

One Third Off eBook

One Third Off by Irvin Shrewsbury Cobb

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One Third Off

By Irvin S. Cobb

Fiction

*From place to place
those times and these
local color
old judge Priest
back home
the escape of Mr. Trimm*

Wit and Humor

*One third off
A plea for old Cap Collier
the abandoned Farmers
the life of the party
eating in two or three languages
"Oh well, you know how women are!"
FIBBLE D.D.
"Speaking of operations—"
Europe revised
ROUGHING it de luxe
Cobb's Bill of Fare
Cobb's anatomy*



Miscellany

*The thunders of silence
the glory of the coming
paths of glory
“Speaking of Prussians—”*

* * * * *

New York

George H. Doran Company

* * * * *

[Illustration: *I weighed myself and in the box score credited myself with A profound shock. Frontispiece*]

One Third Off

By

Irvin S. Cobb

Author of “Old Judge Priest,” “Speaking of Operations—” Etc.

Illustrated by Tony Sarg

New York

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One Third Off

TO
HARRY M. STEVENS, ESQUIRE
WHO IN TIMES GONE BY HELPED ME
PUT THAT ONE THIRD ON

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CHAPTER I

Extra! Extra! All About The Great Reduction!

The way I look at this thing is this way: If something happens to you and by writing about it you can make a bit of money and at the same time be a benefactor to the race, then why not? Does not the philanthropic aspect of the proposition more than balance off the mercenary side? I hold that it does, or at least that it should, in the estimation of all fair-minded persons. It is to this class that I particularly address myself. Unfair-minded persons are advised to take warning and stop right here with the contemporary paragraph. That which follows in this little volume is not for them.

An even stronger motive impels me. In hereinafter setting forth at length and in detail the steps taken by me in making myself thin, or, let us say, thinner, I am patterning after the tasteful and benevolent examples of some of the most illustrious ex-fat men of letters in our country. Take Samuel G. Blythe now. Mr. Blythe is the present international bant-weight champion. There was a time, though, when he was what the world is pleased to call over-sized. In writing on several occasions, and always entertainingly and helpfully, upon the subject of the methods employed by him to reduce himself to his current proportions I hold that he had the right idea about it.



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Getting fat is a fault; except when caused by the disease known as obesity, it is a bad habit. Getting thin and at the same time retaining one's health is a virtue. Never does the reductionist feel quite so virtuous as when for the first time, perhaps in decades, he can stand straight up and look straight down and behold the tips of his toes. His virtue is all the more pleasant to him because it recalls a reformation on his part and because it has called for self-denial. I started to say that it had called for mortification of the flesh, but I shan't. Despite the contrary opinions of the early fathers of the church, I hold that the mortification of the flesh is really based upon the flesh itself, where there is too much of it for beauty and grace, not merely upon the process employed in getting rid of it.

Ask any fat man—or better still, any formerly fat man—if I am not correct. But do not ask a fat woman unless, as in the case of possible fire at a theater, you already have looked about you and chosen the nearest exit. Taken as a sex, women are more likely to be touchy upon this detail where it applies to themselves than men are.

I have a notion that probably the late Lucrezia Borgia did not start feeding her house guests on those deep-dish poison pies with which her name historically is associated until after she grew sensitive about the way folks dropping in at the Borgia home for a visit were sizing up her proportions on the bias, so to speak. And I attribute the development of the less pleasant side of Cleopatra's disposition—keeping aspids around the house and stabbing the bearers of unpleasant tidings with daggers and feeding people to the crocodiles and all that sort of thing—to the period when she found her anklets binding uncomfortably and along toward half past ten o'clock of an evening was seized by a well-nigh uncontrollable longing to excuse herself from the company and run upstairs and take off her jeweled stomacher and things and slip into something loose.

[Illustration: "64 BROAD."]

But upon this subject men are less inclined to be fussy, and by the same token more inclined, on having accomplished a cure, to take a justifiable pride in it and to brag publicly about it. As I stated a moment ago, I claim Mr. Blythe viewed the matter in a proper and commendable light when he took pen in hand to describe more or less at length his reduction processes. So, too, did that other notable of the literary world, Mr. Vance Thompson. Mr. Thompson would be the last one to deny that once upon a time he undeniably was large. The first time I ever saw him—it was in Paris some years ago, and he was walking away from me and had his back to me and was wearing a box coat—I thought for a moment they were taking a tractor across town. All that, however, belongs to the past. Just so soon as Mr. Thompson had worked out a system of dieting and by personal application had proved its success he wrote the volume *Eat and Grow Thin*, embodying therein his experiences, his course of treatment and his advice to former fellow sufferers. So you see in saying now what I mean to say I do but follow in the mouth-prints of the famous.



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Besides, when I got fat I capitalized my fatness in the printed word. I told how it felt to be fat.

I described how natural it was for a fat man to feel like the Grand Canon before dinner and like the Royal Gorge afterwards.

I told how, if he wedged himself into a telephone booth and said, "64 Broad," persons overhearing him were not sure whether he was asking Central for a number or telling a tailor what his waist measurements were.

I told how deeply it distressed him as he walked along, larding the earth as he passed, to hear bystanders making ribald comments about the inadvisability of trying to move bank vaults through the streets in the daytime. And now that, after fifteen years of fatness, I am getting thin again—glory be!—wherein, I ask, is the impropriety in furnishing the particulars for publication; the more especially since my own tale, I fondly trust, may make helpful telling for some of my fellow creatures? When you can offer a boon to humanity and at the same time be paid for it the dual advantage is not to be decried.

CHAPTER II

Those Romping Elfin Twenties

It has been my personal observation, viewing the matter at close range, that nearly always fat, like old age or a thief in the dark, steals upon one unawares. I take my own case. As a youngster and on through my teens and into my early twenties—ah, those romping elfin twenties!—I was, in outline, what might be termed dwindly, not to say slimmish. Those who have known me in my latter years might be loath to believe it, but one of my boyhood nick-names—I had several, and none of them was complimentary but all of them were graphic—was Boney. At sixteen, by striping myself in alternate whites and blacks, I could have hired out for a surveyor's rod. At twenty-one I measured six feet the long way, and if only mine had been a hook nose I should have cast a shadow like a shepherd's crook.

My avocation in life was such as to induce slenderness. I was the city staff of a small-town daily paper, and what with dodging round gathering up items about people to write for the paper and then dodging round to avoid personal contact with the people I had written the items about for the paper, I was kept pretty constantly upon the go. In our part of the country in those days the leading citizens were prone to take offense at some of the things that were said of them in the public prints and given to expressing their sense of annoyance forcibly. When a high-spirited Southern gentleman, regarding whom something of a disagreeable nature had appeared in the news columns, entered the editorial sanctum without knocking, wearing upon his crimsoned face an expression



of forthright irritation and with his right hand stealing back under his coat skirt, it was time for the offending reporter to emulate the common example of the native white-throated nut-hatch and either flit thence rapidly or hunt a hole.



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Since prohibition came in and a hiccup became a mark of affluence instead of a social error, as formerly, and a loaded flank is a sign of hospitality rather than of menace, things may have changed. I am speaking, though, of the damper early nineties in Kentucky, when a sudden motion toward the right hip pocket was a threat and not a promise, as at present. So, what with first one thing and then another, now collecting the news of the community and now avoiding the customary consequences, I did a good deal of running about hither and yon, and kept fit and spry and stripling-thin.

Yet I ate heartily of all things that appealed to my palate, eating at least two kinds of hot bread at every meal—down South we say it with flours—and using chewing tobacco for the salad course, as was the custom. I ate copiously at and between meals and gained not a whit.

CHAPTER III

Regarding Liver-Eating Watkins and Others

It was after I had moved to New York and had taken a desk job that I detected myself in the act, as it were, of plumping out. Cognizant of the fact, as I was, I nevertheless took no curative or corrective measures in the way of revising my diet. I was content to make excuses inwardly. I said to myself that I came of a breed whose members in their mature years were inclined to broaden noticeably. I said to myself that I was not getting the amount of exercise that once I had; that my occupation was now more sedentary, and therefore it stood to reason that I should take on a little flesh here and there over my frame. Moreover, I felt good. If I had felt any better I could have charged admission. My appetite was perfect, my digestion magnificent, nay, awe-inspiring.

To me it seemed that physically I was just as active and agile as I had been in those 'prentice years of my professional career when the ability to shift quickly from place to place and to think with an ornithological aptitude were conducive to a continuance of unimpaired health among young reporters. Anyhow—thus I to myself in the same strain, continuing—anyhow, I was not actually getting fat. Nothing so gross as that. I merely was attaining to a pleasant, a becoming and a dignified fullness of contour as I neared my thirtieth birthday. So why worry about what was natural and normal among persons of my temperament, and having my hereditary impulses, upon attaining a given age?

I am convinced that men who are getting fat are generally like that. For every added pound an added excuse, for each multiplying inch at the waistline a new plea in abatement to be set up in the mind. I see the truth of it now. When you start getting fat you start getting fatuous. With the indubitable proof of his infirmity mounting in superimposed folds of tissues before his very gaze, with the rounded evidence

presented right there in front of him where he can rest his elbows on it, your average fattish man nevertheless

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refuses to acknowledge the visible situation. Vanity blinds his one eye, love of self-indulgence blinds the other. Observe now how I speak in the high moral tone of a reformed offender, which is the way of reformed offenders and other reformers the world over. We are always most virtuous in retrospect, as the fact of the crime recedes. Moreover, he who has not erred has but little to gloat over.

