

twenty hours out of the twenty-four, sleeping too much? And not only work, but a perpetual supervision, the mind on the rack, the nerves never relaxed. And yet, diet and work as he would, he got fatter and fatter, and never once did his fatness obscure his genius or cause his flame to burn less ardently. A man who would gravely ascribe the Russian disaster and the Waterloo defeat to the Imperial aggregation of adipose tissue has little real knowledge of Napoleon or of history.

Napoleon was born to be a fat man—all the Bonapartes became fat at thirty, and even before—it was not a question of diet or sleep or work or exercise—the cells of fat went on in due process of time to cover their bodies,



DUMAS.



VOLTAIRE.

with no more influence upon their brains than stature really has. And that brings us to an interesting point—the sub-influence—the unconscious action of any personal peculiarity upon character. We all know that Pope's deformity, Scott's lame leg, and Byron's club-foot really wrought an effect upon their careers, making them introspective and reliant upon their own inner resources, just as the malformed arm of a certain European monarch to-day undoubtedly biased his early youth and manhood.

One would therefore expect that fat—or, rather, let us say the consciousness of a well-covered body—would have some such reflex psychological action, making its owner placid, bovine, equanimous. Then there instantly leaps to the mind, the alert mind, mordant wit, and tremendous industry of Gibbon, of Balzac, of Dumas. There probably never was such an indefatigable observer and chronicler as Balzac. "A Russian—the translator of 'Père Goriot'—came to my rooms this morning," wrote Balzac to a friend. "He was evidently taken much by surprise, for he had, as he frankly confessed, expected to find a gaunt and fiery eagle of a man—not the stout, respectable bourgeois whom he embraced."

Appearances, then, are deceptive. The mountain may seem stupid and inert; within may burn fires vast enough to light and thrill the universe. Dr. Johnson, whose girdle might have easily encompassed a dozen Dantes, at least was not sensitive as to his bulk, and had a proper contempt for thin, little men, which may probably account for his affection for Boswell, who began to grow very fat soon after

twenty, and yet was able to produce the best biography in the language. But it was not so with Dr. Johnson's Royal master, George III., who had all Byron's horror of growing fat, and early put himself on a strict regimen to prevent his emulating the example of his uncle, the Duke of Cumberland, who weighed eighteen stone.

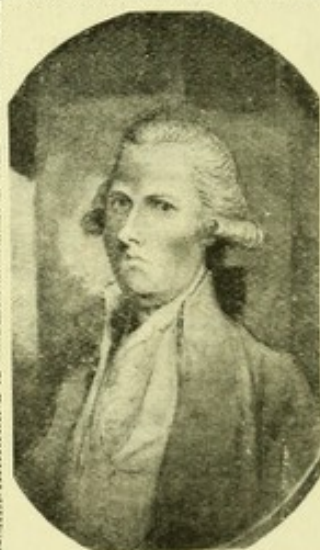
"If I had taken care what I ate and drank," said the Duke to his Royal nephew, "I could have prevented this"—tapping his too-protuberant stomach. But the theory was not really a sound one—for bodily corpulence, like the gifts of poetry and music, comes to persons the most unlikely, and who certainly would seem not to deserve it. Thus the ascetic Tolstoi's taunt, "Show me the man's body and I will show you his mind," is not and cannot be right.

It is true the witty Voltaire was as thin as a skeleton, but what is there to show that he would not have been equally *spirituel* had he weighed, say, thirteen stone instead of seven? Then, too, it is erroneous to suppose that a corpulent person is necessarily easy-going, as we say. King Henry VIII. was fat at twenty, yet certainly no man was more *exigeant*—although the late King Carlos of Portugal might support the theory of amiability.

It is perhaps within the domain of politics that we really encounter fat and genius at its highest development. As someone remarked of American statesmanship: "It is necessary to bulk largely (and literally) in the public eye," even though certain American editors—notably, the editor of the *New York Sun*—do their utmost, and they can be very scathing, to discount the undeniable advantage of a political candidate's weight, especially in



CHARLES JAMES FOX.



