

The Reformation of Hennessey.

BY ALFRED HURRY.

MERRIDEW is a practical joker. It is a mania with him. He has been assaulted, had his windows broken, been ducked in a horse pond, and threatened with legal proceedings. But nothing has cured him and nothing ever can. I am convinced that if he saw a good opening for a practical joke on his sorrowing relatives round his death bed, he would play it. He is not a bad natured man; his jokes are conceived in a spirit of good humor, and he is sorry when he finds that he has given pain. But in a few days he is devising some new plot against the dignity of his neighbor and the peace of the suburb.

His jokes are elaborate affairs. He spends a month planning one, and waits with the patience of a red Indian for the psychological moment. Some are impromptu, however. The joke that he worked on Hennessey was conceived and worked on the spur of the moment. It lacked the finish and polish of his thought out master pieces, but it served Hennessey's front garden which, with its trim flower beds and graceful shrubs, was once the pride of the terrace and the apple of Hennessey's eye, is transformed into a howling wilderness. Hennessey used to be fond of telling us that it took him ten years to make that front garden. Less than ten minutes sufficed to unmake it. It happened thus:

Mrs. Hennessey and the children had gone to the seaside. Hennessey's business engagements unfortunately prevented him from accompanying them. He is a clerk

in Somerset House, and seldom had time for holidays. So Hennessey was a bachelor pro tem., and sought to wile away his long lone evenings by going to theatres, smoking concerts, and playing billiards. To cheer Mrs. Hennessey up he wrote her that he felt like a hermit in his cave, in the silent house every night.

Merridew heard of this, and said he would come round to the Hermitage any night Hennessey liked and play him chess.

'Mrs. Hennessey's a good woman,' he said to the rest of us. 'It'll do Hennessey more good playing chess than to lose his money trying to learn billiards or increasing the refreshment contractors's takings at theatres. He's fond of a game of chess, and he'll take the bait and never know that he's hooked.'

Hennessey 'fancied' himself at chess, as he did at games of skill, from tossing for shillings to spotting Derby winners. He accepted Merridew's invitation with enthusiasm, and offered to bet Merridew ten shillings that he, Hennessey, would win less than twenty moves. It was arranged that Merridew should come round with his half sovereign the next evening.

The best laid schemes gang aft aglay, however. Sharp to time, Merridew, in smoking cap and slippers, rang at Hennessey's door.

He was rather disgusted to find that Hennessey was not yet home. He made himself comfortable in the room that Hennessey termed his studio and read. Hennessey came not, and when ten o'clock struck