There are two sorts of evidence upon which many judges look askance—that sort of evidence which is circumstantial and that sort which purely is hearsay. In this connection, and departing for the space of a paragraph or so from the main theme, I am reminded of the incident through which a certain picturesque gentleman of the early days in California acquired a name which he was destined to wear forever after, and under which his memory is still affectionately encysted in the traditions of our great Far West. I refer to the late Liver-Eating Watkins. Mr. Watkins entered into active life and passed through a good part of it bearing the unilluminative and commonplace first name of Elmer or Lemuel, or perhaps it was Jasper. Just which one of these or some other I forgot now, but no matter; at least it was some such. One evening a low-down terracotta-colored Piute swiped two of Mr. Watkins' paint ponies and by stealth, under cover of the cloaking twilight, went away with them into the far mysterious spaces of the purpling sage.

To these ponies the owner was deeply attached, not alone on account of the intrinsic value, but for sentimental reasons likewise. So immediately on discovering the loss the next morning, Mr. Watkins took steps. He saddled a third pony which the thief had somehow overlooked in the haste of departure, and he girded on him both cutlery and shootlery, and he mounted and soon was off and away across the desert upon the trail of the vanished malefactor. Now when Mr. Watkins fared forth thus accoutered it was a sign he was not out for his health or anybody else's.

Friends and well-wishers volunteered to accompany him upon the chase, for they foresaw brisk doings. But he declined their company. Folklore, descending from his generation to ours, has it that he said this was his own business and he preferred handling it alone in his own way. He did add, however, that on overtaking the fugitive it was his intention, as an earnest or token of his displeasure, to eat that Injun's liver raw. Some versions say he mentioned liver rare, but the commonly accepted legend has it that the word used was *raw*. With this he put the spur to his steed's flank and was soon but a mere moving speck in the distance.



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Now there was never offered any direct proof that our hero, in pursuance of his plan for teaching the Indian a lesson, actually did do with regard to the latter's liver what he had promised the bystanders he would do; moreover, touching on this detail he ever thereafter maintained a steadfast and unbreakable silence. In lieu of corroborative testimony by unbiased witnesses as to the act itself, we have only these two things to judge by: First, that when Mr. Watkins returned in the dusk of the same day he was wearing upon his face a well-fed, not to say satiated, expression, yet had started forth that morning with no store of provisions; and second, that on being found in a deceased state some days later, the Piute, who when last previously seen had with him two of Mr. Watkin's pintos and one liver of his own, was now shy all three. By these facts a strong presumptive case having been made out, Mr. Watkins was thenceforth known not as Ezekiel or Emanuel, or whatever his original first name had been, but as Liver-Eating, or among friends by the affectionate diminutive of Liv for short.

This I would regard as a typical instance of the value of a chain of good circumstantial evidence, with no essential link lacking. Direct testimony could hardly have been more satisfactory, all things considered; and yet direct testimony is the best sort there is, in the law courts and out. On the other hand, hearsay evidence is viewed legally and often by the layman with suspicion; in most causes of action being barred out altogether. Nevertheless, it is a phase of the fattish man's perversity that, rejecting the direct, the circumstantial and the circumferential testimony which abounds about him, he too often awaits confirmation of his growing suspicions at the hands of outsiders and bystanders before he is willing openly to admit that condition of fatness which for long has been patent to the most casual observer.

Women, as I have observed them, are even more disposed to avoid confession on this point. A woman somehow figures that so long as she refuses to acknowledge to herself or any other interested party that she has progressed out of the ranks of the plumpened into the congested and overflowing realms of the avowedly obese, why, for just so long may she keep the rest of the world in ignorance too. I take it, the ostrich which first set the example to all the other ostriches of trying to avoid detection by the enemy through the simple expedient of sticking its head in the sand was a lady ostrich, and moreover one typical of her sex. But men are bad enough. I know that I was.

CHAPTER IV

I Become The Panting Champion

Month after month, through the cycle of the revolving seasons, I went along deceiving myself, even though I deceived none else, coining new pleas in extenuation or outright contradictions to meet each new-arising element of confirmatory proof to a state of case which no unprejudiced person could fail to acknowledge. The original discoverer of the alibi was a fat man; indeed, it was named for him—Ali Bi-Ben Adhem, he was, a friend

and companion of the Prophet, and so large that, going into Mecca, he had to ride on two camels. This fact is historically authenticated. I looked it up.



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In the fall of the year, when I brought last winter's heavy suit out of the clothes-press and found it now to hug o'ersnugly for comfort, I cajoled my saner self into accepting a most transparent lie—my figure had not materially altered through the intervening spring and summer; it was only that the garments, being fashioned of a shoddy material, had shrunk. I owned a dress suit which had been form fitting, 'tis true, but none too close a fit upon me. I had owned it for years; I looked forward to owning and using it for years to come. I laid it aside for a period during an abatement in formal social activities; then bringing it forth from its camphor-ball nest for a special occasion I found I could scarce force my way down into the trousers, and that the waistcoat buttons could not be made to meet the buttonholes, and that the coat, after finally I had struggled into it, bound me as with chains by reason of the pull at armpits and between the shoulders. I could not get my arms down to my sides at all. I could only use them flapper fashion.

I felt like a penguin. I imagine I looked a good bit like one too.

But I did not blame myself, who was the real criminal, or the grocer who was accessory before the fact. I put the fault on the tailor, who was innocent. Each time I had to let my belt buckle out for another notch in order that I might breathe I diagnosed the trouble as a touch of what might be called Harlem flatulency. We lived in a flat then—a nonelevator flat—and I pretended that climbing three flights of steep stairs was what developed my abdominal muscles and at the same time made me short of wind.

I coined a new excuse after we had moved to a suburb back of Yonkers. Frequently I had to run to catch the 5:07 accommodation, because if I missed it I might have to wait for the 7:05, which was no accommodation. I would go jamming my way at top speed toward the train gate and on into the train shed, and when I reached my car I would be 'scaping so emphatically that the locomotive on up ahead would grow jealous and probably felt as though it might just as well give up trying to compete in volume of sound output with a real contender. But I was agile enough for all purposes and as brisk as any upon my feet. Therein I found my consolation.

Among all my fellow members of the younger Grand Central Station set there was scarce a one who could start with me at scratch and beat me to a train just pulling out of the shed; and even though he might have bested me at sprinting, I had him whipped to a souffle at panting. In a hundred-yard dash I could spot anyone of my juniors a dozen pairs of pants and win out handily. I was the acknowledged all-weights panting champion of the Putnam division.

[Illustration: TO OBSERVE MR. BRYAN BREAKFASTING IS A SIGHT WORTH SEEING. *Page 45*]

If there had been ten or twelve of my neighbors as good at this as I was we might have organized and drilled together and worked out a class cheer for the Putnam Division Country Club—three deep long pants, say, followed by nine sharp short pants or

pantlets. But I would have been elected pants leader without a struggle. My merits were too self-evident for a contest.



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But did I attribute my supremacy in this regard to accumulating and thickening layers of tissue in the general vicinity of my midriff? I did not! No, sir, because I was fat—indubitably, uncontrovertibly and beyond the peradventure of a doubt, fat—I kept on playing the fat man's game of mental solitaire. I inwardly insisted, and I think partly believed, that my lung power was too great for the capacity of my throat opening, hence pants. I cast a pitying eye at other men, deep of girth and purple of face, waddling down the platform, and as I scudded on past them I would say to myself that after all there was a tremendous difference between being obese and being merely well fleshed out. The real reason of course was that my legs had remained reasonably firm and trim while the torso was inflating. For I was one who got fat not all over at once but in favored localities. And I was even as the husband is whose wife is being gossiped about—the last person in the neighborhood to hear the news.

As though it were yesterday I remember the day and the place and the attendant circumstances when and where awakening was forced upon me. Two of us went to Canada on a hunting trip. The last lap of the journey into camp called for a fifteen-mile horseback ride through the woods. The native who was to be our chief guide met us with our mounts at a way station far up in the interior of Quebec. He knew my friend—had guided him for two seasons before; but I was a stranger in those parts. Now until that hour it had never occurred to me that I was anywhere nearly so bulky as this friend of mine was. For he indubitably was a person of vast displacement and augmented gross total tonnage; and in that state of blindness which denies us the gift to see ourselves as others see us I never had reckoned myself to be in his class, *avoir-dupois* speaking. But as we lined up two abreast alongside the station, with our camp duffel piled about us, the keen-eyed guide, standing slightly to one side, considered our abdominal profiles, and the look he cast at my companion said as plainly as words, "Well, I see you've brought a spare set along with you in case of a puncture."

But he did not come right out and say a thing so utterly tactless. What he did say, in a worried tone, was that he was sorry now he had not fetched along a much more powerful horse for me to ride on. He had a good big chunky work animal, not fast but very strong in the back, he said, which would have answered my purposes first rate.

I experienced another disillusioning jolt. Could it be that this practiced woodsman's eye actually appraised me as being as heavy as my mate, or even heavier? Surely he must be wrong in his judgments. The point was that I woefully was wrong in mine. How true it is that we who would pluck the mote from behind a fellow being's waistcoat so rarely take note of the beam which we have swallowed crosswise!



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Even so, a great light was beginning to percolate to my innermost consciousness. A grave doubt pestered me through our days of camping there in the autumnal wilderness. When we had emerged from the woods and had reached Montreal on the homeward trip I enticed my friend upon a penny-in-the-slot weighing machine in the Montreal station and I observed what he weighed; and then when he stepped aside I unostentatiously weighed myself, and in the box score credited myself with a profound shock; also with an error, which should have been entered up a long time before that.

Approximately, we were of the same height and in bone structure not greatly unlike. I had figured that daily tramping after game should have taken a few folds of superfluous flesh off my frame, and so, no doubt, it had done. Yet I had pulled the spindle around the face of the dial to a point which recorded for me a total of sixteen pounds and odd ounces more than his penny had registered for him.

