

Modern Slavery: The Dress Curse

By William James Cromie



WHAT does this modern civilization profit us? We say that we are a highly civilized race, yet the savage tribes of Southern Africa can give us lessons in health. The gulf between us and the savage is so narrow, that one can step across it with a thought. The lady reading this will probably be shocked by the fact that I compare her with a slave or savage.

Will she study this picture carefully and see whether or not she is in the grasp of the cruel hand?

I do not mean, when I say we are little better than the savage, to decry our modern institutions, representing as they do, gathered experience of ages, and applied for the good of humanity. They have their advantages, especially hospitals. But remember that we breed the sickly people who fill them. How many men are there who are not slaves to the god of overeating and indolence, and to the drink, drug, or tobacco habit. Are not many women slaves to the goddess of dress? How many a fair life has been blighted by



the tight lacing of the corset, and yet tight lacing still finds its victims. Let us say with Shakespeare, "Seest thou not what a deformed thief this fashion is?"

Let us glance for a

little at the evils of corset wearing. In figure 1 you see a body in normal health, while in figure 2 you see the victim of the corset. You will observe that the part of the body around which corsets and bands are placed has no bony structure. This pliability renders it possible for one unconsciously although easily to produce deformity in a short time. The stiffness of the corset tends to bring the hips forward and make the back straight, while it ought to have natural curves. It makes the chest flat, the shoulders round, the head projecting forward, and the abdomen prominent. You will observe that in figure 2 the body is deformed. This is the greatest evil of corset wearing, as it brings about displacement of the vital organs. By the pressure of garments at the waist line the stomach is crowded down many inches more than it should be; hence it cannot perform its functions. The liver is crowded down, causing constipation, and last, but not least, the organs of sex are impaired and diseased.

If a string is bound about the arm, the circulation of the blood in this part is impeded, thus making the blood stagnant and impure. If this constriction be placed around that part of the body, where are located the large arteries and the vital organ, what will occur? Take a piece of rubber and bind it tightly on the finger, close to the hand, and this member will soon become white, cold

and numb. In like manner when the waist is constricted the circulation is slowed, the blood flowing more slowly becomes cool, causing cold hands and

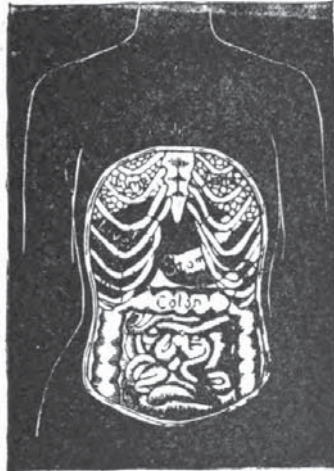


Fig. 1

feet. This chilled blood flows back to the heart more slowly, thus impairing the entire circulation. When one constricts the waist for any length of time, she becomes subject to headaches, backaches, indigestion, cold extremities, inactivity of the bowels, hysteria, "that tired feeling," depression of spirits, falling of the womb and other troubles too numerous to mention.

I imagine I hear someone say, "Surely corsets will do me no harm if I wear them loose." My friend, will you wear them loose? When you go to a party or a sociable will you not draw them in just a little tighter to make your figure look more trim (?) and slender?

Again I hear someone ask "What if one cannot hold herself up without a corset?" But she can. By the wearing of corsets the muscles of the waist are changed to fat, because there is no work for them to perform. When one removes them, that part feels weak. Read what some eminent authorities say regarding the corset curse.

Prof. N. H. Fowler closes his work upon "Fashion in Deformity" with these words: "The true form of the human body is familiar to us from

classic models. It is, however, quite possible that some of us may think the present fashionable shape the more beautiful of the two. In that case it would be well to consider whether we are sure that our judgment is sound on this subject. Let us remember that to the Australian the nose peg is an admired ornament; that to the Thlinket, the Botocudos and Congo negro, the lip dragged down by a heavy plug, and the ears distended by huge disks of wood, are things of beauty; that the Malay prefers teeth that are black. Let us carefully ask ourselves whether we are sure that in leaving nature as a standard of the beautiful, and adopting a purely conventional one, we are not falling into an error exactly similar to that of all these people whose tastes we are so ready to condemn. The fact is, that in admiring such distorted forms as the constricted waist and pointed foot, we are opposing our judgment to the maker of our bodies. We are neglecting the criterion offered by nature. We are simply putting ourselves on the level in point of taste with those Australians, Botocudos and negroes. We are taking fashion and nothing



Fig. 2

better, higher or truer for our guide."

The Chinese Minister in one of our monthly magazines lately said "The Chinese women have big waists and little feet, while the American women have little waists and big feet.

Alice B. Stockman, M. D., said : " I am a temperance woman. No one can realize more than I do, the devastation and ruin alcohol in its many forms has brought to the human family. Still I solemnly believe that in weakness and deterioration of health, the corset has more to answer for than intoxicating drinks."

Prof. O. S. Fowler writes, " Tight lacing is the chief cause of infantile mortality. That it inflicts the very worst forms of physical ruin is self-evident. No evil equals that of curtailing this maternal supply of breath, nor does anything do this as effectually as tight lacing. If it were merely a female folly, or if its ravages were confined to its preparators, it might be allowed to pass unrebuked, but it strikes a deadly blow at the very life of the race itself. By girting in the lungs, stomach, heart and diaphragm, it cripples every one of the life manufacturing functions, impairs the circulation, and lays siege to the child bearing citadel itself. By the want of abundant maternal vitality, air, exercise and digestion is this practice murderous to both. It often destroys germinal life before or soon after birth, by most effectually cramping, inflaming and weakening the vital apparatus and stopping the flow of life at its fountain head. It slowly but surely takes the lives of tens of thousands and so effectually weakens and diseases millions more as ultimately to cause their untimely death. No tongue can tell, no finite mind conceive the misery it has produced, nor the number of deaths directly or indirectly of young women, bearing mothers, and weakly infants it has occasioned ; besides the millions on millions it has caused to drag out a short but wretched existence. If the murderous practice continues another generation, it will bury all the middle and upper classes of women and children and leave propagation to the coarse grained but

healthy lower classes. Most alarmingly has it deteriorated our very race in physical strength, power and constitution, energy and talents. Let those, who had rather bury than raise their children, marry tight lacers."

" Moralists, Christians, reformers, philosophers and philanthropists of all sects and grades, come let us unite in preserving a frowning front to this race-ruining practice and bachelors insist on natural waists or no wives and frown down a practice your patronage imposes. Women will cease to lace just when you cease to require it."

The corset is not the only conventional garment that has an injurious effect upon the system. It is about as harmful to wear long heavy skirts supported by the hips, which force the organs downward with all the accompanying evils; besides the trailing skirt is a microbe catcher. The *New Castle News* of August wrote that during the scientific congress held at Rome the delegates from the various countries of Europe have come to the conclusion that long skirts are eminently dangerous to health. During the congress Dr. Philip Casagrandi demonstrated in a most original and impressive fashion the inconveniences and the sanitary perils of the garment. He sent into the streets a number of ladies carrying trailing skirts, with instructions to walk about for an hour. When the ladies returned the dangerous vestments were submitted to a microscopic examination, and on each of the skirts Dr. Casagrandi discovered whole colonies of microbes and bacilli.

The physicians determined that the germs of influenza, consumption and typhoid fever are the least of the evils which careless mothers after an hour's promenade bring home to the cradles of their children.

In view of the alarming revelations made by Dr. Casagrandi the hygienists present at the congress promptly condemned the wearing of long skirts.

