RECONCILIATION.

A NEW YEAR'S STORY.

BY HENRY CRESSWELL.

It was with the air of a man profoundly indifferent to his successes that Gerard Strickland, twitching his cuffs and stretching his arms, before letting his hands fall into his lap, sank back into the luxurious arm-chair by his library fire, after throwing on the table the letter that announced his promotion to an enviable post in the Civil Service. As he thought of the post, his advancement seemed to him no subject for congratulation, but only one of those grim jests with which fortune delights to mock disappointed men.

An old man servant, one of a sort growing rare, entered the room with an evening paper. He laid it at his master's side and stood at a respectful distance waiting, half hesitating, with some anxiety legible in his countenance.

"Well, Thomas?" asked Strickland.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but do you remember what day it is to-day?"

"No, Thomas."

"Your wedding day sir!"

Strickland's face clouded.

"I did not know, sir, whether you would wish for dinner the same wine as—as you used to have."

"No Thomas; I shall probably dine at the club."

"I ordered dinner, as usual, sir, and a bouquet, in case———"

"Quite right, Thomas, quite right."

For an instant the heart of the promoted official sank. The fidelity of his old domestic was humiliating. How he would once have resented the suggestion that Thomas would remember this anniversary better than himself. And that it should fall to the old servant to order from the florist the bouquet Gerard himself had been formerly so proud to bring home on this evening to his wife! But the slight sense of annoyance passed away quickly. It was with absolute indifference that, seeing the man servant still waiting, he asked:

"Anything else, Thomas?"

"This morning when you had but just gone a young lady called. Hearing you were not at home she said she would call again this evening about six. She wishes to see you on important business."

"Her name?"

"She left none."

"Did you see her?"

"No sir."

"Did John say what she was like?"

"Rather tall, sir; a young lady, dark and fashionably dressed."

"If she calls I will see her. You may go, Thomas." The servant left and Strickland continued to himself: "Tall, young, dark, well-dressed, business with me. Who can she be?"

"The lady is here, sir, in the drawing-room," said Thomas, returning to the library after about ten minutes.

Strickland went to the drawing-room. At the door he paused a moment to steal a look at his visitor. She stood by one of the tables, idly turning the leaves of a photograph album. Her back was toward him, and he could distinguish only the tall and graceful figure of a woman, well-dressed, and wearing expensive laces.

"Madam!" he said, advancing.

The lady turned. Strickland started as if he had received an electric shock. To conceal, to the best of his ability, his surprise and the sudden pallor of his face, he made her a profound bow.

"I hope I am not inconveniencing you," she said, at the time returning his salute. Then, with a quiet ease, she selected a chair and sat down.

"Not in the least; I am at your service," said Strickland.

"As I shall avail myself of your condescension, I hope that was not merely a compliment."

"May I ask you how I can oblige you?"

The lady stroked the soft fur of her muff and once or twice lifted her searching eyes to his face. Apparently she was hesitating to name the purpose of her visit. Meanwhile Strickland gratified his eyes with a good look at her, lovely, fascinating still as the first day he had seen her. Only her pure profile had gained more decision and her eyes had a profounder meaning than when he last looked into them, as those of a woman who had lived and suffered.

At length she said:

"Do you still correspond with my father?"

"Yes. It is, however, a fortnight since I last wrote to him."

"I received a letter from him yesterday. He is coming to town to-morrow."

This time Strickland made no attempt to conceal his surprise.

"To-morrow! Your father, who never leaves home!"

"The medical men ordered him to the South and he will on his way stop in town to spend the night with—"

She paused.

"His daughter," said Strickland.

"He says his son. And so we find ourselves in a pleasant embarrassment."

She leant back, and with a small hand began drubbing a waltz on the table at her side.

"You call it pleasant?" said Strickland.

"I did not come here to discuss words, but to discover a plan of action."

"I see none."

"And you are a politican, a man of genius! If those subtle arts, that have been so successfully employed in your own advancement, could be, without prejudice to you, this once employed to extricate me from—"

"Excuse me, madam; but your reproaches are scarcely likely to assist me to exercise my imagination."

"Bah! Well, I have a plan. First, I do not wish, cost what it may, to let my father know—the truth."

"The unhappy truth!"

