

A New Year's Gift

By CHARLES HERVEY

ONLY one day more, sollo- quized the Baron de Croix Martel as he put the finishing stroke to his toilet and contemplated his well waxed iron gray moustache with less satisfaction than he would probably have felt had not his mind been otherwise preoccupied.

"One short December day," he went on after a pause, "and every likely place already explored twice over except the quay. I wonder who the idiot was who first invented New Year's gifts? Not one of my ancestors. I'll engage. The Croix-Martels date from the crusades and, I dare say, have been guilty of follies enough since then, but I won't do the injustice of supposing that they ever threw away more money than they could possibly help."

With this comforting reflection the Baron took up his hat, gloves and cane and sallied forth from his little apartment in the Rue Godot on the errand for which he was bound.

Our hero was a bachelor not so much from choice as from his inability hitherto to discover what he considered a suitable part. Tall, thin and just turned fifty, he was sufficiently good tempered when nothing occurred to put him out of humor and as notorious a miser as ever existed since the days of Harpagon and John Elwes.

Perhaps the most disagreeable necessity to which he periodically submitted was complying with the (to him) detestable custom of celebrating the advent of New Year's day by a distribution of presents, a drain on his purse which, although he took care to confine his liberality within the narrow limits, was even in its modified form inexpressibly painful to him.

The twenty franc piece he felt bound to offer his concierge caused him an annual pang, and the question of 2 francs to the waiter of the little restaurant where he was in the habit of dining when not invited elsewhere lay heavy on his conscience even after appropriating to his own use—which no one but himself ever dreamed of doing—the cigar tied up with pink ribbon presented to him as a "reminder" and retained by his owner to be offered in turn to every customer in the room.

These, however, were minor grievances compared with what he was suffering on the last day of the year.

In the course of the preceding six months he had made the acquaintance of the Comtesse de Franchimont, a Belgian widow with two daughters who had recently settled in Paris and who was, according to report, in possession of a handsome fortune. Naturally partial to society when it cost him nothing, he had by degrees become a habitual frequenter of her party apartments in the Rue de Marignan and had established himself there to a certain extent as l'ami de la maison.

Mme. de Franchimont was barely forty and did not look her age. As for Mlle. Berthe, the brune, and Mlle. Louise, the blond, they were both charming and perfectly aware of the fact. In this pleasant circle the Baron soon made himself entirely at home. When he did not dine there he generally dropped in of an evening or occupied a seat in their box at the opera.

This continued intimacy, with its many contingent advantages, he had hitherto enjoyed without scruple, but the time was at hand when, in accordance with Parisian usages, the hospitalities he had received must be adequately returned.

For days and weeks he had wandered from place to place like a perturbed spirit in quest of some object suitable for his purpose. He had dived into obscure passages and emerged at the other end with the disheartening consciousness of failure and had pored over the stock of half the curiosity shops in the capital without unearth a single pearl of price within the limits of his own.

In short, the worthy Baron was at his wit's end and as a last resource resolved to explore the refuge of the

regulate, the quay, from the Pont Royal to the Pont des Arts.

He had already exhausted the Quai Voltaire and the Quai Malaquais and was on the point of retracing his steps when the recollection of an old bric-a-brac establishment in the adjoining Rue de Seine struck him as a hitherto unsuspected locality. Taking, therefore, the turn opposite the Mazarin library, he speedily discovered on his right hand the object of his search and entered the shop. A few minutes' examination and a question or two sufficed to convince him that his unlucky star was still in the ascendant, and he was about to resume his walk when some broken pieces of china lying in a corner caught his eye.

"What is that?" he asked the dealer.

"What it is now, you see, M. le Baron, but what it was before my shopman let it fall and smashed it to bits you can have no idea. I never saw a finer vase, real old Dresden, worth a couple of thousand francs if it was worth a sou. They say it once belonged to Mme. du Barry."

"Ah!" said the Baron, looking attentively at the heap of fragments and poking at them with his cane. "Can not it be repaired?"

"Impossible, monsieur," replied the other. "The cleverest workman in France could make nothing of it now."

"What are you going to do with the pieces?" inquired M. de Croix Martel in whose fertile brain a "happy thought" was gradually germinating.

"What can I do but throw them away?" growled the irate tradesman.

"Will you sell them to me for 5 francs?"