If he was fat, unmistakably and conclusively fat and he was—what then was I? In Troy weight—Troy where the hay scales come from—the answer was written. I was fat as fat, or else the machine had lied. And as between me and that machine I could pick the liar at the first pick.

CHAPTER V

On Acquiring Some Snappy Pores

That night on the sleeper a splendid resolution sprouted within me. Next morning when we arrived home it was ready and ripe for plucking. I would trim myself down to more lithesome proportions and I would start the job right away. It did not occur to me that cutting down my daily consumption of provender might prove helpful to the success of the proposed undertaking. Or if it did occur to me I put the idea sternly from me, for I was by way of being a robust trencherman. I had joyed in the pleasures of the table, and I had written copiously of those joys, and I now declined to recant of my faith or to abate my indulgences.

All this talk which I had heard about balanced rations went in at one ear and out at the other. I knew what a balanced ration was. I stowed one aboard three times daily—at morn, again at noon and once more at nightfall. A balanced ration was one which, being eaten, did not pull you over on your face; one which you could poise properly if only you leaned well back, upon arising from the table, and placed the two hands, with a gentle lifting motion, just under the overhang of the main cargo hold.

Surely there must be some way of achieving the desired result other than by following dieting devices. There was—exercising was the answer. I would exercise and so become a veritable faun.

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Now, so far as I recalled, I had never taken any indoor exercise excepting once in a while to knock on wood. I abhorred the thought of ritualistic bedroom calisthenics such as were recommended by divers health experts. Climbing out of a warm bed and standing out in the middle of a cold room and giving an imitation of a demoniac semaphore had never appealed to me as a fascinating divertimento for a grown man. As I think I may have remarked once before, lying at full length on one's back on the floor immediately upon awakening of a morning and raising the legs to full length twenty times struck me as a performance lacking in dignity and utterly futile.

Besides, what sort of a way was that to greet the dewy morn?

So as an alternative I decided to enroll for membership at a gymnasium where I could have company at my exercising and make a sport of what otherwise would be in the nature of a punishment. This I did. With a group of fellow inmates for my team mates, I tossed the medicine ball about. My score at this was perfect; that is to say, sometimes when it came my turn to catch I missed the ball, but the ball never once missed me. Always it landed on some tender portion of my anatomy, so that my average, written in black-and-blue spots, remained an even 1000.

Daily I cantered around and around and around a running track until my breathing was such probably as to cause people passing the building to think that the West Side Y.M.C.A. was harboring a pet porpoise inside. Once, doing this, I caught a glimpse of my own form in a looking-glass which for some reason was affixed to one of the pillars flanking the oval. A looking-glass properly did not belong there; distinctly it was out of place and could serve no worthy purpose. Very few of the sights presented in a gym which largely is patronized by city-bred fat men are deserving to be mirrored in a glass. They are not such visions as one would care to store in fond memory's album. Be that as it may, here was this mirror, and swinging down the course suddenly I beheld myself in it. Clad in a chastely simple one-piece garment, with my face all a blistered crimson and my fingers interlaced together about where the third button of the waistcoat, counting from the bottom up, would have been had I been wearing any waistcoat, I reminded myself of a badly scorched citizen escaping in a scantily dressed condition from a burning homestead bringing with him the chief family treasure clasped in his arms. He had saved the pianola!

From the running track or the medicine-ball court I would repair to the steam room and simmer pleasantly in a temperature of 240 degrees Fahrenheit—I am sure I have the figures right—until all I needed before being served was to have the gravy slightly thickened with flour and a dash of water cress added here and there. Having remained in the steam cabinet until quite done, I next would jump into the swimming pool, which concluded the afternoon's entertainment.

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Jumping into the cool water of the pool was supposed to reseal the pores which the treatment in the hot room had caused to open. In the best gymnasium circles it is held to be a fine thing to have these educated pores, but I am sure it can be overdone, and personally I cannot say that I particularly enjoyed it. I kept it up largely for their sake. They became highly trained, but developed temperament. They were apt to get the signals mixed and open unexpectedly on the street, resulting in bad colds for me.

For six weeks, on every week day from three to five P.M. I maintained this schedule religiously—at least I used a good many religious words while so engaged—and then I went on the scales to find out what progress I had made toward attaining the desired result. I had kept off the scales until then because I was saving up, as it were, to give myself a nice jolly surprise party.

So I weighed. And I had picked up nine pounds and a half! That was what I had gained for all my sufferings and all my exertions—that, along with a set of snappy but emotional pores and a personal knowledge of how a New England boiled dinner feels just before it comes on the table.

“This,” I said bitterly to myself—“this is sheer foolhardiness! Keep this up for six weeks more and I’ll find myself fallen away to a perfect three-ton truck. Keep it up for three months and I’ll be ready to rent myself out to the aquarium as a suitable playmate for the leviathan in the main tank. I shall stop this idiocy before it begins making me seasick merely to look down at myself as I walk. I may slosh about and billow somewhat, but I positively decline to heave up and down. I refuse to be known as the human tidal wave, with women and children being hurriedly removed to a place of safety at my approach. Right here and now is where I quit qualifying for the inundation stakes!”

Which accordingly I did. What I did not realize was that the unwonted exercise gave me such a magnificent appetite that, after a session at the gymnasium, I ate about three times as much as I usually did at dinner—and, mark you, I never had been one with the appetite, as the saying goes, of a bird, to peck at some Hartz Mountain roller’s prepared food and wipe the stray rape seed off my nose on a cuttle-fish bone and then fly up on the perch and tuck the head under the wing and call it a meal. I had ever been what might be termed a sincere feeder. So, never associating the question of diet with the problem of attaining physical slighthness, I swung back again into my old mode of life with the resigned conviction that since destiny had chosen me to be fat there was nothing for me to do in the premises excepting to go right on to the end of my mortal chapter being fat, fatter and perhaps fattest. I’d just make the best of it.

And I’d use care about crossing a county bridge at any gait faster than a walk.

Now this continued for years and years, and then here a few months ago something else happened. And on top of that something else—to wit: The Great Reduction.



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Of the Great Reduction more anon.

CHAPTER VI

More Anon

Well, I made up my mind, having tried violent exercise in the gymnasium, coupled with violent language in the steam room, and having found neither or both had been of the least avail in trimming down my proportions, but on the contrary had augmented them to the extent of nearly ten pounds, live weight, that I would let well enough alone. If 'twere my ordained fate to be fat—why, then so be it; I'd be fatly fatalistic and go on through life undulating and rippling. If an all-wise Providence meant to call me to the estate of being the bulkiest writing man using the English language for a vehicle, then let Hilaire Belloc look to his laurels and Gilbert K. Chesterton to his unholsterings. There was one consolation: Thank heavens the championship would remain in America!

The years go marching by in ordered processional. A great war bursts and for a space endures. In our own land prohibition is nationally enacted and women's suffrage comes to be, and Irving Berlin, reading the signs of the times, decides to write *The Blue Laws Blues*. Fashions of thought change; other fashions, also. A girl who was born without hips or eyebrows and who in childhood was regarded as a freak, now finds herself, at the age of eighteen, exactly in the mode, thus proving that all things come to those who wait. Czecho-Slovakia is discovered. The American forces spent three days taking Chateau-Thierry and three years trying to learn to pronounce it. Ireland undertakes to settle her ancient problem on the basis of self-extermination. Several rich retail profiteers die, the approval being hearty and general, and on arriving at heaven experience great difficulty in passing through the Needle's Eye, or tradesmen's entrance. Somebody tells Henry Ford about what some high priests did in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago and in the first flush of his startled indignation he becomes violently anti-Semitic. General Pershing returns from the battlefields of Europe universally acclaimed a model of military efficiency and wearing so many medals that alongside him John Philip Sousa, by contrast, looks absolutely nude. His friends project him into the political arena and the result is summed in a phrase—"Lafayette, he ain't there!" Unavailing efforts are made by a rebellious and unreconciled few of us to find a presidential candidate willing to run on a platform of but four planks, namely: Wines, ales, liquors and cigars. Harding wins, Scattering second; Cox also ran: slogan: "He Kept Us Out of McAdoo." Manhattan Island, from whence the rest of the country derives its panics, its jazz tremblors and its girl shows, develops a severe sinking sensation in the pit of its financial stomach, accompanied by acute darting pains at the juncture of Broad and Wall. This is the way Thomas Carlyle used to start off a new chapter, and I like it. It denotes



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erudition. Ziegfeld builds a new Follies show around twelve pairs of winsome knee joints. North Dakota blows down the Nonpartisan League and discovers that darned thing was loaded in both barrels. The Prussians are pained to note that for some reason or other a number of people seem to harbor a grudge against them. Nine thousand Kentucky mint patches are plowed under and the sites sown with rosemary; that's for remembrance. In New York plans are undertaken for construing the Eighteenth Amendment along the lines of the selective draft, upon the theory that booze is a bad thing for some people and much too good for many of the others. The word "intrigued" creeps into our language and becomes common property, but the fiction writers saw it first. A business men's cabinet, composed almost exclusively of politicians, succeeds a business men's cabinet composed almost exclusively of politicians. In order to hurry along the payment of Installment One of the Indemnity France whistles up the reserves and that chore is chored. Pessimists, including many of the old-line Democrats, practically all the maltsters, and Aunt Emma Goldman, are filled with a dismal conviction that creation has gone plum' to perdition in a hand basket. Those more optimistically inclined look upon the brighter side of things and distill consolation from the thought that nothing is so bad but what it might have been worse—Trotzky might have been born twins. Great Britain has her post-war industrial crisis, Serial Number 24. The Sinn Fein enlarges the British national anthem to read God Save the King Till We Can Get at Him! By a strict party vote Congress decides the share in the victory achieved by the A.E.F. was overwhelmingly Republican, but that the airship program went heavily Democratic. Popular distrust of home-brew recipes assumes a nationwide phase. This brings us up to the early spring of this year of grace, 1921, which is what I have been aiming for all through this paragraph.