She made a little grimace, and proceeded: "My father would be cruelly hurt, and the sins of the children ought not to be visited upon their parents. My remorse—I beg your pardon, that is of little consequence here"—she looked aside to warn him not to expostulate, and continued: "Hitherto, thanks to our precautions, the distance of my father's residence and the seclusion in which he prefers to live, he has been spared this sorrow. To-morrow our clever edifice of dutiful falsehood falls to the ground, and I, at least, am unable to conjecture the consequences."

"And I."

"Mr. Strickland, it is absolutely necessary to prevent this scandal. I trust you will assist me. My father must find us together; and we must avoid everything that would awaken suspicion."

She spoke sadly, as well as earnestly. A deep shadow of concern settled on her hearer's face. Wrapped in thought, he delayed the answer. His visitor became impatient.

"Your promised courtesy costs too much?" she demanded.

"No. I am ready. But I see many difficulties. The servants?"

"Give the new man-servant I found here this morning a holiday. I will speak to Thomas."

"If a friend should call?"

"You will see no one."

"If we meet your father, people will see us together."

"We will go in a closed carriage."

"Your father will stay here several hours. Good and simple-hearted as he is, do you believe it possible he will not recognize a—bachelor's house?"

"I will send my work, my music, and so on this evening. The room?"

"Is as you left it."

"Sentimentality?"

"No—respect."

"Have you any further objections?"

"None. It remains to be seen whether we shall be able to deceive Mr. Gregory."

"By playing the affectionate couple. Can you remember your grimaces and fooleries of two years ago?" she asked, sarcastically.

"No; I have forgotten them," replied Strickland, with a frown.

And the two looked into each other's eyes, like two duelists.

"When will you come here?" asked Strickland.

"This evening. I will bring my things, and I shall slightly disarrange this and that. I hope I shall not inconvenience you. You are not expecting anyone?"

"No one. I was going out. If you wish, I will stay and assist you. My engagement is unimportant."

"Pray go. We should have to talk and we have nothing to say to each other."

"Nothing. Will you dine here."

"No, thanks; I'll go home now and return bye and bye."

She rose. Strickland bowed in response to her bow, conducted her to the door without another word, and returned with a sense of relief to the library.

When he returned home, shortly after midnight, the house had resumed an aspect long strange to it. Lights were burning in the drawing-room, and a little alteration in the arrangement of the furniture had restored to the room a forgotten grace. Bouquets of flowers filled the vases and a faint sweetness of violets floated about the hall and staircase. The piano was open, and some music stood on the bookstand. On the boudoir table was a work basket. By the hearth his visitor was sitting in a low chair, her little feet half buried in the bear-skin rug, and her head reposed on her hand, whilst she gazed wistfully into the fire.

Was it a dream? Bertha's flowers: Bertha's music. Bertha herself in her home again! Two years' misery cancelled in an evening. In a moment rushed across his memory a golden wooing, a proud wedding, happy months, and the bitter day of separation. He turned away, and passed to his room, saying, "Good night!"

"Good night," replied his wife, without moving.

The strange event that had taken place in Gerard Strickland's house prevented none of its inmates enjoying a wholesome night's rest. Bertha, persuaded that to-morrow's comedy could effect no real change in her relation to her husband, went to her room with the feelings of one who spends a night in a hotel. Strickland, similarly, regarding the past as irremediable, read in bed for half an hour, and then fell asleep.

To get married they had both committed a thousand follies. After meeting her at a table d'hote Strickland had pursued her half over Europe, vanquished the difficulties of an approach to her father in his secluded country house and ultimately, assisted by the lady's prayers and tears, gained the old man's reluctant consent to surrender his idolized daughter. The young married people, passionately attached to each other, enjoyed fifteen months of remarkable happiness and then came the end.