"Certainly, monsieur, if you desire it. But what possible use?"

"Never mind," interrupted the Baron. "That's my affair. Now, listen. What I want you to do is this. You will pack up these pieces just as they are, mind, put this card of mine with them and send the parcel this evening, from 9 to half past, to Mme. de Franchimont, 64 Rue de Marignan. It is not to be taken upstairs, but left with the concierge. Understand?"

"Perfectly, M. le Baron," answered the owner of the bric-a-brac shop, glancing at the card as he spoke. "All shall be done exactly as you wish."

"I can quite depend upon you?"

"Quite, M. le Baron. At 9:30 to the moment it shall be delivered."

"Enfin!" said M. de Croix Martel to himself as he walked briskly home ward. "A most brilliant inspiration, ma parole! For 5 francs I shall have the credit of a present worthy of a millionaire. The fellow who brings it will naturally be supposed to have let it drop on the way the Champs Elysees are always slippery in frosty weather—and to have booted in order to avoid unpleasant inquiries. When the parcel arrives I shall be there, and as no one knows where I bought it I can storm away at my ease without fear of discovery."

Punctually at five minutes before 9 o'clock the Baron rang the first door bell at 64 Rue de Marignan and was immediately ushered into the drawing room where the three ladies were assembled. Mme. de Franchimont, seated by the fire, was occupied with some intricate marvel of embroidery, while her daughters were busily employed in arranging on a table in the center of the apartment a variety of bonbon boxes and other objects strongly indicative of New Year's day, which had evidently just arrived.

"Look here, M. le Baron," said Berthe as he entered the room. "See what a number of presents we have already received—a Imps lazuli paper cutter and such a beautiful flower stand near the window?"

"And a delicious filigree cardcase," chimed in Louise, holding up the object in question for the inspection of the visitor.

"Charming indeed!" responded M. de Croix Martel looking more adulously at the speaker than at the cardcase.

"There, that will do, gifts," interposed her mother, after shaking hands with her guest. "Come and sit by the fire, Baron, and then we will give you some tea."

"I trust," he replied, "that when my humble offering arrives you will be as pleased as I am."

"No folles, I hope, Baron," said Mme. de Franchimont, shaking her head reprovingly.

"Oh, madame, a mere trifle I assure you," answered our hero in a deprecating tone, accompanied, however, by a significant twirl of his moustache. "But you will see, you will see."

At that moment the door opened and the maitre d'hotel appeared bearing a voluminous parcel, which he solemnly placed on the table, and with the explanatory announcement, "For Mme. de Franchimont."

"What a strangely shaped parcel!" remarked Mme. de Franchimont, rising from her chair and approaching the table, while the Baron, laying down his cup, was preparing himself for an outburst of indignation or, in other words, was "getting the steam up."

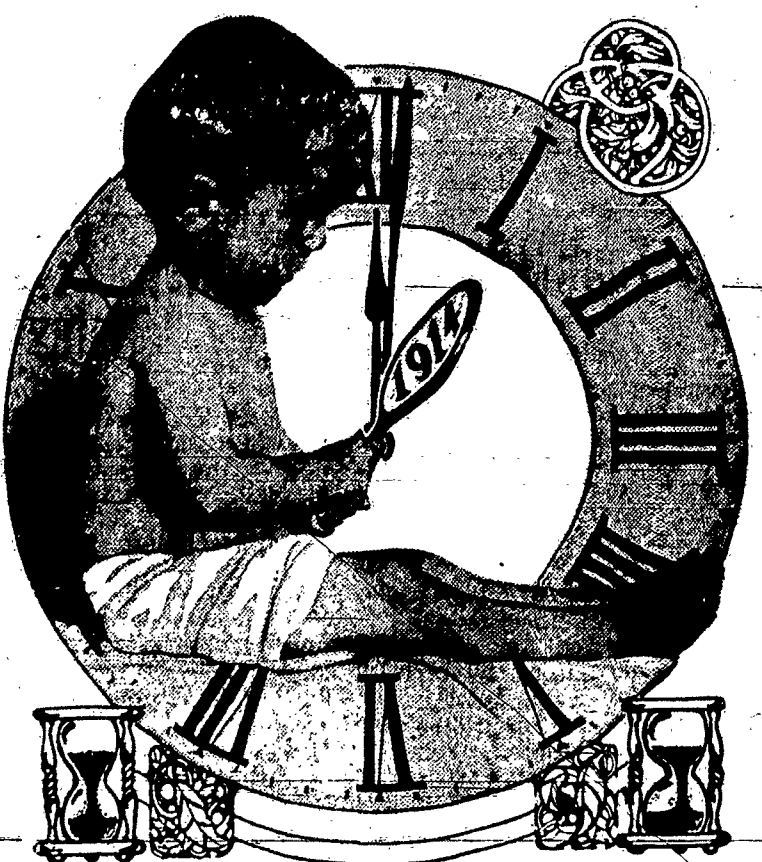
"Ah, here it is!" exclaimed Mlle. Berthe as she hastily rose away the last obstacle to the gratification of her curiosity. "M. le Baron! I knew it could be no other. Mon Dieu! What can this be?"