Quite without warning, I discovered along about the first of March that something ailed me; something was rocking the boat. About my heart there was a sense of pressure, so it seemed to me, or else my imagination was at fault. Mentally, I found myself—well, for lack of a better word to express it—logy. Otherwise, in all physical regards, I felt as brisk and peart as ever I have, despite the circumstance of having reached the age when a great many of us are confronted by the distressing discovery that we are rapidly getting no younger.

Now when a man who has always enjoyed such outrageously perfect health as it has been my good fortune to enjoy takes note that certain nagging manifestations are persisting within him it is his duty, or least it should be his duty, to try to find out the underlying cause of whatever it is that distresses him and correct the trouble before it becomes chronic.

I did not get frightened—I trust I am not a self-alarmist—but I did get worried. I made up my mind that I would not wait, as those who approach middle age so often do, for the medical examiner of an insurance company to scare me into sudden conniption fits. But

I also made up my mind that I would find out what radically was wrong with me, if anything, and endeavor to master it while the mastering was good.



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This, though, was after I had harked back to the days of my adolescence. I was born down on the northern edge of the southern range of the North American malaria belt; and when I was growing up, if one seemed intellectually torpid or became filled with an overpowering bodily languor, the indisposition always was diagnosed offhand as a touch of malaria. Accordingly, the victim, taking his own advice or another's, jolted his liver with calomel until the poor thing flinched every time a strange pill was seen approaching it, and then he rounded out the course of treatment with all the quinine the traffic would stand. Recalling these early campaigns, I borrowed of their strategy for use against my present symptoms—if symptoms they were. I took quinine until my ears rang so that persons passing me on the public highway would halt to listen to the chimes. My head was filled with mysterious muffled rumblings. It was like living in a haunted house and being one at the same time.

CHAPTER VII

Office Visits, \$10

It required all of two weeks of experimenting with my interior to convince me that whatever it might be that annoyed me, it surely was not a thing which an intensive bombardment of the liver would cure. The liver has a low visibility but is easy to hit.

I had the aversion to seeking professional guidance for the curing of a presumably minor disorder that most robust male adults have. In personal tribute I may add that I have never been hypochondriac in any possible respect. However, toward the end of those three weeks I formed the decision that I would go to see a doctor or so. But I would sneak up on these gentlemen, so to speak. I would call upon them in the role of a friend rather than avowedly as a prospective patient, and take them into my confidence, as it were, by degrees. Somewhere in the back part of my brain I nursed a persistent fear that my complaints might be diagnosed as symptoms of that incurable malady known as being forty-four years old, going, on forty-five. And I knew that much already without paying a physician twenty-five dollars for telling me so the first time and ten dollars for each time he told it to me over again.

Rather shamefacedly, with a well-simulated air of casualness, I dropped in upon a physician who is a friend of mine and in whose judgment I have confidence; and then, after a two-day interval, I went to see a second physician of my acquaintance who, I believe, also thoroughly knows his trade. With both men I followed the same tactics—roundabout chatting on the topic of this or that, and finally an honest confession as to the real purpose of my visit. In both instances the results were practically identical. Each man manifested an almost morbid curiosity touching on my personal habits and bodily idiosyncrasies. Each asked me a lot of questions. Each went at me with X-ray machines and blood tests and chemical analysissies—if there isn't any such word I



claim there should be—until my being was practically an open book to him and I had no secrets left at all.

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And the upshot of all this was that each of them told me that though organically I was as sound as a nut in fact much sounder than some of the nuts they knew professionally—I was carrying an overload of avoirdupois about with me. In other words, I was too fat for my own good. I was eating too much sweet stuff and entirely too much starch—especially starch. They agreed on this point emphatically. As well as I could gather, I was subjecting my interior to that highly shellacked gloss which is peculiar to the bosom of the old-fashioned full-dress or burying shirt upon its return from the steam laundry, when what my system really called for was the dull domestic finish.

“Well, doc,” I said upon hearing this for the second time in language which already had a familiar sound—“well, all that you say being true, what then?”

“For one thing, more exercise.”

“But I take plenty of exercise now.”

“For example, what?”

“For example, golf.”

“How often do you play golf?”

“Well, not so very often, as the real golf-bug or caddie’s worm would measure the thing—say, on an average of once a week in the golfing season. But I take so many swings at the ball before hitting it that I figure I get more exercise out of the game than do those who play oftener but take only about one wallop at the pill in driving off. And when I drive into the deep grass, as is my wont, my work with the niblick would make you think of somebody bailing out a sinking boat. My bunker exercises are frequently what you might call violent. And in the fall of the year I do a lot of tramping about in the woods with a gun. I might add that on a hunting trip I can walk many a skinny person into a state of total exhaustion.” I stated this last proudly.

“All right for that, then,” he said. “We’ll concede that you get an abundance of exercise. Then there is another thing you should do, and of the two this is by far the more essential—you should go on a diet.”

Right there I turned mentally rebellious. I wanted to reduce my bulk, but I did not want to reduce my provender. I offered counter-arguments in defense. I pointed out that for perhaps five years past my weight practically had been stationary. Also I called attention to the fact that I no longer ate so heavily as once I had. Not that I wished actually to decry my appetite. It had been a good friend to me and not for worlds would I slander it. I have a sincere conviction that age cannot wither nor custom stale my infinite gastric juices. Never, I trust, will there come a time when I shan’t relish my victuals or when I’ll feel disinclined to chase the last fugitive bite around and around the

plate until I overtake it. But I presented the claim, which was quite true, that I was not the consumer, measured by volume, I once had been. Perhaps my freightage spaces, with passing years, had grown less expansive or less accommodating or something.

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Likewise, I invited his consideration of the fact, which was not to be gainsaid either, that many men very much less elaborated than I in girth customarily ate very much more than I did. I recalled, offhand, sundry conspicuous examples of this sort. I believe I mentioned one or two such. For instance, now, there was Mr. William Jennings Bryan. The Bryan appetite, as I remarked to the doctor, is one of the chief landmarks of Mr. Bryan's home city of Lincoln, Nebraska. They take the sight-seeing tourists around to have a look at it, the first thing.

To observe Mr. Bryan breakfasting on the morning when a national Democratic convention is in session is a sight worth seeing. A double order of cantaloupes on the half shell, a derby hat full of oatmeal, a rosary of sausages, and about as many flapjacks as would be required to tessellate the floor of a fair-sized reception hall is nothing at all for him. And when he has concluded his meal he gets briskly up and strolls around to the convention hall and makes a better speech and a longer one and a louder pile than anybody. Naturally, time, the insatiable remodeler, has worked some outward changes in Mr. Bryan since the brave old days of the cross of gold. His hair, chafed by the constant pressure of the halo, has retreated up and ever up his scalp until the forehead extends clear over and down upon the sunset slope. The little fine wrinkles are thickly smocked at the corners of the eagle eyes that flashed so fiercely at the cringing plutocrats.

But his bearing is just as graceful and his voice just as silvery and as strong as when in '96 he advocated free silver to save the race, or when he advocated anti-expansion in the Philippines, or government ownership of the railroads, or a policy of nonpreparedness for war when Germany first began acting up—Grover Cleveland Bergdoll felt the same way about it and so did Ma Bergdoll;—and I, for one, have no doubt that Mr. Bryan will be just as supple, mentally and physically, three years hence when, if he runs true to form, he will be advocating yet another of that series of those immemorial Jeffersonian principles of the fathers, which he thinks up, to order, right out of his own head, when a campaign impends. Mr. Bryan knows how to play the political game—none better; but he certainly does have a large discard. That, however, is aside from the main issue.

The point I sought to bring out there in the office of my friend Doctor So-and-so was that Mr. Bryan, to my knowledge, ate what he craved and all that he craved, yet did not become obese. When the occasion demanded he could be amply bellicose, but the accent was not upon the first two syllables.

I cited similar cases further to buttress my position. I told him that almost the skinniest human being I ever knew had been one of the largest eaters. I was speaking now of John Wesley Bass, the champion raw-egg eater of Massac Precinct, whose triumphant career knew not pause or discomfiture until one day at the McCracken County fair when suddenly tragedy dire impended.



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He did not overextend himself in the gustatory line—that to one of John Wesley Bass' natural gifts and attainments well-nigh would have been impossible; but he betrayed a lack of caution when, having broken his former record by eating thirty-six raw eggs at a sitting, he climbed upon a steam merry-go-round, shortly thereafter falling off the spotted wooden giraffe which he rode, and being removed to the city hospital in an unconscious condition.

That night later when the crisis had passed the doctors said that as nearly as they could figure out a case so unusual, Mr. Bass had had a very close call from being just naturally scrambled to death. I spoke at length of my former fellow townsman's powers, dwelling heavily upon the fact that, despite all, he never thickened up at the waistline. Throughout the narrative, however, the doctor punctuated my periods with derisive snorts which were disconcerting to an orderly presentation of the facts. Nevertheless, I continued until I had reached what I regarded as a telling climax.

"Piffle!" he rejoined. "One hoarse raucous piffle and three sharp decisive puffs for your arguments! I tell you that what ails you is this: You are now registering, the preliminary warnings of obesity. The danger is not actually here yet; but for you Nature already has set the danger signals. There's a red light on the switch for one I. Cobb. You are due before a great while for a head-end collision with your own health. You can take my advice or you can let it alone. That's entirely up to you. Only don't blame me if you come back here some day all telescoped up amidships.