Bertha became jealous. Devoted to her husband, proud, hasty, immoderate in all her thoughts and emotions, she resented, with all the intensity of her nature, a meeting between Strickland and a former flame, a dance, a note, half an hour's conversation. The husband unfortunately met her passionate expostulations with the disdainful insouciance of an easy temperament. The inevitable consequence ensued, a bitter misunderstanding. An impudent servant, a malicious acquaintance, half a-dozen venomous tongues, lashed the wife's jealousy into madness. An explanation demanded from her husband was refused with a sneer. He had begun to think her a proud, unloving woman, and under the circumstances, judged self-justification ridiculous. The following morning, she entered his library and with marvellous calmness, without quavering over a single word, announced to him their immediate separation—for ever. Taken by surprise Strickland tried to temporize, acknowledged he had been thoughtless, did all in a man's power to avoid the rupture. Bertha only replied so proudly and with so much severity that self-respect forbade him further self-defense. They separated. Strickland externally bore his misfortune with quietness, and, in counsel with his own conscience, concluded his life broken and ruined by his own want of tact. The husband and wife met two or three times as people who barely know each other. He devoted himself to professional duties, resumed some of his bachelor habits and amused himself as he could. She led a quiet, almost solitary life, restricting her pleasures to such simple enjoyments as she could provide herself at home and seldom appearing in public. On one point both agreed—to write regularly to Bertha's father, repeating such stereotyped phrases as, "Bertha is well and sends her love. I believed she wrote to you a few days ago." "Gerard is well and at present very busy. He will not this year be able to accompany me to the seaside."

It will be easily believed that to go to her husband's house and to ask a favor of him had cost Bertha's pride a struggle. "For papa's sake; for papa's sake!" she repeated to herself, to steel her nerves to the humiliation, which, however, Strickland's cold courtesy had considerably lessened. If he would be equally considerate on the morrow, a little spirit, a little self-command, and some clever pretending might enable them safely to conduct her father through the few hours to be spent in town, to set him off from Victoria, and with a polite bow, to separate and return to their several existences.

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Dinner was ended, Mr. Gregory smiled contentment and happiness, and the two actors at the opposite ends of the table of necessity smiled too.

Their parts had proved difficult. From the moment of the old gentleman's arrival they had had to call each other by their Christian names and to use the little endearments of two people still in love. More than once, a word, an intonation, that sounded like an echo of the dead past, made Strickland pale and Bertha tremble. Their embarassment momentarily increased. The more perfect their dissimulation, the bitterer was the secret remorse that wrung the hearts of both of them, whilst they exchanged for meaningless things, words, looks and smiles, once the most sacred signs of affection. With the fear of betraying themselves by an indiscretion was intermixed another, a misgiving lest, while they acted affection, they should be guilty of real feelings warmer than the courteous indifference with which they desired to regard each other.

On the stairs, when Mr. Gregory, preceding them, was for an instant out of sight, Bertha turned back and bestowed on her husband a grim look of fatigue that meant, "How are we to continue this?"

"'Tis only till to-morrow, Bertha," he replied in an undertone, wishing to help her. But the Christian name which, because he had in the last two hours used it so frequently, unwittingly slipped from his lips, caused her to turn her face away with an angry frown.

By the fire in the back drawing room Mr. Gregory appeared actuated by a desire to ask all the most awkward questions, and to broach all the topics of conversation most difficult for his host and hostess.

"Letters are welcome, Bertha," he said, "when people can not meet, but I have enjoyed my little visit more than all the pages you have sent me. There is very little in letters. Don't you think your wife grows handsomer, Strickland?"

"I tell her so every day."

"And so he tells me, Bertha. His letters are all about you. You have a model husband, my dear."

"I have, papa."

Strickland hung his head and regarded the pattern of the carpet.

"I should like to see your house, Bertha," said Mr. Gregory, after a moment

The little party sat out on a tour of the mansion. After an inspection of several rooms, as Strickland preceded them into the breakfast-room, the father stopped his daughter and said:

"Bertha, where is your mother's portrait?"

"The frame had got shabby and we have sent it to be regilt," replied the daughter, promptly.

"Where does it generally hang?"

"There."

She assigned to the picture, which she had taken away with her, the first empty space on the wall that met her eye.

"I don't think that a very good place!" said the old man. "Ah, what a woman she was! What a wonderful woman! You should have known her, Strickland. You owe her your wife. When she was leaving me, poor dear! she made me promise never to hesitate to make any sacrifice that should be for Bertha's happiness; and so, when my little girl came to me and said, 'Papa, I can never be happy without Gerard,' I thought of my dear wife and let her go. I feared, when I sent her abroad, I should lose her. Well, you were made for each other. Do you remember your first meeting in Paris?"