M. de Croix Martel, who had quietly drawn near the table, gave one look at the contents of the parcel, stood for a moment horror-struck and then, unperceived by the three ladies, slipped out of the room and darted down the Rue de Marignan as fast as his legs could carry him. He had seen enough. Alas for the vanity of human calculations! The dealer of the Rue de Seine had exceeded his instructions and had carefully enveloped every fragment of the shattered vase in a separate piece of paper.—Argosy.



THE BARON POKED AT THE FRAGMENTS WITH HIS CANE.

Looking Into the Future.



THE DEATH OF THE OLD YEAR

Miserere! Toll the bell. Let the earth send forth a knell. For a great soul takes his flight, None knows whither, in the night— Miserere!

Stretched upon his snowy bier, Lying, like the good old year, And upon the midnight gale, All may hear his parting wail— Miserere!

In the old king's checkered reign There were mingled joy and pain. Friends proved false, while foes were true, Sinners many, saints a few— Miserere!

There were hearts that suffered wrong, None it truly and were strong. Hearts there were so black with sin Satan wondered at their sin— Miserere!

Garners full of fruitful store, Measura pressed and running o'er; Famine in the streets at night, Doing deeds too dark for light— Miserere!

Rang the church bells for the weal, Told they also for the dead. In one home a joy was born, From another joy was torn— Miserere!

Such earth's sorrow, such its sin All must end where they begin. Snow which wraps the New Year's feet Is the old year's winding sheet— Miserere!

Now his spirit goeth fast, Midnight hours will be his last. To your knees earth a worn and weary— Miserere! Miserere! Charlotte Beaumont Jarvis

A SONG TO BROKEN RESOLUTIONS

Songs have been sung to the roses that fade, To the girls that we've known and the vows that we've made, To the things that we've done in the sun and the shade, And the indiscreet words we have spoken.

But never a song, not so much as a word, Has any poor mortal we've met ever heard That touched in the slightest or even referred To the fine resolutions we've broken.

As each of us drifts toward the close of the year, We're possessed by a feeling uncommonly queer, A sort of a kind of a yearning right here— You know just the sort of a yearning. We muse and we think and we ponder and sigh, As we dream of the days that have softly gone by.

Then we sadly determine improvement to try, And a new leaf we find ourselves turning to fly.

We're really angelic perhaps for a week; With bliss beatific our friends say we seek. So saintly we grow that we feel like a freak, And we really begin to get restive. Then we meet some old sinner who's out for a time, And we deem just one tittle no very great crime.

And ah, what's the use of prolonging the rime?— We get home in a state rather festive, And that is what comes of our leaf turned new.

Having broken it once we feel free to pursue The same old routine that our callow days knew. Though our consciences give us a raking, If the questions in order I'd like to inquire, Why men will taboo things they really desire, When they know in their hearts they'll be cutting the wire— And the vows they're making be breaking— Philadelphia Call

OLD YEAR ADIEU.

Old Father Time, with visage grim, Marks finis on another year; His harvest he has gathered in; The swath was wide both far and near.

The strife of battle rages round The ranks of fighters in the van. But clashing arms and shouts resound Of victor and of conquered man.

The aged sire, with trembling hands, And heavy looks of silvery white, Perceives the passing of the sands, The sunset's glow, the clouds of night.

Mayhap there is a vacant chair At home, but recently resigned. A loved one gone above to wear The crown of bliss by angels twined.

The path to glory may not lead With roses strewn about the feet, But hope and strive by word and deed.