"And please don't consume time which is reasonably valuable to me, however lightly you may regard it, by telling me now about slim men who eat more than you do and yet keep their figures. The woods are full of them; also the owl wagons. The difference between such men as those you have described and such men as you is that they were made to be thin men and to keep on being thin men regardless of their food consumption, and that your sort are naturally predisposed to fatness. You can't judge their cases by yours any more than you can judge the blood-sweating behemoth of Holy Writ by the plans and specifications of the humble earwig.

"One man's meat is another man's poison; that's a true saying. And here's another saying—one cannot eat his cake and have it, too. But that's an error so far as you are concerned. The trouble with you is that when you eat your cake you still have it—in layers of fat. If you want to get rid of the layers you'll have to cut out the cake, or most of it, anyway. Must I make you a diagram, or is this plain enough for your understanding?"

It was—abundantly. But I still had one more bright little idea waiting in the second-line trenches. I called up the reserves.

"Ahem!" I said. "Well now, old man, how about trying some of these electrical treatments or these chemicalized baths or these remedies I see advertised? I was

reading only the other day where one successful operator promised on his word of honor to take off flesh for anybody, no matter who it was, without interfering with that person's table habits and customs."



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My friend can be very plain-spoken when the spirit moves him.

[Illustration: "YOU ARE NOW REGISTERING THE PRELIMINARY WARNINGS—"
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"Say, listen to me," he snapped, "or better still, you'd better write down what I'm about to say and stick it in your hat where you can find it and consult it when your mind begins wandering again. Those special mechanical devices to reduce fat people are contrived for the benefit of men and lazy women who are too slothful to take exercise or else too besotted in the matter of food indulgence to face the alternative of dieting. They may not do any harm—properly operated, they probably do not—but, at best, I would regard them as being merely temporary expedients specially devised as first aid to the incurably lazy.

"And as for pills and boluses and bottled goods guaranteed to reduce your weight, and as for all these patented treatments and proprietary preparations which you see boosted in the papers—bah! Either they are harmless mixtures, in which event they'll probably do you no serious injury, but will certainly do you no real good; or else they contain drugs which, taken to excess, may cut you down in size, but have the added drawback of very probably cutting short your life.

"No, sir-ree! For you it's dieting, now and from now on. You may be able to relax your diet in time, but you can never altogether forego it. Give us this day our daily diet—that's your proper prayer. And you'd better start praying pretty soon, too!"

"All right, doc," I said resignedly. "You've practically converted me. I can't say I'm happy over the prospect, but if you say so I'm prepared to become a true believer. But since, between us, we're about to take all the joy out of life, let's be thorough. What must I do to be saved? Give me the horrible details right here. I might as well hear the worst at one session."

"I'm no dietitian," he said. "I don't profess to be one. That's not my line—my line is the diagnostic. Of course I could lay down a few broad general rules for your guidance—any experienced practitioner could do that—but to get the best returns you should consult a diet specialist. However, in parting—I have several paying guests waiting for me and we are now about to part—I will throw in one more bit of advice without charge. No matter what suggestions you may get from any quarter, I would urge you not to follow any banting formula so rigorous as to take off your superfluous flesh very rapidly. Take your time about it. If you live as long as both of us hope you may you'll have plenty of time. There's no rush, so go at it gradually. Be regular about it, but don't be too ambitious at the outset. Don't try to turn yourself into a tricky sprite in two weeks. For a fat man too abruptly to strip the flesh off his bones I regard as dangerous. It weakens him and depletes his powers of resistance and makes him fair game for any stray microbe which may be cruising about looking for a place to set up housekeeping."



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At first blush it might appear to the lay mind that a germ would scarcely care to pick a bone when it had fat meat to feed on, but my own recollections bore out my friend's statements. I remembered a man of my acquaintance, an enormously fleshy and unwieldy man, who, fearing apoplexy, undertook a radical scheme of banting. He lost fifty pounds in three months, so apoplexy did not get him, but pneumonia did with great suddenness. He was sick only three days. Nobody suspected that he was seriously ill until the third day, when suddenly he just hauled off and died.

So I promised to have a care against seeking to hurry myself right out of the flounder class and right into the smelt division.

CHAPTER VIII

The Friendly Sons of the Boiled Spinach

My friend gave me the names of several men of acknowledged standing and told me I should be making no mistake did I put myself in the hands of any one on the list. I thanked him and departed from his presence. To the casual eye I may have seemed, going away, to be in high spirits; but, confidentially, I wasn't feeling so very brash. My spirits were low. I had heard the truth—I made no effort to deceive myself there—but the truth was painful.

Still, knowing what I should do, I hesitated, temporizing with myself. I gave a couple of days of intensive meditation to the subject, and then I reached this conclusion: I would read a few standard and orthodox works on dietetics, and, so doing, try to arrive at least at a superficial knowledge of the matter. Also, I would balance what one recognized authority said as against what another recognized authority said, and then, before going to a specialist, I would do a little personal experimenting with my diet and mark the effects.

I arrived at this decision privately, taking no one into my confidence. And without an intent to deprive any hard-worked specialist of a prospective fee, I shall ever continue to believe that the second part of the course I chose to follow was a wise one. It might not serve my brother-in-obesity, but it served me well. I'm sure of that.

But the first part of the system naturally came first. This had to do with research work among the best authorities. Here I struck one of the snags that rise in the pathway of the hardy soul who goes adventuring into any given department of the science of medicine and its allied sciences. I was pained to observe how rare it was for two experts, of whatsoever period, to agree upon a single essential element. An amateur investigator was left at a loss to fathom why such entirely opposite conclusions should have been arrived at by the members of the same school when presumably both had

had the same raw materials to work on. By their raw materials I mean their patients. But so it was.

The ancient apostles of dietetics, the original pathfinders into a hitherto untracked field, had disciples who set out to follow in their footsteps, but before they had traveled very far along the alimentary trail the disciples were quarreling bitterly with the masters' deductions and conclusions. To-day's school was snooty touching on the major opinions of yesterday's crowd, and to-morrow's crowd already made faces at to-day's.



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On just two points I found a unanimity of opinion among what might be termed the middle group of dietetic explorers as counter-distinguished from the pioneering cult and the modern or comparatively modern. Each one was so absolutely certain that he was so absolutely right and so absolutely certain that all his contemporaries were so absolutely wrong.

At the beginning, it seemed, a reduction of the sufferer's flesh had been attempted by the simple device of bleeding him copiously—not with a monthly statement, as latterly, but with a lancet. Abundant drinking of vinegar also had been recommended as a means to accomplish the desired end. They were noble drinkers in the olden times, but until I began delving into literature of the subject I did not suspect that there had been any out-and-out vinegar toppers.

There was citation in an early work of the interesting case of the Marquis of Cortona, a subchieftain under the Duke of Alva, and a fine fat old butcher he must have been, too, by all tellings. Finding himself grown so rotund that no longer could he enter with zest into the massacre bees and torture outings which the Spaniards were carrying on in the harried Netherlands, the marquis had recourse to vinegar; and so efficacious was the treatment that, as the tradition runs, he soon could wrap his loosened skin about him in great slack folds like a cloak, and thus, close-reefed, go merrily murdering his way across the Low Countries.

One pictures the advantages accruing. In cold weather, now, he might overlap his wrinkles in a clapboarded effect and save the expense of laying in heavy underwear. True, this might give to the wearer a clinker-built appearance; still it would keep him nice and warm, and no doubt he had his armor on outside the rest of his things. But likewise there must have been drawbacks. Suppose, now, the marquis were caught out in blowy weather and the wind worked in under his tucks and the ratlines pulled loose and, all full-rigged and helpless, bellying and billowing and flapping and jibing, he went scudding against his will before the gale. Could he hope to tack and go about before he blew clear over into the next county? I doubt it.

And suppose he inflated himself for a party or a reception or something, and a practical joker put a tack in a chair and he sat down on it and had a blow-out. The thought is not a pretty one, yet the thing were possible.

From these crude beginnings I worked my way down toward the present day. Doctor Banting, of England, the father of latter-day dietetics from whose name in commemoration of his services to mankind we derive the verb intransitive "to bant," had theories wherein his chief contemporaneous German rival, Epstein the Bavarian, radically disagreed with him. Voit, coming along subsequently, disagreed in important details with both. Among the moderns I discerned where Dr. Woods Hutchinson had his pet ideas and Doctor Wiley had his, diametrically opposed. So it went. There was almost as much of disputation here as there is when a federation of women's clubs is

holding an annual election. It was all so very confusing to one aiming to do the right thing.



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One learned savant flatly laid down the ultimatum that the individual seeking to reduce should cut out all pork products from chitterings clear through the list to headcheese and give his undivided support to the red meats and the white. One of his brethren was equally positive that I might partake of bacon and even ham in moderation, but urged that I walk around red meat as though it were a pesthouse. Yet a third—a foe, plainly, to the butcher, but a well-wisher to the hay-and-produce dealer if ever one lived—recommended that I should eliminate all meat of whatsoever character or color and stick closely to fodder, roughage and processed ensilage. I judge he sent his more desperate cases to a livery stable.

According to one dictum, bread was all right up to a certain point, and, according to another, all wrong. This man here held a brief for beans, especially the succulent baked bean; that man yonder served solemn warning upon me that if perversely I persisted to continue to eat baked beans the fat globules would form so fast I would have the sensation that a little boy was inside of me somewhere blowing bubbles. The writer didn't exactly say this, but it was the inference I drew from his remarks.