They remembered it.

The tour of the house was completed, and they returned to the drawing-room, Gerard and his wife congratulating themselves, not without reason, that the good papa was not very observant, for many a token of something abnormal had been plain enough.

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With a common sigh of relief the two actors sank into their respective corners of their carriage, after seeing Mr. Gregory off the next morning. Not a word was spoken. Bertha watched the drops of rain that trickled down the windows. Gerard studied the back of the coachman. They had again become strangers. Presently, moving accidentally, Strickland touched his wife's arm.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"Pray do not mention it."

Perfect strangers! Yet both in the silence were anxiously meditating every event of the last few days, remembering the most trifling impression and studying all they signified. As they past near a cross street the husband asked:

"Shall I drive you to your own house?"

"I am coming to yours to superintend the packing. My maid can not do it alone."

On arriving the wife at once went to her chamber. Strickland, conscious of utter purposelessness, returned to the back drawing-room and took up the paper. Bertha passed backward and forward. Once or twice he caught a glimpse of her moving about the room. At last he looked up.

"You will tire yourself," he said; "can not I assist you?"

"No, thank you. I have nearly done."

A few minutes later she came and seated herself on the opposite side of the fire. She appeared tired. As she sat she looked around to see if anything had been forgotten.

"I think it rains less," said Strickland, who had laid down the paper.

"No. It rains just the same as before."

"Is the carriage ready?"

"I have sent to know."

The carriage would be ready in ten minutes. Those ten minutes seemed an eternity. When the servant entered to say the carriage waited, Bertha rose and stood for a little while before the mirror, arranging her laces and ribbons with difficulty, for her fingers trembled. Then she slowly drew on her gloves and turned towards her husband. He had risen and was standing waiting.

"Good morning," she said, bowing slightly.

He bowed, but made no reply. She turned and quietly, with calm, even step walked from the room. She could hear that he followed her.

They were in the hall. Suddenly he stepped to her side.

"Bertha! You are not going without first forgiving me?" he exclaimed in a voice mingled with grief and passion.

She turned round, and in an instant had thrown herself into his arms.

"Darling! you will never leave me again?"

"No, no, love. Never!"

The newest fur collars are deep and pointed, forming a V at the back, and coming to a point at the waist-line in front.

Ants and Butterflies.

In a recent number of the "Journal" of the Bombay Natural History Society, Mr. Lionel de Niceville describes the manner in which the larvæ of a species of butterfly (*Taurcus theophrastus*, Fabricius) are cultivated and protected by the large common black ants of Indian gardens and houses. As a rule ants are the most deadly and inveterate enemies of butterflies, and ruthlessly destroy and eat them whenever they get the chance; but in the present case the larvæ exude a sweet liquid of some sort, of which the ants are inordinately fond, and which they obtain by stroking the larvæ gently with their antennæ. Hence the great care which is taken of them. The larvæ feed on a small thorny bush of the jungle, the *Zizyphus Jujuba*, and at the foot of this the ants construct a temporary nest. About the middle of June, just before the rains set in, great activity is observable on the tree. The ants are busy all day running along the branches and leaves in search of the larvæ, and guiding and driving them down the stem of the tree towards the nest. Each prisoner is guarded until he is got safely into his place, when he falls off into a doze and undergoes his transformation into a pupa. If the loose earth at the foot of the tree is scraped away hundreds of larvæ and pupæ in all stages of development, arranged in a broad, even band all round the trunk, will be seen. The ants object to uncovering them, and immediately set to work to put the earth back again; if this is taken away again, they will remove all the chrysalids and bury them lower down. When the butterfly is ready to emerge in about a week it is tenderly assisted to disengage itself from its shell, and, should it be strong and healthy, is left undisturbed to spread its wings and fly away. For some time after they have gained strength they remain hovering over their old home. In one case a butterfly fell to the ground before its opening wings had dried, and a soldier-ant tried to rescue it. He carried it back to the tree with the utmost care, and made several attempts to assist the butterfly to hold on again, but finding his efforts unavailing he left the cripple to recover himself. On his return, seeing no improvement, he appeared to lose all patience, and, rushing in, bit off both wings and carried the body into the nest. But high handed proceedings of this kind are very unusual. It is said to be a curious sight to watch the fragile and delicate butterflies wandering about, all feeble and helpless, among the busy crowd of coarse black ants, and rubbing shoulders in perfect safety with the ordinary fierce, big-headed soldiers. A larva of another species thrown down among them as an experiment was immediately set upon and torn to pieces by the ants.

