

CORPULENCE.

Corpulence or obesity is, there can be no doubt one of the most widely spread of the minor troubles to which the human race is subject, and as such worthy of the most careful attention on the part of hygienists and therapeutists. Until within a very few years it was universally taught that the great sources of fat within the human body were the fatty and hydro-carbonaceous elements of the food; and, although it was admitted that the albuminates might, under certain circumstances, give rise to fat, this was put forward rather as a doubtful hypothesis than an admitted fact. The recent labors of physiologists have cast no little doubt upon the old views, and the last writer on the subject of corpulence (Immermann, who contributes article to Ziemssen's 'Encyclopædia') throws over the old views entirely, and adheres absolutely to the doctrines put forward by modern physiologists. It is now held that fat is formed principally from the albuminous elements of the food just as the fat in fatty degeneration of the tissues, is derived from the organised albumen of those tissues. The albuminates eaten with the food are used in part for the nutrition of the albuminous tissues, and the surplus which is not so used undergoes continued processes of metamorphosis and oxidation, and appear among the excretions in the form of urea, uric acid, carbonic acid, and water. If, however, the albumen taken in with the food be in excess of the requirements, or if obstacles stand in the way of its proper oxidation within the body, then a great part is deposited in the form of fat, instead of being burnt up into carbonic acid and water. It is hardly necessary for us to repeat, in this place, the various arguments, physiological and chemical, which have been put forward in support of this view. It must be sufficient to state that they appear tolerably conclusive, and place the albumen source of fat upon a basis which seems to us to be fairly secure.

The value of the other varieties of food in determining obesity depends, it would seem, mainly on their doing away with the necessity of the ultimate oxidation of the non-nitrogenous products of the metamorphosis of the albuminates, and so enabling them to take the form of fat and settle in the tissues, instead of making their escape by the lungs in a more volatile state of being. The formation of fat from albuminates would appear to be greatly favored by this incomplete combustion, and when fats and hydrocarbons are taken with