

TIGHT-LACING IN THE PULPIT.

Rev. Mr. Haweis, in addressing a crowded congregation at St. James', Marylebone, spoke very strongly on the "Criminal Ignorance and Thoughtlessness of Tight-lacing." The chief points of his discourse are thus paraphrased in *Truth*—

What is it makes a lady's head
Feel heavy as a lump of lead?
What makes her nose's tip so red?
Tight-lacing!

What makes her cheek burn like a coal,
Her feet as cold as Arctic pole?
What cramps her body and her soul?
Tight-lacing!

What makes her temper short and sharp?
What causes her to fret and carp?
And on the smallest ills to harp?
Tight-lacing!

What checks her proper circulation,
And dulls her ordinate sensation?
What blights her babes' breeds for the nation?
Tight-lacing!

What makes her waist a wasp-like thing,
And gives her tongue a waspish sting?
What baulks her when high notes she'd sing?
Tight-lacing!

What is it, with its vice-like squeeze,
Destroys its faded victim's ease?
And brings her doctors countless fees?
Tight-lacing!

What is it that makes her gasp for breath,
And—so stern modern science saith—
Dooms her too oft to early death?
Tight-lacing!

What brings a "corn upon her heart,"
And makes her "spoiled by cruel art"
Unfit to play the mother's part?
Tight-lacing!

What tortures her into a shape
Which "ruts her liver" past escape,
And which, at most, makes *gommeux* gape?
Tight-lacing!

What beauty's lines in her destroys,
And fashion's powerful aid employs,
To crush from out her life its joys?
Tight-lacing!

What ages her before her time,
And makes her feeble ere her prime?
What tempts to a self-suffered crime?
Tight-lacing!

What, quite ignoring Nature's facts,
Her waist so cruelly contracts,
That each inch saved fresh pain exacts?
Tight-lacing!

And what bad fashion of the day
Is it that ladies now should say
They'll spurn without an hour's delay?
Tight-lacing!

MEG.

Margaret Neale, a girl of twenty or thereabouts, sat on a low, broad stone at the edge of the cliff that overhung the sea. Her features were irregular, but she had a certain dark, gypsy-like beauty of her own. Her brown stuff gown clung closely about her; her hat had fallen back, and hung carelessly by the strings; a red woollen shawl was wrapped around her shoulders, one end trailing over the scant, gray herbage. Her hands were clasped about her knees; there was a hard, set look about the unsmiling mouth; and the eyes, that were sometimes most tender, had a dangerous light in them as they gazed steadfastly off over the darkening sea to a distant horizon, still red with the reflected glow of the sunset.

At a little distance, but with his back toward her, and his steel-blue eyes just as steadfastly bent in the opposite direction, stood Matthew Erickson, a handsome young fellow enough, in the rough dress of a miner, tall, strong and ruddy, with a full, curling, chestnut beard and hair of the same rich colour. A blue ribbon dangled from his left hand.

There had evidently been a quarrel, and a love-quarrel in a straggling mining hamlet on the northwest coast of England does not differ greatly from one in a scattered fishing hamlet on the eastern coast of Maine. Forms of speech may differ, but love and anger are much the same the wide world over. As for the queer, quaint dialect in which this especial pair of lovers poured forth their mutual grievances, no attempt will be made to reproduce it here. You may be sure they said "ye" for "you," and "toid" for "told," and "ta" for "thou," and "canna" for "cannot." But all that shall be taken for granted, if not for your ease and comfort, at least for mine!

Tired of the silence at length, the young miner sauntered away with an air of assumed indifference, and picking up a handful of pebbles, slowly tossed them, one by one, into the waves below. Margaret's eyes did not waver, but none the less did she follow every motion of his hand. Having watched the fall of his last pebble, he came back and stood behind her, winding the ribbon round his finger to its evident detriment.

"So you will not wear it, Meg?" he said at last.

"No, I will not," she answered, without turning her head. "Why do you vex me? There's no more to be said about it."

"But why, Meg?" and he laid his hand on her shoulder as if with an attempt at reconciliation. "Tell me why? Surely you can do no less."

"Because—because I can't abide blue, Matt Erickson. It's hateful to me."

"But I like it, Meg! and if you cared for me you would be glad to wear a blue ribbon to the fair when I ask it."

"Why did you buy it?" she asked shortly, turning towards him by a hair's breadth. "Not to please me, that's sure!"

