

THE SALE OF A SOUL.

A STORY OF AMERICAN LIFE.

IN FOUR PARTS—By C. M. S. McLENNAN.

SYNOPSIS.

The story opens on a Saturday night in a back parlour of Terence Fitzgerald's bar. The beautiful daughter of mine host, Maggie, is asked to sing. The performance is interrupted by the entrance of two gentlemen in evening dress. One of them exclaims, addressing the singer, "You are superb, which excites the wrath of some of the low-class frequenters of the place. The landlord comes in, and the strangers go off with him. One of them tells Fitzgerald that his daughter is simply magnificent, and that her proper place is in fashionable Society. Chapter II. shows how the bar-tender fights a slum admirer of Maggie's who threw a glass at her. Prescott, the gentleman who thinks the girl too good for her present social position—talks about her to Curzon, one of his club friends, who tries to reason him out of his idea, saying that the girl is happy where she is, and does not find her surroundings uncongenial. Prescott is, however, too much interested in the slender, elegant, and lovely Maggie to give up his plan of introducing her to society. Accordingly he again interviews her father, promises that his aunt, a maiden lady of the highest integrity and standing, shall chaperone the girl, and finally persuades Fitzgerald to allow his child to be made a great lady.

III.



T was at Mrs Bensingham-Jones' large fancy dress ball.

"A pantomime," laughed Dicky Pendleton, dressed as Gladstone, as he worked his way through the jam to get at his particular Marjorie, who had just emerged from her white silk wrap and furs, and stood near the doorway looking like a bluish rosebud amid a buzzing circle of masculine bees.

"When the ladies jab their dimpled elbows into your ribs, life is a perfect blessing," puffed fat little Olney Travers, in an absurd Boy Blue rig up. "But hang me if I think it a boon when a man grinds half through you. Confound it, Jim Mauson, keep off my toes. And don't push, don't push."

Pretty little Mrs Bensingham Jones had achieved a tremendous success with her dance. The occasion was one of immense splendour, gaiety and excitement. Besides the ludicrously like imitation of Gladstone, there were Toreadors, Robinson Crusoes, peasants, jockeys, birds and bipeds of every sort and description. A late comer stood in the doorway contemning the radiant and rampant spectacle of whirling figures, and as the strains of the waltz swam and sighed on the warm, fragrant air he raised his head and swept his gaze over the flashing assemblage. Out of the gorgeous mass, a tall, straight, distinguished-looking woman, dressed in soft gray, a woman of middle age, who seemed unmoved by all the excitement about her, came to his side and stood with him, looking, as he did, across the great room.

"Well, are they talking about her?" asked the man after a moment's silence.

"Yes, Bryce," answered the woman. "The effect has been just what you predicted. She is the sensation of the night!"

"Is Curzon here?"

"Yes; and he has met her. Shall you dance?"

"No, I am going away at once."

"But shan't you speak to Margaret? She was only just now asking if you were here?"

Prescott pulled at his short moustache.

"Was she?" he jerked out; "oh, well, that doesn't matter. How does she carry herself?"

"Nobly!"

"Of course she does. By Jove, there she is talking with Curzon. What a woman! Is she indeed human, aunt? Surely she is unlike those others. See, how every eye is attracted to her."

The new debutante was the subject of conversation everywhere. Mrs Bensingham-Jones took as much pride in her as though she belonged to her, which was very good of her, considering that her own daughter, with a neck like a tallow-candle, and no nose worth mentioning, was being shamefully neglected by the men, who were making a regular stampede all the evening in the direction of the new beauty. Very little was known about Miss Fitzgerald, but it was enough to be told that she was from out of town and the protégée of Miss Prescott.

"She'll make the match of the year," said the women.

"Gad, what shoulders!" exclaimed the men. The wondrous beauty that Prescott had discovered in Margaret when in her soiled calico gown she stood in the smoke of the saloon and sang "Shandon Belle," was, naturally enough, intensified into an almost effulgent splendour now that she was arrayed in delicate finery and placed within an ornamental environment. Her flesh was as white as snow, her hair arranged with artistic grace, and the sculptural nobility of her figure was

set forth to the highest advantage by the gown she wore. And her air was that of a young princess accepting the homage of the multitude as her proper due, but modest and gentle withal, and with no trace of plebeian arrogance. Indeed, the triumph of Margaret in her new sphere was made complete by a refinement of bearing and propriety of utterance that were rare even at a fashionable dance. A critic of manners entering that ballroom and moving among the company must have said that the noblest born of all, and the one of the nicest culture was the tall, lilylike Margaret, the child of the Bowery.

