

COMPRESSION OF THE FEMALE WAIST BY STAYS.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.

GENTLEMEN,—On examining the body of a young female a few weeks ago, I was so much struck by the remarkable effects produced both on the bony framework of the body, and on the soft parts within, by the pressure of stays with tight lacing, that I am induced to ask you to give insertion to a few observations on this subject.

The female in question was 23 years of age, of middle stature, and died, it was supposed, of disease in the abdomen. For different reasons, however, it is merely the phenomena which particularly attracted my attention, that I wish to allude to. In this case there was a most satisfactory explanation given by the state of the parts, of the manner in which the female waist may be reduced to half its natural dimensions, for the lower ribs on the left side were driven upwards and inwards, so as to be folded over those of the opposite side, in such a manner, that below the xiphoid cartilage, far from there being any space between the cartilages of the lower ribs, as they mounted towards the sternum, one set was placed in front of the other.

Hence we may easily imagine what effects must have been produced on the yielding organs within. We had only time to observe the following facts:—

Thorax.—The diaphragm was driven further upwards than natural, reaching on the right side, where the liver had been pressed under it, to the level of the third rib, on the left to that of the fourth. Remembering this fact, we shall easily understand how comparatively small the space must have been for the play of the heart and lungs.

The right lung was extensively diseased. About an ounce of pale serous fluid was found in the pericardium.

The exterior circumference of the waist was about seventeen inches.

Abdomen.—The phenomenon in this cavity which most attracted my attention, was the aspect of the transverse colon, and this, we may easily suppose, cannot have been very natural, for this division of the gut, confined to a space about half the extent of that across which it is naturally stretched, was of necessity folded on itself, in such manner as must have impeded, in no inconsiderable degree, the passage of the fæces along its canal, thus giving rise to constipation of the

bowels, and indigestion, with all their attendant ills.

The abdominal cavity was exceedingly small, not only from approximation of its sides by squeezing the ribs, but also on account of the manner in which the lumbar vertebræ and linea alba were driven towards one another, so that the front of the lumbar portion of the spine could be plainly felt through the anterior abdominal parietes, before the body was opened.

It is not surprising that, in individuals such as this, the pregnant state should be one of great anxiety and suffering, and that œdema, or varicose condition of the veins of the lower extremities, obstinate costiveness, frequent vomiting, or weakness of the loins, should accompany it, or that recovery, after the efforts of parturition, should be lingering and tedious.

I have under my care at present a young lady, not yet 16, where the greatest benefit was immediately experienced by throwing aside the stays, or supports for the chest, as they are called. The spine was already crooked, lateral curvature towards the left side having taken place, which has gradually given way to treatment since the stays were abandoned. The details of this case I intend to give on a future occasion.

I am, gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

J. NOTTINGHAM,

late House Surgeon to the Liverpool
Infirmary.

Liverpool, Oct. 27, 1841.