Eat dried fruits until your seams give, said Doctor A. Avoid dried fruits as you would the plague, counseled the equally eminent Doctor B. Professor C considered the drinking of water with meals highly inadvisable; whereas Professor D said that without adding an extra ounce of weight I might consume water until my fluid contents sloshed up and down in me when I walked, and merely by getting a young lady in Oriental costume to stand alongside me I might qualify at a Sunday-school entertainment for the entire supporting cast of the familiar tableau entitled Rebecca at the Well. He intimated that just so I stopped short of committing suicide as an inside job all would be fine and dandy. I do not claim that these were his words; this is the free interpretation of his meaning. Sink the knife in the butter to the very hilt—there will be no ill effects but only a beneficial outcome—declares such-and-such a food faddist. Eschew butter by all means or accept the consequences, clarions an earnest voice. Well, I never was much of a hand for eschewed butter anyway. We keep our own cow and make our own butter and it seems to slip down, just so.

In the vegetable kingdom the controversy raged with unabated fury. The boiled prune, blandest and most inoffensive of breakfast dishes, formed the basis of a spirited debate. There were pro-prunists and there were con-prunists. The parsnip had its champions and its antagonists; the carrot its defenders and its assailants. In this quarter was the cabbage heartily indorsed, there was it belittled and made naught of. The sprightly spring onion, already socially scorned in some of the best lay circles, suffered attack at the hands of at least one scientific and scholarly professional.

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After reading his strictures I remarked to myself that really there remained but one field of useful popularity for the onion to adorn; in time it might hope to supplant the sunflower as the floral emblem of Kansas, as typifying a great political principle which originated in that state: The Initiative, when one took a chance and ate a young onion; the Referendum, while one's digestive apparatus wrestled with it; the Recall, if it disagreed with one. Alone, of all the vegetables, stood spinach, with not a single detractor. On this issue the vote in the affirmative practically was by acclamation. I am in position to state that boiled spinach has not an enemy among the experts. This seems but fair—it has so few friends among the eating public.

I observed much and confusing talk of the value of nitrogens, proteids and—when I had reached the ultra-modernists—vitamines. Vitamines, I gathered, had only recently been discovered, yet by the progressives they were held to be of the supremest importance in the equation of properly balanced human sustenance. To my knowledge I had never consciously eaten vitamines unless a vitamine was what gave guaranteed strictly fresh string beans, as served at a table-d'hote restaurant, that peculiar flavor. Here all along I had figured it was the tinny taste of the can, which shows how ignorant one may be touching on vitally important matters. I visualized a suitable luncheon for one banting according to the newest and most generally approved formula:

=RELISH= MIXED GELATINOIDS

=POTAGE= STRAINED NITROGEN GUMBO

=ENTREE= GRILLED PROTEIDS WITH GLOBULIN PATTIES

=DESSERT= COMPOTE OF ASSORTED VITAMINES

Or the alternative course for one sincerely desirous of reducing, who believed everything he saw in print, was to cut out all the proscribed articles of food—which meant everything edible except spinach—and starve gracefully on a diet composed exclusively of boiled spinach, with the prospect of dying a dark green death in from three to six weeks and providing one's own protective coloration if entombed in a cemetery containing cedars.

Personally I was not favorably inclined toward either plan, so I elected to let my conscience be my guide, backed by personal observation and personal experimentation. I was traveling pretty constantly this past spring, and in the smoking compartments of the Pullmans, where all men, for some curious reason, grow garrulous and confidential, I put crafty leading questions to such of my fellow travelers as were over-sized and made mental notes of their answers for my own subsequent use. Since the Eighteenth Amendment put the nineteenth hole out of commission, prohibition and how to evade it are the commonest of all conversational topics among those moving

about from place to place in America; but the subject of what a man eats, and more particularly what he eats for breakfast, runs it a close second for popularity.

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For example, there is the seasoned trans-atlantic tourist who, on the occasion of a certain terrifically stormy passage, was for three days the only person on board excepting the captain who never missed a single meal. You find him everywhere; there must be a million or more of him; and he loves to talk about it, and he does.

But even more frequently encountered is the veteran drummer—no, beg pardon, the veteran district sales manager, for there aren't any drummers any more, or even any traveling salesmen; but instead we have district sales managers featuring strong selling points—I say, even more frequently encountered is the veteran district sales manager, wearing a gravy-colored waistcoat if a tasty dresser, or a waistcoat of a nongravy-colored or contrasting shade if careless, who craves to tell strangers what, customarily, he eats for breakfast.

I made it a point to study the proportions and hearken to the disclosures of such a one, and if he carried his stomach in a hanging-garden effect, with terraces rippling down and flying buttresses and all; and if he had a pasty, unhealthy complexion or an apoplectic tint to his skin I said to myself that thenceforth I should apply the reverse English to his favorite matutinal prescription.

CHAPTER IX

Adventure of The Fallen Egg

So, having mapped out my campaign of attack against my fat, I rose one morning from my berth in the sleeping car and I dressed; and firmly clutching my new-formed resolution to prevent its escape, I made my way to the dining car and sat down and gave my order to the affable honor graduate of Tuskegee Institute who graciously deigned to wait on me.

Now, theretofore, for so far back as I remembered, breakfast had been my heartiest meal of the entire day, with perhaps two exceptions—luncheon and dinner. Precedent inclined me toward ordering about as many pieces of sliced banana as would be required to button a fairly tall woman's princess frock all the way down her back, with plenty of sugar and cream, and likewise a large porringer of some standard glutinous cereal, to be followed by sausages with buckwheat cakes and a few odd kickshaws and comfits in the way of strawberry preserves and hot buttered toast and coffee that was half cream, and first one thing and then another. But Spartanlike I put temptation sternly behind me and told the officiating collegian to bring me plain boiled prunes, coffee with hot milk and saccharin tablets, dry toast and one dropped egg.

The prunes and the coffee were according to specifications, although, lacking the customary cream and three lumps of sugar, the coffee was in the nature of a profound



disappointment. But a superficial inquiry convinced me that the egg was not properly a dropped egg at all.

Here was a fallen egg, if I ever saw one. I was filled with pity for it—poor, forsaken, abandoned thing, with none to speak a kind word for it! And probably more sinned against than sinning, too. Perhaps there was hereditary influences to be reckoned with. Perhaps its producer had been incubator raised, with no mother to guide her and only the Standard Oil Company for a foster parent. And what would a New Jersey corporation know about raising a hen?



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Thus in sudden compassion I mused. To the waiter, though, I said:

“There has been a mistake here, *alumnus*. This egg never was meant to be dropped—it was meant to be thrown. Kindly remove the melancholy evidences.”

He offered to provide a substitute, but the edge of my zest seemed dulled. I made dry toast the climax of my chastely simple repast. It was simple and it was chaste, but otherwise not altogether what I should characterize as a successful repast. It lacked, as it were.

Let us pass along to noontime. Ere noontime came I was consumed with gnawing pains of emptiness. As nearly as I might judge, I contained naught save vast hollow spaces and acoustics and vacuums and empty, echoing, neglected convolutions. Sorely was I tempted to relax the rigors of the just-inaugurated regime; nobly, though, I resisted the impulse.

As I look back now on that day I find the memory of my suffering has dimmed slightly. The passage of weeks and months has served to soften the harsh outlines of poignant recollection. What now in retrospect most impresses me is the heroism I displayed, the stark fortitude, the grandeur of will power, the triumph for character. Sheer gallantry, I call it.

For my midday meal I had more dry toast, a reduced portion of boiled tongue and a raw apple—satisfying enough to some, I grant you, but to me no more than a tease to my palate. Long before three o'clock I knew exactly how a tapeworm feels when its landlord goes on a hunger strike. Every salivary gland I owned was standing on tiptoe screaming for help; every little mucous membrane had a sorrow all its own. Each separate fiber of my innermost being cried out for greases and for sugars and for the wonted starchy compounds for to stay it and for to comfort it.

I underwent pangs such as had not been mine since away back yonder in August of 1914, in the time of the sack of Belgium, when the Germans locked up five of us for a day and a night in a cow stable where no self-respecting cow would voluntarily have stayed, and, then sent us by train under guard on a three-day journey into Germany, yet all the while kept right on telling us we were not prisoners but guests of the German Army. And at the end of the third day we reached the unanimous conclusion among ourselves that the only outstanding distinction we could see, from where we sat, between being prisoners of the German Army and guests of the German Army was that from time to time they did feed the prisoners. For throughout the journey the eight of us—since by now our little party had grown—lived rather simply and frugally and, I might say, sketchily on rations consisting of one loaf of soldiers' bread, one bottle of mineral water and a one-pound pot of sour and rancid honey which must have emanated in the first place from a lot of very morbid, low-minded bees.



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However, in those exciting days there were many little moving distractions about to keep one from brooding o'ermuch on thoughts of lacking provender. I boast not, but merely utter a verity, when I state that every time I shook myself I shifted the center of population. Where we had been the lesser wild life of midcontinental Europe abounded. In the matter of a distinction which had come to me utterly without solicitation or effort on my part I have no desire to brag, but in justice to myself—and my boarders—I must add that at that moment, of all the human beings in Central Europe, I was the most densely inhabited. My companions scratched along, doing fairly well, too; but I led the field—I was so much roomier than any one of them was.

But here aboard this Pullman on this, the dedicatory day of my self-imposed martyrdom, I could not lose myself as I had on that former historic occasion in the ardor of chasing the small game of the country. By four o'clock in the afternoon I could appreciate the sensations of a conch shell on a parlor whatnot. I had a feeling that if anyone were to press his ear up against me he would hear a murmuring sound as of distant sea waves. Yet, mark you, I held bravely out, fighting still the good fight. This, then, was my dinner, if such it might in truth be called: Clear soup, a smallish slice of rare roast beef cut shaving thin, gluten bread sparsely buttered, a cloud of watercress no larger than a man's hand, another raw apple and a bit of domestic cheese—nothing rich, nothing exotic, no melting French *fromages*, no creamy Danish pastries.