Fillmore and the Hen.

In the first quarter of this century a party of travellers was journeying down the Missouri in a flat boat. The river was covered with floating ice, and provisions were scarce, but the men were young, possessed of much more wit than money, and able to extract plenty of fun out of the danger and privation.

One evening two of them, a school teacher and a Frenchman, went ashore to buy provisions at a farm house. The teacher offered half a dollar to the farmer's wife for a motherly old hen that was scratching about the yard. She refused with a torrent of abuse.

His comrade, who was lounging over the gate, whispered, "Offer another bit."

"Five bits!" said the teacher.

The woman hesitated, then, to her amazement, the hen squeaked out:

"I'm not worth it. I'm four years old! I'm not worth it!"

The teacher started back in dismay; the farmer's wife, regaining her courage, chased the hen, and caught it up in her arms.

"Take two bits! It's all I'm worth!" it said, flapping wildly in her arms.

She ran, pale with terror, to the Frenchman and put it in his hands, screaming out: —"Take it away! It's bewitched!"

The young man threw the money back to her, and carried off the hen.

Many years afterwards, among the crowd in the East room of the White house which attended one of the receptions of President Fillmore, was the kindly old Signor Blitz, well-known to all the children of the Eastern States as a ventriloquist. When he was introduced to the President the two men looked at each other a moment and then burst into a laugh.

"You never thought to see me here," said Mr. Fillmore. "Now for the first time I understand the mystery of the old hen!"—[Chicago Herald.

The French Barber.

French barbers, writes Blakely Hall, wrap the end of a towel over the fingers of their left hand, and when it is necessary to touch the face at all it is the towel that comes into contact with it and not the barber's hand. The main point about their work is the swiftness and dexterity with which they shave. In America a man usually reconciles himself to be fifteen or twenty minutes in the chair, and five minutes of it is spent in dodging hair tonics, bay rum, brillintine, face lotions and powder. The French use none of these things. They lather a man's face very slightly, run over it with a razor, sponge it off, and the man dries it himself with a towel and leaves the shop five or six minutes after he had entered it. Very many Frenchmen shave twice a day if they are going out in the evening, and it is the regular custom to step into a barber's on their way to dinner and get shaved after they have assumed evening dress. There is no pomatum or cosmetic of any sort used, so that the "barber's smell" is agreeably lacking.

Lucky She Didn't Sneeze.

She was a remarkably fine grown girl, and as they came down the staircase from the supper room she hung lovingly upon her lover's arm.

"You didn't really mean that you thought my dress was too tight, did you, Mr. Pitcher?"

"I'm afraid I did—but then it doesn't matter; you haven't got a cold."

"Haven't got a cold, why, what of that?"

"What of that? Why, you're very lucky, that's all."

"Lucky, why?"

"Because there's no fear of your sneezing. If you happened to sneeze, by George, you'd have nothing on."—[New York Mercury.

Will the firemen hang their hose?

Warm Weather in Australia.