WILLIAM PITT.

the case of Mr. Cleveland, who weighed seventeen and a half stone. But it has been the same in the Old World. Who more fiery and tumultuous than Charles James Fox, "the fattest member of this House"; who calmer and gentler than Pitt, one of the thinnest of men? Then there was the fat and untamable Mirabeau—a counterpart of the fat and docile Louis XVI.; a Daniel O'Connell to match, let us say, Lord John Russell.

In America it is indisputable that the majority of the Presidents have been fat men, and at this writing the most prominent and promising candidate, Mr. Taft, has constantly a rejoinder ready for those hecklers who twit him with his abnormal deposit of adipose tissue. "The gentleman has rudely interrupted. He asks why I am fat. He might just as well have asked me why I have brown hair instead of black. Let me tell him this. I would rather a thousand times be wrapped up in Nature's honest integument than wrapped up in my own conceit and ignorance." (Great applause.)

As if further to demonstrate the popular fallacy concerning fat one might turn to science, where there are a score of celebrated fat men, from Arkwright to Ray Lankester, to balance the thin ones.

In painting and sculpture, obesity and genius so frequently go hand in hand that one scarcely need pick out examples from Rubens to Alma-Tadema. Poets when young may be thin, but, like Horace, success gives them a fuller habit, in spite of striking examples to the contrary. But in scarcely any domain is fat so prominent

as in that of music, especially the executive side of that art. Look at the generous proportions of Handel and of Bach, if you will; but how many great modern singers and players are there who are not obese? "It is part of a tenor's and soprano's profession to be fat," says Colonel Mapleson, the impresario, humorously; and from the instances we see on the operatic and concert

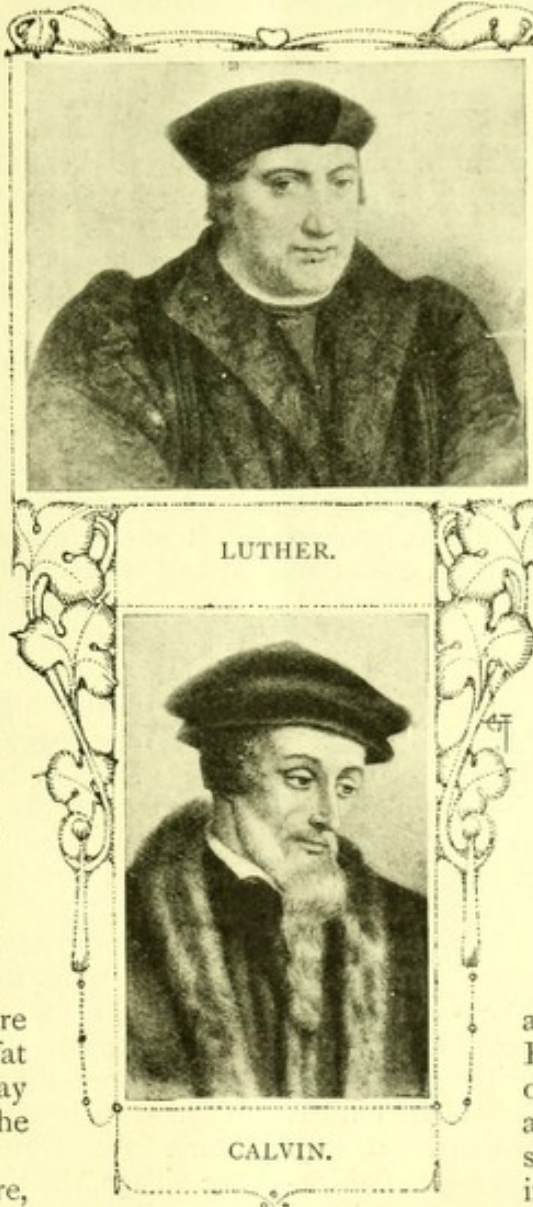
stage there is much truth in the dictum. On the stage of the drama, it is true, a foolish prejudice limits the usefulness of an obese actor to comedy, although most of the great comedians have been thin men. No man had a more delicate talent than the late Corney Grain, who once called himself "the comic elephant," and yet his nearest rival, George Grossmith, is as gaunt as a needle. On the other hand, no one can doubt that Mr. Oscar Asche is a born tragedian.