Some soul to cheer The New Year greet! —T. J. Dahey in Pittsburgh Dispatch.

WE PETITION THEE.

STAND near us, thou of the supreme vision, When midnight bells toll the death of the year.

Oh, be thou nigh in the night's transition Which heralds the dawn that is creeping near.

On the threshold of years, half gay, half fearful, We wait expectant in hope, in fear,

In this day's last moment to welcome a year full Of days—full measure—with high good cheer.

O'er the trackless field of our new endeavor Chart us a way that shall lead us true, Through cloud and sunburst, in safety ever, One step nearer the goal—and you.

—Philadelphia North American.

A MODERN MIRACLE

A NEW YEAR'S STORY

IT was the last day of the old year. London had recovered from its Christmas festivities—and their after effects—and was preparing to see the new year in.

In the misty hours of the December afternoon two young men were gazing through the windows of a Piccadilly club at the people who were hurrying up and down that thoroughfare.

"Well, Densham," said the younger and darker of the two, "are you meditating any lofty and noble resolutions for the new year?"

"I am afraid that is not much in my line," replied Lord Densham in a slightly affected tone. "But I am thinking of making a great alteration."

"Really? Are you going to change your tailor or only let your moustache grow?"

"Don't be flippant," said his lordship in quite a melancholy tone. "The fact is, Brirley, old boy, I'm going to get married." This was drawn out slowly and with a deep sigh, as though the speaker felt he was making some mighty self sacrifice for humanity.

"I thought you looked jolly blue about something, but wherefore the gloom?" asked Brirley. "Nobody compels you."

"I have to marry in self defense," proceeded his lordship. "It is sickening to feel that you are being run after by all the girls and all their matchmaking mamma. But the worst of it is that I've fixed on two girls, and I can't for the life of me decide which to have."

"And who are the favored couple between whom Paris the Second has to judge?"

"One is Daisy Molyneux—the lively little thing with the blue eyes and the good figure, you know. Of course she is very jolly and awfully fond of me—"

"Yes, and the other?"

"Sibyl Castlemaine, your—er—second cousin, isn't she?"

"Do you think Sibyl cares for you?"

"I am afraid there is not much doubt of it, old man," said his lordship mournfully as he languidly stroked his

Have you never heard of Tantalus? asked her cousin as he led her to a secluded corner.

"Who was he? An ancient god, wasn't he?" replied Miss Castlemaine.

"Was he a relative of Barchus? The spirit decanters are named after him."

"No," said Cecil very seriously. "He was a young man who longed for a certain prize just out of his reach."

"And this is apropos of what?" inquired Sibyl.

"Tantalus would have been happier if his prize had been out of his sight as well as out of his reach. In order to escape the madness of Tantalus I have been letting my prize go out of sight. They are waiting very nicely," he added, drawing her attention to one of the couples frolicking near them.

"Lord Densham and Daisy Molyneux?"

"Yes, Densham's a nice fellow, isn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose one would hardly call him shy or modest, would one?"

"When a fellow like that can choose any girl he likes—when he knows they are all like pretty apples asking to be plucked—it is enough to make him conceited."

"And other fellows jealous?" added Sibyl mischievously. "And I suppose none of the pretty apples can be strong enough to refuse to fall into his hand?"

"It would be a modern miracle if they did."

A little later Brirley was trying to soothe his feelings with a cigarette in the smoking room when Lord Densham came up to him.

"I say, old chap, a funny thing has happened. Daisy Molyneux has refused me."

"By Jove! Were any signs of insanity ever noticed in the family before?" asked Cecil.

"No, I believe not," answered the peer, frowning, as usual, to see any sarcasm in the question. "I tried to stick out to her what it meant, but she stuck to it. Nice little girl too."

"Well, I am awfully sorry, Densham; really I am."

"It doesn't matter so very much, Miss Castlemaine is here, isn't she? You see, I can ask her and get it settled. I think I'll go find her. I'm rather sorry I wasted my time over that other silly girl. Anyway, it makes my choice much easier."

When Lord Densham suggested to Sibyl Castlemaine that they should sit at the dance out in the conservatory she saw that he meant to propose to her, and his lordship perceived that under the circumstances there was nothing to be gained by beating about the bush and so he quickly led up to the business he had come to negotiate.