Only when I reached my demi-tasse, which I took straight, did I permit myself a touch of luxury. I lit my cigar with a genuine imported Swedish parlor match.

Followed then the first comforting manifestation, the first gratefully registered taste of recompense for my privations. I had to speak that night and in a large hall, too, and I found my voice to be clearer and stronger than usual, and found, also, that I spoke with much less effort than usual. I was sure partial fasting during the day was bearing fruits in the evening, and I was right, as subsequent evening experiences proved to me. I had rather dreaded that hunger gripes would make my night a sleepless one, but it didn't happen. I may have dreamed longing dreams about victuals, but I tore off eight solid hours of unbridled and—I dare say—uproarious rest.

CHAPTER X

Wherein Our Hero Falters

Next day I kept it up, varying the first day's menus slightly, but keeping the bulk consumption down, roughly, to about one-half or possibly one-third what my rations formerly had been. Before night of the second day that all-gone sensation had vanished. Already I had made the agreeable discovery that I could get along and be reasonably happy on from 35 to 50 per cent of what until then I had deludedly



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thought was required to nourish me. Before the week ended I felt fitter and sprier in every way than I had for years past; more alive, more interested in things, quicker on my feet and brisker in my mental processes than in a long time. The chronic logy, foggy feeling in my head disappeared and failed to return. I may add that to date it still has not returned. Relieved of pressure against its valves—at least I assume that was what came to pass—my heart began functioning as I assume a normal heart should function, and at once the sense of oppression in the neighborhood of the heart was gone.

Within the same week I took most joyful note of the fact that I was losing flesh in the vicinities where mainly I craved to lose it amidships and at the throat. I still had a double chin in front, but the third one, which I carried behind as a spare—the one which ran all the way round my neck and lapped at the back like a clergyman's collar—was melting away. And unless I was woefully mistaken, I no longer had to fight so desperate a battle with the waistband of my trousers when I dressed in the mornings.

I was not mistaken. Glory be and likewise selah! My first and second mezzanines were visibly shrinking. By these signs and portents was I stimulated to continue the campaign so auspiciously launched and so satisfactorily progressing.

I shall not deny that in the second week I did some backsliding. The swing of the tour carried me into the South. It was the South in the splendor of the young springtime when the cardinal bird sang his mating song. With brocading dandelions each pasture gloriously became even as the Field of the Cloth of Gold; and lo, the beginning of the strawberry shortcake season overlapped the last of the smoked-hog-jowl-and-turnip-greens period, and the voice of the turtle was heard in the land.

Figuratively, I was swept off my feet when a noble example of Southern womanhood put before my famished eyes the following items, to wit: About half a bushel of newly picked turnip greens, rearing islandwise above a sloshing sea of pot licker and supporting upon their fronded crests the boiled but impressive countenance of a hickory-cured shote, the whole being garnished with paired-off poached eggs like the topaz eyes of beauteous blond virgins turned soulfully heavenward; and set off by flankings of small piping-hot corn pones made with meal and water and salt and shortening, as Providence intended a proper corn pone should be made.

Then the years rolled away like a scroll and once again was I back in the Kentucky foothills, a lean and lathy sprout of a kid, a limber six-foot length of perpendicular appetite; and it was twelve o'clock for some people, but it was dinner time for me!

My glad low gurgle of anticipatory joy smothered the small inner voice of caution as I leaped, as it were, headlong into that bosky dell of young turnip greens. So, having set my feet on the downward path I backslode some more—for behold, what should come



along then but an old-fashioned shortcake, fashioned of crisp biscuit dough, with more fresh strawberries bedded down between its multiplied and mounting layers than you could buy at the Fritz-Charlton for a hundred and ninety dollars.



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Right then and there was when and where I lost all I had gained in a fortnight of stalwart self-disciplining; rather it was where I regained all I haply had lost. When, gorged and comatose, I staggered from that fair matron's depleted table I should never have dared to trundle over a wooden culvert at faster than four miles an hour. Either I should have slowed down or waited until they could put in some re-enforced-concrete underpinnings.

I was right back where I had started, and for the moment didn't care a darn either. Sin is glorious when you sin gloriously.

But I rallied. I retrieved myself. However, I do not take all the credit to myself for this; circumstances favored me. Shortly I quitted the land of temptation where I had been born, and was back again up North living on dining cars and in hotels, with nothing more seductive to resist than processed pastry and machine-made shortcakes and Thousand Islands dressing; which made the fight all the easier to win, especially as regards the last named. I sometimes wonder why, with a thousand islands to choose from, the official salad mixer of the average hotel always picks the wrong one.

I kept on. The thing proved magically easy of accomplishment. By the fit of my clothing, if by nothing else, I could have told that several of my more noticeable convexes were becoming plane surfaces and gave promise in due season of becoming almost concave, some of 'em. But there was other and convincing testimony besides. I could tell it by my physical feelings, by my viewpoint, by my enhanced zest for work and for play.

Purposely, for the first month I refrained from weighing myself. When I did begin weighing at regular intervals I found I was losing at a rate of between two and three pounds a week. Moreover, I had now proved to my own satisfaction that within sane reasonable limitations I could resume eating most of the things which formerly I ate to excess and which I had altogether eliminated from my menus during the initiatory stages of dieting.

About the time I emerged from the novitiate class I discerned yet one more gratifying fact. If I were in the woods, camping and fishing, or hunting or tramping or riding or taking any fairly arduous form of exercise, I could eat pretty much anything and everything, no matter how fattening it might be. Work in the open air whetted my appetite, but the added exertion burned up the waste matter so that the surplus went into bodily strength instead of into fatty layers. Consumption was larger, but assimilation was perfect.

For my daily life at home, where I am writing this, I have cut out these things: All the cereals; nearly all the white bread; all the hot bread; practically all pastries except very light pastries; white potatoes absolutely; rice to a large extent; sausages and fresh pork and nearly all the ham; cream in my coffee and on fruits; and a few of the starchier vegetables.



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Of butter and of cheese and of nuts I eat perhaps one-third the amount I used to eat, and of meats, roughly, one-half as much as before the dawn of reason came. Of everything except the items I just have enumerated I eat as freely as I please. And when a person begins to reckon up everything else among the edibles—flesh, fowl, fish, berries, fruits, vegetables and the rest he finds quite a sizable list.

I shall not pretend that I do not pine often for sundry tabooed things. Take pies, now—if there is any person alive who likes his pie better than I do he's the king of the pie likers, that's all. And I am desolated at being compelled to bar out the rice—not the gummy, glued-together, sticky, messy stuff which Northerners eat with milk and sugar on it, but real orthodox rice such as only Southerners and Chinamen and East Indians know how to prepare; white and fluffy and washed free of all the lurking library paste; with every grain standing up separate and distinct like well-popped corn and treated only with salt, pepper and butter, or with salt, pepper and gravy before being consumed.

And as for white potatoes—well, it distresses me deeply to think that hereafter the Irish potato, except when I'm camping out, will be to me merely something to stopper the spout of a coal-oil can with, or to stab the office pen in on the clerk's desk in an American-plan hotel. For I have ever cherished the Irish potato as one of Nature's most succulent gifts to mankind. I like potatoes all styles and every style, French fried, lyonnaise, O'Brien, shoestring shape, pants-button design, hashed brown, creamed, mashed, stewed, soufflé—if only I knew who blew 'em up—and most of all, baked *au naturel* in the union suit. And I miss them and shall keep on missing them. But no longer do I yearn for cream in my coffee, now that it is out of it, and I am getting reconciled to dry toast for breakfast, where once upon a time only members of the justly famous Flap Jackson family seemed to satisfy.

Of course I imbibe alcoholic stimulant when and where procurable. From the standpoint of one intent upon cutting a few running feet off the waistline measurements this distinctly is wrong, as full well I know. But what would you? I do not wish to pose as an eccentric. I have no desire to be pointed out as a person aiming to make himself conspicuously erratic by behaving differently from the run of his fellows. Since the advent of Prohibition nearly everybody I meet is drinking with an unbridled enthusiasm; and when not engaged in the act of drinking is discussing the latest and most approved methods of evading, circumventing and defying the Federal and State statutes against drinking. Therefore I drink, too. Even so, I have not yet succeeded in accustoming my palate to strong waters indiscriminately swallowed. I confess to a fear that I shall never make a complete success of the undertaking.



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I suppose the trouble with me is lack of desire. Prior to the attempted enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment potable and vatted mixtures had but small lure for my palate, or my stomach, or my temperament. An occasional mild cocktail before a dinner, and perhaps twice a week a bottle of light beer or a glass of light wine with the dinner—these, in those old wild wicked days which ended in January, 1920, practically made up the tally of my habitual flirtations with the accursed Demon. In the springtime I might chamber an occasional mint julep, but this, really, was a sort of rite, a gesture of salute to the young green year. Likewise at Christmas time I partook sparingly of the ceremonial and traditional egg-nog. And once in a great while, on a bitter cold night in the winter, a hot apple toddy was not without its attractions. But these indulgences about covered the situation, alcoholically speaking, so far as I was concerned. For me the strong, heady vintages, whether still or sparkling, and the more potent distillations had mighty little appeal. Champagne, to me, was about the poorest substitute for good well-water that had ever been proposed; and the Messrs. Haig & Haig never had to put on a night shift at the works on my account.