"Yes; to please you and to please myself. Jenny wears ribbons as blue as her own eyes, and I am sure you cannot say they are not pretty. You are just stubborn, Meg."

Poor Matt! In his uneducated, masculine blindness he could not see that the delicate color that harmonized so well with his pretty cousin's pink and white cheeks and sunny curls, was utterly unsuited to his brown Meg, who needed rich dark hues and warm reds to brighten her somewhat swarthy complexion.

And poor Meg! She had an instinctive sense of fitness that taught her this, but she was not wise enough to know how to explain it to her somewhat imperious lover. She could not say she "hated blue!"

Besides, Meg had carried a sore spot in her heart for two months; ever since this same cousin Jenny of Matt's came on a visit to Rysdyk. She was a dimpled, delicate little creature from the south—from near London, in fact—where, as Meg was very certain, everything was nicer and finer than in Lancashire. Jenny's hands were soft and white, and she had pretty gowns, as befitted the daughter of a well-to-do farmer who kept men-servants and maid-servants. And she had a pair of real gold earrings and a lace scarf! Old Mother Marley said it was real lace, but of that Meg was not quite sure. That was a height of magnificence to which she was not certain that even Jenny could attain. And Jenny had sweet little coaxing ways with her; and she was always purring around her cousin Matt like a kitten; and—and—she wore blue ribbons! Meg would none of them.

She sat for a moment as if turned to stone. Then she blazed out:

"Jenny! Jenny! I am tired of Jenny! She has turned your head with her flirting ways like a butterfly, and her yellow hair and her finery. Give your blue ribbon to her and take her to the fair—for I'll not wear it!"

"And you'll not go to the fair either?" said Matt, in tones of suppressed passion. "Is that what you mean?"

"I'll not go with you," she answered, growing cool herself as she grew angry. "Yet it's likely enough that I may go. There are plenty of lads who would be glad to take me with no ribbons at all."

With a strong effort the young man put the curb upon his tongue, but his face darkened. "You will go with me or no one, Meg," he said. "This is all nonsense—and we to be married next Michaelmas! But come," and he put out his hand to raise her from the stone; "it grows dark."

Meg still angry, but willing to be pacified if she must, allowed him to assist her, and stood beside her stalwart lover with burning cheeks and downcast eyes. She rather liked, on the whole, his tacit refusal to defend himself and his masterful way of telling her it was "all nonsense." But just at this moment, as ill-luck would have it, a small brown paper parcel dropped from the folds of her shawl. Matt stooped to pick it up. It burst open, and a yard or two of scarlet ribbon rippled over his fingers.

Now our poor Meg, not to be outdone by the fair Jenny, had bought this ribbon herself that very evening, meaning to wear it to the fair next week. But it so happened that when Matt went to Mother Marley's shop to buy his own blue love-token, he had found Dan Willis there—the only man in Rysdyk whose rivalry he had ever feared. And Dan was buying a ribbon precisely like this. Mother Marley had wrapped it in this very piece of paper. Matt was sure, and he had seen Dan put it in his pocket and walk off with it.

And now, here it was! His gift was spurned then, and his rival's accepted; and all Meg's talk about Jenny was a mere subterfuge—an excuse for a quarrel.

It was easy to see now why she had been so irritable of late, and so prone to take offence. But a man could not stand everything, and if Meg preferred Dan Willis to him, why so be it.

Yet if she would not wear his love-token she certainly should not wear Dan's. He hardly meant to do it; he was sorry the next minute. But what he did, as the tide of passion swept him off his feet for an instant, was to wind the two ribbons into a knot and throw them vehemently into the sea.

"There!" he cried; that's settled, once for all.

"And something else is settled, too, Matt Erickson," retorted Meg, in a white heat. "There'll be no marriage for us next Michaelmas, no marriage then or ever! You would strike me some day, for aught I know, if I should choose to wear a red knot rather than a blue. I'll not run the risk. I'll have nothing more to say to you while the stars shine," and darting round the cliff she was half way down to the beach before he ever thought of stopping her.

The next day Erickson, magnanimous, great-hearted fellow that he was, after all, having gotten over his quarrel from Meg's standpoint, it occurred to him that he might have drawn un-called-for inferences. Dan Willis might have a dozen sweethearts who all liked red ribbons for aught he knew. And how like a fool he had behaved, losing his temper like a hot-headed boy and throwing Meg's poor little trinkets over the cliff. No wonder she was afraid to trust him. More than one husband in Rysdyk was in

the habit of beating his wife on as slight provocation as the hue of a ribbon; and it was not strange that a high-spirited girl like Meg should decline to run the risk after she had once seen him in a fury.