The most remarkable feature of the Australian climate is the hot wind. The flat, sandy interior of the continent resembles the deserts of North Africa and Arabia, and the winds, therefore are very similar. Immense quantities of sand are drifted about by the wind and carried beyond the coast a considerable distance out to sea. On Jan. 21, 1845, Capt. Start's thermometer rose to 151 degrees in the shade; the mean temperature of December was 101 degrees, for January 104 degrees, and for February 101 degrees. So parched was the ground that there were great cracks in it from eight to ten feet deep. At Cooper's Creek on Nov. 11, 1845, he experienced one of these hot-air currents, and thus describes it: "The wind which had been blowing all morning from northeast, increased to a gale, and I shall never forget its withering effects. I sought shelter behind a large gum tree, but the blasts of heat were so terrific that I wondered the very grass did not take fire; everything, both animate and inanimate, gave way before it; the horses stood with their backs to the wind and their noses to the ground, the birds were mute, and the leaves of the trees fell like a shower around us. At noon I took out my thermometer, graduated to 127 degrees, and put it in the fork of a tree, and an hour afterward, when I went to examine it, the tube was full of mercury and the bulb had burst; about sunset the wind had shifted to west, and a thunder-cloud passed over us, but only a few drops of rain fell." The bursting of the instrument shows that the temperature was much higher than 127 degrees, the glass being unable to resist the expansion of the mercury. Vegetation suffers greatly from the parching character of this wind. Plants droop, leaves shrivel as if frost-bitten, and wheat crops have been destroyed. Its intense dryness is shown by the relative humidity falling to zero, and evaporation amounting to an inch of water a day. High up in the mountains to the east and southeast, in the midst of a frosty morning, occasional hot blasts are felt from the interior, and they cause a peculiar irritation of the nostrils and throat. Although disagreeable as heated air and fatal to vegetation, this dry wind, like that of India, is healthy. The dry climate is practically free from miasmatic diseases.

Prof. Huxley's Honour.

The council of the Royal Society, in selecting Prof. Huxley to be the recipient of the Copley medal for this year, have worthily acquitted themselves of the annual trust with which they have to deal. What may be considered a crowning honour has thus been conferred upon one illustrious among biologists, and illustrious during the years of a busy life as an exponent to the people of scientific aims. Last year the medal was given to Sir Joseph Hooker, who was as the "Life and Letters" testify, intimately connected with Darwin's projects and work, and it is appropriate that the succeeding award has been made to Prof. Huxley, if only on the score of his having taken so large a part in what he himself has termed "the reception of the 'Origin of Species'" The Copley medal, by common consent, is reserved for distinguished savants, who necessarily form the select few. Certainly Prof. Huxley is one of them. What is peculiar to him is the literary gift that he adds to his scientific attainments. No one was more alive to this than Darwin himself. "People complain," he wrote to Prof. Huxley 20 years ago, "of the unequal distribution of wealth; but it is a much greater shame and injustice that anyone should have the power to write so many brilliant essays as you have lately done. There is no one who writes like yon."

Green-Hair and Whiskers.

The "Territorial Enterprise" says: A contract has been let on the Martin White mine at Ward, Nevada, and work is to be resumed forthwith. A queer phenomenon is connected with the working of the Martin White ore. The ore is very base, and it is necessary to roast the whole of it. During the roasting process no disagreeable or deleterious fumes are observable, yet the hair and beards of all the men engaged about the works are soon dyed a bright and permanent green. Even the eyebrows of the workmen are as green as grass. In scores of Nevada mines ores of various kinds are smelted and roasted, but at none of them is either the hair or beards of the workmen changed from their natural hue. It is said that there is less arsenic in the ore of the Martin White than in that of many other mines. Old smelters say arsenic has no such effect on the hair, and all declare that the emerald hue imparted to the hair is due to the presence of some unknown and mysterious metal or mineral. White, light, and sandy beards and hair take a grass green, whereas black or dark brown hair is dyed a deep bottle green. The hair is not injured by its change of color. It retains its original softness and strength.

The Man of Many Passes.

Life with the general passenger agent of a railroad is one continued round of pleasure. He is about the only official connected with the management of a railroad who can travel around the country without money and without price. His fat pocketbook contains the magical open sesame to all lines of road in the country, and he also possesses the privileges of the sleeping cars and the dining cars. When the general freight agent travels he has his annual railroad passes, but he is obliged to produce to the representatives of the sleeping car companies and pay the usual tariff for his meals in the dining cars. A general passenger agent can start for New York with only his collection of annuals and the price of two cocktails and return home with the entire outfit, as some one will certainly turn up to purchase his cocktails for him. To paraphrase the old time chestnut, the general passenger agent could go around the world with a paper collar and a $2 bill and change only the collar.

Muffs are larger than for several seasons past, and are in soft, round shapes, none of the lining showing on the outside.

An exchange contains an article entitled "How to make prayer meetings interesting." To any one who gives the matter a little thought it must appear strange that advice on such a subject should be necessary. If any body of men or women were to approach an early authority praying for something which they earnestly desired there would be no lack of interest in the proceedings so far as they were concerned. Whose fault is it that any prayer meetings are uninteresting?