"It is rather serious to be standing on the edge of a new year," he said. "Dear Miss Castlemaine, I want to be a better man in the future than in the past, and you, only you, can help me. What is needed to make my happiness complete, to crown all my hopes and perfect my manhood, is a woman's love. Sibyl—let me call you Sibyl, my love—will you be the woman? Will you marry me?"

In the selection of the conservatory he opened his arms a little, as though he expected her to creep in, and he expanded his chest to receive the burden of the dainty little head that was to nestle gently on it. But it was a night of surprises.

"I am very sorry you should have asked me this, Lord Densham," said Sibyl gravely. "I am conscious of the vastness of the compliment, and I am not blind to the advantages of your offer, but I do not love you."

"You don't love me?" repeated his lordship in a tone of disappointment that had a suspicion of incredulity in it. "You don't love me? But surely that is only a matter of time. When you have seen more of me, when you know me better, Sibyl!"

"My decision would not alter, Lord Densham. Will you please take me back? I am engaged for the next dance."

With a wonderful smile on his lips, in which indignation, pity and surprise were blended, he politely offered her his arm and led her back to the ballroom. As they entered it they almost ran into Cecil Brirley. He was about to walk past them when Sibyl said:

"Oh, Cecil, here you are! You're just in time."

Densham yielded her up with his customary smile.

They were about to join the dances when it was announced that the mystic midnight moment had arrived, and those who cared to do so were to go to the open windows and on to the doorsteps and the balconies to listen and wait for the solemn peal that was to mark the annual recommencement. Brirley got a wrap to throw over his cousin's shoulders, and then they went to the farther corner of the long balcony.

"Are you thinking of the new year?" asked Cecil.

"No, I was thinking of Tantalus."

"I hope you pity him."

"I don't think I do," responded his cousin softly, feeling glad that the shadows hid her blushing cheek. "Perhaps his prize was not so far out of his reach as he imagined."

"Sibyl, didn't Densham ask you anything?" he whispered.

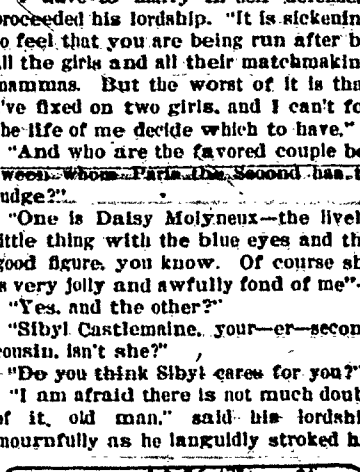
"Yes, Cecil, and—and I performed a modern miracle."

"My darling!" and then there was silence.

"Sibyl, you know I am not a rich man, and I am not a lord."

"And you are not horribly conceited and selfish either, dear?"

He did not remove his arm, and a sudden flush of expectancy quickened the shattering party. Nothing was heard for a moment, and then from a dozen clanging clocks all around them there boomed forth the solemn chime that announced the birth of the new year.



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"Utterly!"

"Well, look here, old chap; I shouldn't ask everybody, but which of the two girls do you advise me to have? They're both nice, loving little girls, and it's an awful bore to have to choose. Which would you ask?"

"Well," said Brirley slowly, "I should advise you to have Daisy Molyneux."

"Thanks awfully, old chap. I only just needed an impartial opinion like yours to help me decide. I'll propose to Daisy tonight. She is going to be at Lady Vivyan's dance, and so is Sibyl. So I can get it settled either way. Will you be there?"

"Yes, I expect so."

Lady Vivyan's rooms presented a gay and brilliant scene that evening. To welcome the new year with dancing and revelry, with music and mirth, was typical of the giddy social whirl in which hostesses and guests revolved.

Lord Densham arrived early. He was attired with his usual care and correctness, and he wore also an air of determination that suited him very well. It displaced the appearance of indifference and listlessness which usually made the hereditary legislator look limp and flabby. He speedily discovered that both Daisy Molyneux and Sibyl Castlemaine had come, and he sought Miss Molyneux that he might acquaint her with the honor he proposed to do her.

It was considerably later when Cecil Brirley arrived. He was not in the best of spirits and did not intend to do much dancing. One of the first persons he noticed was his own cousin.

"What, Sibyl—you not dancing?"

"No, I haven't been here long."

"Shall we sit down somewhere until some one comes and claims you?"

"By all means. It is quite a long time since I've had the chance of talking to you, Cecil."

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