Yet I came from a mid-section of the republic where in the olden days Bourbon whiskey was regarded as a proper staff of life. The town where I was born was one of the last towns below Mason & Dixon's Line to stand out against the local option wave which had swept the smaller interior communities of America; and my native state of Kentucky was one of the two remaining states of the South, Louisiana being the other, which had not officially gone dry by legislative action up to the time when Br'er Volstead's pleasant little act went over nationally.

While I was growing up, through boyhood, through my youth and on into manhood, I had the example of whiskey-drinking all about me. Many of our oldest and most respected families owned and operated distilleries. Some of them had been distillers for generations past; they were proud of the purity of their product. Men of all stations in life drank freely and with no sense of shame in their drinking. Mainly they took their'n straight or in toddies; in those parts, twenty years ago, the high-ball was looked upon with suspicion as a foreign error which had been imported by misguided individuals up North who didn't know any better than to drown good liquor in charged water. There were decanters on the sideboard; there were jimmy-johns in the cellar; and down at the place on the corner twenty standard varieties of bottled Bourbons and ryes were to be had at an exceedingly moderate price. Bar-rail instep, which is a fallen arch reversed, was a common complaint among us.



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Even elderly ladies who looked with abhorrence upon the drinking habit were not denied their wee bit nippy. They got it, never knowing that they got it. Some of them stayed pleasantly corned year in and year out and supposed all the time they merely were enjoying good health. For them stimulating tonics containing not in excess of sixty per cent of pure grain alcohol were provided by pious patent-medicine manufacturers in Chattanooga and Atlanta and Louisville—earnest-minded, philanthropic patriots these were, who strongly advocated the closing-up of the Rum Hole, which was their commonest pet name for the corner saloon, but who viewed with a natural repugnance those provisions of the Pure Food Act requiring printed confession as to fluid contents upon the labels of their own goods. It was no uncommon thing in the Sunny Southland to observe a staunch churchgoer who was an outspoken advocate of temperance rising up and giving three rousing hiccups for good old Dr. Bunkum's Nerve Balm. And distinctly I recall the occasion when a stalwart mother in Israel, starting off to attend a wedding and feeling the need of a little special toning-up beforehand, took three wineglassfuls of her favorite Blood Purifier instead of the customary one which she took before a meal; and, as a consequence, on her arrival at the scene of festivities was with difficulty dissuaded from snatching down the Southern smilax and other decorations that she might twine with them a wreath to crown herself. She somehow had got the idea that she was the queen emeritus of the May. It was reported about town afterward that she tried to do the giant swing on the parlor chandelier. But this was a gross exaggeration; she only tried to hang by her legs from it.

Reared, as I was, amid such surroundings and in a commonwealth abounding in distilleries, rectifying works, blending establishments, bottle-houses, barrel-houses, and saloons, I should have been a hopeless inebriate long before I came of age. The literature of any total abstinence society would prove conclusively that I never had a chance to avoid filling a drunkard's grave. Yet somehow I escaped the fate ordained for me. As I say, I drank sparingly and for long periods not at all, until Prohibition came. Then I began doing as about ninety per cent of my fellow-adult Americans began doing—which was to take a drink when the opportunity offered. As I diagnose it, we nearly all are actuated now by much the same instinct which causes a small boy to loot a jam closet. He doesn't particularly want all that jam but he takes the jam because it is summarily denied him and because he's afraid he may never again get a whack at unlimited jam.

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To my way of thinking, the main result of the effort drastically to enforce Prohibition, aside from making us a nation of law-breakers, law-evaders, sneaks, bribers, boot-leggers, bigots, corruptionists and moral cowards, has been to transfer the burden of inebriety from one set of shoulders to another set of shoulders. Men who formerly drank to excess have sobered up, against their will, for lack of cash or lack of chance to buy hard liquor. They cannot rake together enough coin to purchase the adulterated stuff at ten times the price they had paid for better liquor before the law went into effect. On the other hand, men—and women—who formerly drank but little are now drinking to excess, some of them being prompted, I think, by a feeling of protest against what they regard as an invasion of their personal liberties and some, no doubt, inspired by a perfectly understandable impulse to do a thing which is forbidden when the doing of it gives them a sense of adventure and daring.

Far be it from an humble citizen to criticise our national law-making body. Far be it from him, as he contemplates the spectacle frequently presented under the dome of the Capitol at Washington, to paraphrase Ethan Allen's celebrated remark when he took Fort Ticonderoga in the name of Jehovah and the Continental fathers and exclaim: "Congress—oh, my God!" Far be it, I repeat, from such a one to do such things as these. But I trust I may be pardoned for venturing the statements that excessive drinking already was going out of fashion in this country, that the treating evil was in a fair way to die a natural death anyhow, and that the present sumptuary attempt to cure us overnight of a habit which has been ingrained in the very fibre of the race for so far back as the history of the race runs, has only had the effect of making a bad thing worse.

At that, I hold no brief for the brewer and the distiller. They got exactly what was coming to them. Had they, as a class, been content to obey the existing laws, instead of conniving to break them; had they kept their meddling fingers out of local politics; had they realized more fully their responsibilities as manufacturers and purveyors of potentially dangerous products; had they been willing to cooperate with right-thinking men in a sane and orderly campaign for the cleaning-up and the proper regulation of the liquor traffic; had they seen that the common man's inarticulate but very definite resentment against the iniquities of the corner saloon system was tending to the legal abolition of the whole business of licensed drinking, I believe we should have had no Eighteenth Amendment saddled upon us and no Volstead act to bridle us.

In the final analysis, and stripping aside the lesser contributory causes, I maintain there were just two outstanding reasons why this country went dry after the fashion in which it did go dry: One reason was the Distiller; the other was the Brewer. And for the woes of either or both I, for one, decline to shed a single tear.



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How a fellow does run on when he gets on the subject which is uppermost in the minds of the American people this year! All I intended to say, when I started off on this tack, a few pages back, was that if I absolutely and completely cut out all alcoholic stimulant no doubt I should be reducing my weight much faster than is the case at this writing. To-day practically all the members in good standing of the Order of Friendly Sons of the Boiled Spinach—I mean the dietetic sharps—agree that he or she who is banting will be well-advised to drink not at all. For the most part they do not make a moral issue of this detail. Some of them refuse to concede that a teetotaler is necessarily healthier or happier or more useful to the world than the moderate imbiber is. They merely point out that whiskies and beers are, for the majority of humans, fattening things and should therefore be eliminated from the diet of those wishful to lose their superfluous adipose tissue. Here, again, they disagree with their professional forebears. The experts of the preceding generations, being mainly Englishmen and Germans, could not conceive of living without drinking. Some advocated wines, some ales, some a mixture of both with an occasional measure of spirits added for the sake of digestion. But among the dependable dietetic authorities of the present day there appears to be no wide range of argument on this point. They pretty generally agree that even a casual indulgence in beverages is not indicated for those who seek to reduce. I am sure they are right. But as I remarked just now, what can you do when you are encompassed about by the bottle-toting, sop-it-up-behind-the-door custom which has sprung up since Prohibition was slipped over on us by the Anti-Saloon League?

I confess that I have not the strength of character to swim, almost alone, against the social current. So I partake of the occasional snort and to that extent stand a self-admitted apologist for an offense which no true reductionist should commit.

But I claim that otherwise—that in so far as the solid foodstuffs are concerned—I have, for my own individual case, exactly the right idea about it.

CHAPTER XI

Three Cheers for Lithesome Grace Regained!

My advice to the man or the woman who is in the same fix I was in is to go and do likewise, with variations to suit the individual temperament. It means self-denial but self-denial persevered in is a virtue, and virtue he will find—or she will—not alone is its own reward but a number of additional rewards as well. Let my late fellow sufferer likewise patronize the gymnasium and the steam room and the cold plunge if he so chooses. If he desires to have automatic pores, all right. As for me, I recall what the Good Book says about the pores which ye have always with ye, and I decline to worry about the present uncultured state of mine. Let him try the electric rollers and the electric baths, if such be his bent; no doubt they have their value. And by all means let him consult a qualified physician if he fears either that he is overdoing or underdoing his banting.

Personally, though, I am satisfied with the plan I tried out, of being my own private test tube.



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I claim that I have better information touching on what sustenance I need than any outsider ever can hope to have unless he breaks into me surgically. I claim that a series of rational experiments should tell any rational human how much he needs to eat and what he needs to eat in order to reduce his bulk and yet keep his powers and his bodily vigor unimpaired. I am not speaking now, understand me, of those unfortunates with whom obesity is a disease, but of those who owe their grossness of outline to gluttony. Lacking vital statistics on the subject, I nevertheless dare assert that these latter constitute fully 90 per cent of those among the American people who are distinctly and uncomfortably and frequently unhealthily fat.

Remains but one fly in the ointment. Since Tony Sarg is going to illustrate this treatise, then Tony must revise the old working plans. For my figure is not so much pro as once it was. It is more con, if you get my meaning—the profile curves in toward, instead of being, as formerly, so noticeably from.

Still, I should worry about the troubles of an artist, even though a friend. I weighed myself this morning. Three months ago, when I set out to reduce my belt line and my collar size, I snatched the beam down ker-smack at two hundred and thirty-six pounds, stripped. This morning I weighed exactly one hundred and ninety-seven, including amalgam fillings and the rights of translation into foreign languages, including the Scandinavian. One hundred and eighty-five pounds is my ultimate aim. Howsoever, I may keep right on when I attain that figure and justify the title of this book by taking a full one third off. In either event, though, I shall know exactly where I am going and I'm on my way. And I feel bully and I'm happy about it and boastfully proud.

Three rousing cheers for lithesome grace regained!

THE END

[Transcriber's note: Obvious typos in this project were corrected.]