

all know that they do it, and none of them acknowledge it. I have only met one woman all my life who confessed that she laced tightly, and gave me something like a reason for doing so. But you may always suspect a woman who has a round waist—such as is admired; a woman's waist is not round by nature. The circle, however, is the figure into which the greatest amount of material may be most tightly packed. You may understand what I mean by buying a packet of a dozen pencils or pens. They are tightly tied in a round packet. Take one out, the packet will fall into an oval; take out another, and there will be a looser oval. Tighten the string, and the parcel will go round again. So it is with a woman's waist. Compression rounds the natural oval of her waist into what is called a fashionable figure. Try to think what it means! The muscles that run down the side of the spine, and give grace and beauty to the naked back, are atrophied. I do not profess to be learned in physiological terms, but in general phrases I may say that none of the internal organs act freely and fully; the heart is compressed, and the blood does not pulsate normally through its natural channels; the lungs are contracted, and no tight-laced woman ever practises what is called abdominal breathing, so as to allow a full current of air to purify her sluggish blood. We have all heard of Indians who, in periods of famine, tighten their hunger-belts, to prevent at once the further digestion of food and the pangs of hunger. But every tight-laced woman wears a perpetual hunger-belt, and thereby impoverishes her digestion and nutrition as well as her development. Starvation may take place in the midst of plenty, and crudities and impurities get into the blood of a spare eater that are usually associated with over-eating. The constitution that might have been strong for good is rendered feeble and dependent upon others through vanity. The thousand nameless weaknesses and languors that are supposed to be peculiar to our sex are often found only to be peculiar to the tight-lacing section of our sex. After a time girls lose the consciousness of tight lacing, but Nature will not be wronged with impunity.

There is one natural but unwelcome retribution that occasionally follows this form of wrong-doing. The consequent want of sufficient exercise, of healthy oxygenation of the blood, of nourishing food, causes large depositions of adipose tissue, so that the fashionable young girl who laces herself into a wasp-like smallness in the middle becomes a ponderous and unwieldy woman before her ripe middle age.

There was once a discussion on this subject at the British Association, and I was asked to speak. I pointed out the fact that, from the statistics of staymakers, the average size of the female waist had decreased by two inches during

the previous twenty-five years. I showed that a more general following of the foolish fashion during that period may have tempted larger numbers of women to have laced tighter than before; or that this generation may have inherited a lowered vitality, and consequently a slighter figure, from mothers who had themselves tight-laced. The question has become of tremendous importance. Are women justified, from any motives, in following fashion to an extent that not only injures their own health but tends to lower the physique of a whole country?

I have long felt this to be a national evil, and some years ago, in these pages, in considering the abnormal death-rate among English baby-boys, I suggested that the tight-lacing habits of mothers might be one of the removable causes of infant mortality.

There is no compensation for the destruction of the physical ideal of woman.

The art ideal is at the same time ignored. By tight lacing a woman prevents the natural development of a figure that may have been intended to have been the most beautiful thing in animated Nature, full of graceful curves; and she substitutes for it an inartistic absurdity fashioned after the model of a wooden Dutch doll.

The eyes of some people are blinded by custom so as to think a disproportionately small waist a pretty thing and a thing to be desired. True art ideas are based upon proportion and require the perfection of healthy development. Any standards of taste recognised by the civilised world are based upon the proportions of the old Greek statues. But there we find that a Venus, to a stature of 5 ft. 2½ in., had a waist of 26 inches! A taller figure would have had a larger waist. What modern Venus would not confess she would be "horrified" to appear in such artistic proportions as these?

As a departure from truth, this habit, therefore, becomes an aesthetic as well as a moral wrong.

The intellectual ideal of woman is wronged too, for in the strange interdependence of the spiritual, intellectual, and physical, the whole cannot rise to its highest possibilities under such conditions. I have heard a medical man gravely state: "There is no inferiority in women except through their clothes and customs"! I believe this is true. There is difference, but not necessarily inferiority, except where an artificial inferiority is induced by following unnatural habits such as this.

We want the whole intellect of women to help to regenerate the world. I consider it one of the most hopeful signs of the times in regard to the higher education of women that, in general, those women who distinguish themselves most at Universities and examinations have the largest waists. Hockey, boating and lawn tennis, and walking tours take their share in this desirable improvement, but it also depends on their rational clothing.

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