But the annals of genius are filled to overflowing with the names of men who toiled and achieved fame under a full habit. Nothing can be more unjust than the gibe about "fat and folly" and fatness and indolence.

Martin Luther was as fat as Calvin was thin; Ernest Renan's obesity did not obscure his insight and brilliancy. Many writers and speakers have too long spoken invidiously of fatness, but the best retort we have been able to glean in our researches


into this weighty subject is that of C. H. Spurgeon, the famous preacher.

"People," said Spurgeon, "say I am fat. I am not fat. I am bone and flesh. My limbs, thank God, are amply clothed, and I am in my right mind."



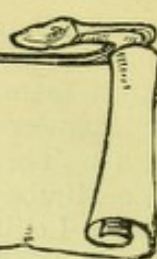
LUTHER.

CALVIN.



THE COUSINS.

By W. B. MAXWELL.



Author of "Vivien," "The Guarded Flame," etc.

I.



HE two children were cousins, and very fond of each other. Master Tom Lawton was the orphan son of that good soldier Sir Thomas Lawton, who won reputation, fame, glory in our Indian wars ; and then, having won so much, began to lose—first his money, then his wife, then his life. Thus little Tom was left like a small lost dog, to be cared for by any kind relatives who were not too busy to attend to the matter.

Miss Mabel Lawton was the daughter of the kind relatives who, off and on, looked after little Tom. The boy had some sort of solicitor-guardian, some sort of pension-money or Government-grant, and really he demanded no great thought. He was to be educated for a soldier, and, as soon as possible, be sent to India with a sword.

But all relating to little Mabel was of the utmost importance, because her people, these Hampshire Lawtons, were of the wealthy, idle, ornamental class. Papa was a big land-owner, county magnate, deputy lieutenant, always making boss-shots at getting into Parliament, and gaining more and more gratitude and respect from his party each time that he missed the target. If he stuck to it and went on shooting without count of the cost of cartridges, etc., he might end as a peer and get into Parliament *that* way. Step-mamma was pretty, well-born, fashionable, with more money of her own. They lived at Ainswinton, in a large white house in a park, and were kind to poor little Tom. But the kindest person in that house, or park, or all the wide world, was blue-eyed, brown-tailed Mabel.

She never changed. From the first she was the real friend. "I hop," she wrote, after Tom's first visit to Ainswinton, "you will Come here next Hollydays and all yur Hollydays. I love you very much, and if you wil mary me when I am growne up I wil do so."

Tom came regularly to spend his vacations in Hampshire. He did Mabel good. It happened that, in the opinion of the local doctor, Mabel was making too much haste to reach the grown-up goal. She was coming through her short skirts too fast, was too tall, too intelligent for her tender years. Books should be laid aside ; and the best thing for Mabel would be to let her run wild until colour came back to her pale cheeks and her black stockings had rounder, firmer legs in them. Step-sisters and brothers could not run, wild or tame ; they could only toddle. So Tom ran wild with her.

It was a perfect house, of varied charm. It had stately, splendid rooms and halls, and snug little home-like rooms that opened into the gardens ; it had gun-rooms, play-rooms, box-rooms, untreasured lofts, forgotten or undiscovered flights of stairs, and dim, untrodden passages ; it had been built by many men in many ages, but Providence had guided their hands ; without settled plan, added to, tinkered at, messed about by architects, builders, sanitary engineers, it had slowly matured into the absolutely perfect house—for Hide and Seek.

There were innumerable servants : grave, dignified, stupid while in presence of master and mistress ; but behind their backs, with the children, they were playmates—jolly good playmates, too. There were noble stables, home farm, dairies, the wide park, the woods, the village, the rising down—in a word, there were all the materials that made up paradise for Master Tom.

In the springtime, especially when Easter holidays fell late, the boy used to throb, almost to burst, with happiness. As he and Mabel scampered across the park to the budding beech-woods, the west wind blew on their faces, blew into their beating hearts ; and the wind was the joy of life, stirring them to bound and prance as it stirred the lambs on the hillside, the squirrels and the rabbits on the moss-carpet of the wood. They spent the long mornings