As for Jenny—she had come in between him and Meg. He could see it now. But she was going home the day after the fair, and he would see Meg that very night and tell her so. For he did not dream that all was indeed over between them. He could hardly wait for the hour to leave the mine.

He changed his soiled clothes, ate his supper hurriedly, and was soon on his way to Meg, stopping as he went to buy another ribbon—red, this time, and broader and richer and handsomer than the one he had robbed her of.

Then he went on through the crooked, scattered little village till he reached the Widow Neale's cottage just on the outskirts.

To his surprise he found the door locked and the shutters closed. As he stood in his perplexity, a white-haired archie who was throwing somersets near by shouted: "Ho, you, Matt Erickson! It's no good to wait there. The widow and Meg have gone away."

"Gone? Where?"

"Don't know. To France, like enough—or to Ameriky—or to London—or somewhere. They took a big box and a bundle, and they don't know but they'll stay forever'n ever. Meg said so," and, making a rotating wheel of himself, the lad vanished round the corner.

Just then the door of the nearest cottage opened, and a woman's face looked out. It was growing dark.

"Is it you, Erickson? There's no one at home in the house there. But I have something here I was to give you when you come this way."

His face was stern and set and white in the fading light, as he took the little packet from the woman's hand.

"Where have they gone?" was all he said.

"I don't just know. To visit some of their kinfolk a great way off," the widow said. "Oh! but she's a close-mouthed one, she is—and Meg's a bit like her. They're not gossip folk. You never get much out of them," she added with an injured air.

"Not but I've found them good neighbours enough, but they're rather high and mighty for commoners."

As soon as he was out of sight Matthew Erickson opened the packet. He knew what was in it before he untied the knot, a string of curiously carved beads with a strange, foreign, spicy odor, that he bought of a wandering sailor and fastened round Meg's neck one happy night, and two or three other trifles he had given her. And he found this note slowly and painfully written, badly spelled, perhaps, and not punctuated at all. But what of that? The meaning was plain enough; all too plain, Matt thought, as he drew his hand across his eyes as if to clear his vision.

"I gave you back your truth last night. Here are the beads, and the silver piece, and the heron feathers. Now all is over between us." Here she had evidently hesitated a moment, wondering if her words were strong enough; for, on the line below she had written, as with an echo from the prayer-book reverberating in her ears: "Forever and forever, amen. Margaret Neale."

Not Meg, his Meg, his proud, high-spirited sweetheart—but Margaret Neale! It set her at such an immeasurable distance from him. "All is over between us." As if she were dead, and buried out of his sight. And he had spoken to James Ray about the snug cottage beyond the bay; and they were to have been married at Michaelmas!

He knew enough of the Widow Neale's habits to ask no more questions of the neighbours. As one of them had said, she was close-mouthed. He knew she had a sister living in Scotland, for whom Meg was named; but where even he did not know. Scotland was like a distant, foreign land to the people in Rysdyk. But the widow had money enough to go to Scotland or farther if she wished, even on such short notice. She had never worked in the mines, neither had Meg. She had a comfortable annuity, left her by her old mistress; for she had served in a great family before she married John Neale.

Month after month passed. Michaelmas was over, the winter came and went, and Rysdyk knew no more of her or of Meg than when they left. The silence, the void, grew unendurable to Matt. With the early spring he carried into effect what had been the one dream of his life before he learned to love Meg. America was the land of promise for miners as well as others; and had he not a friend who worked in the great iron mines at Ishpeming, on the shores of the wonderful Northern lake that was itself almost as large as all England? He had no father or mother, only a half-uncle whose house had been the only home he had ever known.

What better could he do than to seek work and forgetfulness together, where there would be nothing to remind him of the past?

So, when one fine morning, nearly a year after her sudden flitting, the neighbours awoke to find the door of Widow Neale's cottage ajar and the shutters open, the great bit of news Meg heard was that Matt Erickson had gone to America.

