

XXVII. *A Letter from Dr. T. Coe, Physician at Chelmsford in Effex, to Dr. Cromwell Mortimer, Secr. R. S. concerning Mr. Bright, the fat Man at Malden in Effex.*

S I R, Chelmsford, April 16, 1751.

Read May 9. ^{1751.} I NOW send you a plain but true and authentic account of an extraordinary man, whom you yourself have seen, and whom I have known ever since he was a boy, viz. Mr. Edward Bright, grocer, late of Malden in Effex, who died there the 10 of November last in the 30 year of his age. He was a man so extremely fat, and of such an uncommon bulk and weight, that I believe there are very few, if any, such instances to be found in any country, or upon record in any books; at least I have never heard or read any genuine account of a man, who was equal, or even came near to him in weight. I know, that Dr. Allen, in his *Synopsis universæ medicinæ practicæ*, quotes Sennertus for a woman of 450 pounds, and for a man, who weighed 600 pounds; and Chambers, in his Dictionary, mentions the same precisely in the same way; which therefore I suppose he took from Allen. But the numbers are falsely printed in Allen; for, as they stand in Sennertus *cap. de corpulentia nimia*, the weight of the woman is 480 pounds, and that of the man several pounds more than 400.

If the following story of Mr. Bright should exceed the faith of any in this present age, there are a great many

many witnesses, who can attest it: and if posterity shall find themselves at a loss to believe it, upon this bare relation, they may have further evidence, if they will be at the pains to consult a public record of the corporation, made by the order of the present magistrates; and also the register of the parish of All Saints in Malden, where he was buried; in both which they will find the main facts properly vouched.

Mr. Bright was descended from families greatly inclined to corpulency, both on his father's and his mother's side. Many of his ancestors and relations have been remarkably fat, though very far inferior to him in bulk. He was always fat from a child, and yet very strong and active, and used a great deal of exercise, both when a boy, and after he became a man, which he continued to do till within the last two or three years of his life, when he became too unwieldy. He could walk about very well, and nimbly too, having great strength of muscles; and could not only ride on horseback, but would sometimes gallop after he was grown to between 30 and 40 stones weight. He used to go to London about his business, till the journey of 40 miles, and going about there, became too great a fatigue to him; and he left it off for some years before he died. But he was grown to such a size before he left it off, that he was the gazing-stock and admiration of all people, as he walked along the streets. In the last year or two he could walk but a little way, being soon tired, and out of breath, and travelled abroad but little, and that in a chaise. He was so large and fat a boy, that at the age of 12 years and a half he weighed 10 stones and 4 pounds horse-man's

man's weight, *i. e.* 144 pounds*. And he increased in bulk, as he grew up, so that in seven years more, that is before he was twenty, he weighed 24 stones, or 336 pounds. He went on increasing, and probably in pretty near the same proportion. For the last time he was weighed, which was about thirteen months before he died, his weight was 42 stones and 12 pounds, with only his waistcoat, shirt, breeches, and stockings on; and these cloaths being afterwards weighed, were found to be 16 pounds; so that his neat weight at that time was 41 stones and 10 pounds, or 584 pounds. What his exact weight was at the time of his death, cannot be told: but, as he was manifestly grown bigger since the last weighing, which he himself, and every body about him, were sensible of, if we take the same proportion, by which he had increased for many years upon an average, *viz.* of about 2 stones a year, and only allow 4 pounds addition for last year, on account of his moving about but very little, while he continued to eat and drink as before (which allowance is perhaps less might be granted) this will bring him to 44 stones or 616 pounds neat weight. And that I find by the judgment of the most reasonable people, who knew him well, and saw him often, is reckoned a very fair and modest computation, and the lowest, that can be made.

As to his measure, he was 5 feet 9 inches and a half high. His body round: the chest just under the arms measured

* There is at this time at Malden a boy not 14 years old (no relation to Mr. Bright) who weighs as much. Tulpius *Obs. medic. lib. 3. cap. 55.* tells of a boy of vast bulk and strength, who at 5 years of age, weighed 150 pounds; but does not say what became of him afterwards.

measured 5 feet 6 inches, and round the belly 6 feet 11 inches. His arm in the middle of it was 2 feet 2 inches about, and his leg 2 feet 8 inches.

He had always a good appetite, and, when a youth, used to eat somewhat remarkably ; but of late years, though he continued to eat heartily, and with a good relish, yet he did not eat more in quantity than many other men, who, we say, have good stomachs.

As to drink, though he did not take any liquor to an intoxicating degree, yet perhaps upon the whole he drank more, than might have been advisable to a man of his very corpulent disposition. When he was a very young man, he was fond of ale and old strong beer ; but for some years past his chief liquor was small beer, of which he commonly drank about a gallon in a day. In other liquors he was extremely moderate, when by himself, sometimes drinking half a pint of wine after dinner, or a little punch, and seldom exceeding his quantity ; but when he was in company, he did not confine himself to so small an allowance.

He enjoyed for the most part all his life as good health as any man, except that in the last 3 years, he was two or three times seized with an inflammation in his leg, attended with a little fever ; and every time with such a tendency to mortification, as to make it necessary to scarify the part. But by the help of scarification and fomentations, bleeding largely once or twice in the arm, and purging, he was always soon relieved. I say bleeding largely, for it was always the custom with him, to have not less than two pounds of blood taken away at a time. And he

was

was no more sensible of the loss of such a quantity, than another man is of twelve or fourteen ounces.

He married when he was between twenty-two and twenty-three years old, and lived a little more than seven years in that state: in which time he had five children born, and left his wife with child of the sixth, near her time.

There was an amiable mind in this extraordinary overgrown body. He was of a chearful temper, and a good-natured man, a kind husband, a tender father, a good master, a friendly neighbour, and a very fair honest man. So that he was beloved and respected by all, who knew him, and would have been as much lamented by his acquaintance, as any man in any station of life ever was, had it not been, that they looked upon him for several years as a man, who could not live long; and out of regard and compassion to him, considered his life as a burthen, and death as a happy release to him, and so much the more, as he thought so himself, and wished to be released.

His last illness, which continued about fourteen days, was a miliary fever, as I am well informed by the apothecary, who attended him. It began with pretty strong inflammatory symptoms, a very troublesome cough, great difficulty of breathing, &c. and the eruption was extremely violent. For some days he was thought to be relieved in the other symptoms by the eruption: but it seems to be no wonder at all, that his constitution was not able to struggle through such a disease, which proves so fatal to many, who appear to be much more fit to grapple with it.

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His body began to putrify, very soon after he was dead; so that notwithstanding the weather was cool, it became very offensive the next day, before they could get a coffin made. As the corps was of a surprising bulk, the coffin must be so too. It was 3 feet 6 inches broad at the shoulders, 2 feet 3 inches and a half at the head, 22 inches at the feet, and 3 feet 1 inch and a half deep.

Great numbers of people came to see the coffin, while it was making; and at the funeral there was a vast concourse, not only of the town, but from the country for several miles round about, out of curiosity to see, how such a corps could be got to the ground. It was drawn to the church on a low-wheel'd carriage by ten or twelve men, and was let down into the grave by an engine fixed up in the church for that purpose. I am,

S I R,

Your most humble servant,

T. Coe.