It struck her like a blow. Now, indeed, he had dropped out of her life as utterly as, months since, she had dropped out of his. For she, too, had time to repent. Almost before the blue hills of Scotland had dawned upon her sight she had repented in dust and ashes. How foolish she had been, like a child who throws away

its bread in a pet and goes to bed hungry. Why had she not worn the blue ribbon to please her lover, even if she did not like it? As for Jenny—but what nonsense was that! She would have been ashamed of Matt if he had not been kind to her.

To be sure, he had been cross and had thrown away her ribbon. But then he was a man, and men were strong and masterful and could not bear contradiction, and she had angered him by her foolish persistence.

Ah! If she could but undo it all and have her tall, brave, handsome lover back again!

She would have turned round and gone back to Rysdyk the very next day if she could have had her way. But a journey was a journey to people of their rank and condition, and her mother, who had taken it to please her and somewhat against her own will, was not to be blown about like a feather by her caprices. She had suspected a love quarrel was at the bottom of Meg's sudden and impetuous desire to go immediately on a visit to her Aunt Margaret in Kilmarnock. But once being there the old lady was determined to have "the worth of her money" before she went back. She could not afford to go jaunting round the country, she said, as if she were the queen herself, with all parliament at her back. When she had had her visit out she would go home, and not before. Meg was a good girl, but she was a bit hot-tempered. This lesson would do her good.

But why, do you ask, did not Meg write to her lover, if she felt she had been in the wrong? And why did no wiser ones than she always do the best thing, the right thing? Besides, she was a woman, and a proud one. After having discarded her lover she would not forthwith fall at his feet and ask him to marry her. But, ah! she thought, as the long slow days wore on, if she could but look upon his face once more, he would know all without the telling.

There was another reason. Writing was a hard and unaccustomed task. She could not talk with her pen. Sometime, if the good God would let her see Matt face to face, she might be able to explain. But she could not write.

And now after all the months of waiting, she was back in Rysdyk, but he—she was in America. It was as if he had gone out of the world. One day she went to the rectory and asked Miss Agnes to let her look at a map of America. The young lady did so and showed her England, also, and the wide waste of waters that lay between the two. What a speck England was, to be sure! Then she asked to be shown Lake Superior, and Miss Agnes pointed it out, wonderingly. How far it was! As far from the sea board, almost, as the width of the Atlantic itself.

She turned away with a long, shuddering sigh. Hope was dead within her. Matthew Erickson had gone out of her little world into another of which she knew nothing. He would have been nearer if he had been dead.

Once in a while, as the years went on, at rare intervals news of him came back to Rysdyk. He was well; he had fair wages, though gold was not to be had for the gathering in America any more than in England; he had been promoted and had charge of a gang of men. At length there was a long interval of silence. Then came the floating rumours of ill; then after awhile a letter in a strange handwriting, a letter to his uncle, who had died three weeks before it came. There had been a bad accident in the mine—an explosion; and in the effort to save others, Matthew Erickson had himself received dangerous injuries. No one thought he could live. But now, after months, he was slowly recovering, if recovery it could be called. For he was blind. The poisonous vapours had destroyed his sight.

It was five years since he went away—five years that had brought many changes to Meg. It was sobered, thoughtful woman, not a hot-tempered girl, who knelt by the Widow Neale's side a week after the letter came and said:

"Mother, have I been a good, faithful child to you these many years?" Her mother looked at her wonderingly. Two quiet women living alone, they were not in the habit of being over demonstrative.

"A good child? Why do you ask that, Meg? I ever had a better in all Lancashire!"

"Have I ever vexed you or given you sorrow?"

Tell me, mother."

"No," said the Widow Neale slowly. "Only—it vexes me that you will not marry; an old maid's no good, and you know that two of the best men in Rysdyk worship the very ground you tread on this day. I call no names and I say nothing. A woman must answer for herself. I wish you were married, Meg. I've saved up a good penny for your dowry; you know that."

"Yes," she said, her lips quivering.

"Whatever was the reason you did not have Matt Erickson?" her mother went on querulously. "You'd been a proud wife now, and he here, hale and hearty."

With a quick gasp Meg threw up both arms, and then buried her face in her mother's lap, sobbing vehemently, while the latter sat agast, frightened at the storm she had unwittingly raised. At last she touched her daughter's hair softly.

"Don't, Meg," she said. "I did not mean it."

But Meg only drew the wrinkled hands about her neck, and let her tears flow unchecked. At length she looked up.

"It was I who drove him away—Matt Erickson," she said. "We had a little quarrel, just