Prescott, now that he saw the girl fairly launched into society, could hardly help feeling a sudden apprehensiveness of the possible consequences. The imposture of which he had been guilty was plain before him, and he knew that if he was discovered he would be censured by his friends, and perhaps cut as a cad. It certainly was all very irregular and reprehensible, this freakish performance of his. People would say he was insane, or worse, when they found him out. And, above all, it would disgrace his aunt, that simple, good lady who would tattoo her face to gratify a whim of Bryce's, and who, after she once saw Margaret, agreed to share in the imposture proposed by Bryce, though not without experiencing severe qualms of conscience and grave misgivings.

"Why, we shall be conferring a boon upon society, aunt," Bryce had said to her. "Do you think there could possibly be harm in giving Margaret to them? They need her. She will glorify the neighbourhood. I would like to tell them frankly who she is, but you know how impossible that would be. There is only one way: She must be introduced as a young friend of yours from out of town."

And Margaret was so brought forward at Mrs Bensingham Jones' dance.

Prescott left the ballroom without speaking to Margaret. He went out into Fifth Avenue, and as he turned to walk down town his attention was attracted to the figure of a man standing under the lamplight on the corner and eyeing him with a half-eager, half-frightened glare. The hard, pale face, with its thin mouth and sharp, black eyes, struck him at once as a familiar one, and he paused to take a second look at the man. As he did so, the fellow shuffled swiftly toward

him, and at closer range Prescott recognized Davenant, the young rowdy he had punched in Fitzgerald's saloon on his first visit there, and who had struck Margaret with the bar glass.

"What are you doing round here?" growled Prescott at him, fixing him with a savage look.

"I came here ter see you. Treat me fair, and I'll treat you fair. I'll forget yer blow—I want ter talk wid yer, that's all."

The presence of the man and his strange words irritated Prescott. He guessed at once that Davenant knew of Margaret's presence at the dance, and he saw in him a dangerous enemy to him and his plans.

"I don't care to talk with you," he said. "Now go on about your business."

"But I must tell yer amp'n about Aer. Yer've got ter hear it."

"Nothing you could say to me would interest me," rejoined Prescott.

"But this would," snarled Davenant, and a hard, ugly look sprang into his eyes. "You'd better listen. I don't know what your game is wid Maggie, but when I saw her wid yer lady frens I took it for granted yer wuz acting on the level wid her. Well, now, I don't understand you doods, an' perhaps it's a regular thing ter go down inter the Bowery an' adopt girls, but I thought yer usually wuz careful about the girl's character."

Prescott clutched the young rough by the lapel of his coat, and almost pulled him off the ground.

"What do you mean by that, you sneak?" he muttered.

Then Mr Davenant went spinning into the street, followed by an annihilating curse from Prescott. He picked himself up from the pavement, and, turning a baleful countenance to Prescott, hissed out all the vile names known to his vocabulary, and then, as he slunk away, muttered that he would square accounts within a very few hours.

Prescott was enraged at the rough's words relating to Margaret's character, and with this anger there was a sudden sinking of the heart, as the realization came to him for the first time that he had never thought to question before the utter purity of the girl.

"Well, and what of it?" he soliloquized; "at all events she is no worse than a good many that are dancing there in the same room with her. I don't care how you look at it, she deserves the position I have put her in."

As Prescott started down the avenue Curzon was descending Sherry's steps.

"Hello, Bryce, is that you?" he called. "I was going down to the Club to write a few letters that I want to get off to night. I say, old fellow, taking Prescott's arm, 'do you know society is tremendously indebted to your aunt for that beautiful Miss Fitzgerald? Really, I never saw anything to equal her, and her dignity and tact are remarkable. When a man sees a girl like her he is apt to get serious over her prospects. Now, Bryce, you know Miss Fitzgerald can use this world as a plaything. Nothing is closed to her. It seems to me rather exciting to imagine what her record is to be. What do you think about it?"

"What do I think about it?" responded Prescott, inwardly exulting at the victory he had gained over his old friend. "Why, Miss Fitzgerald will be the sensation of the season, and marry, I hope, the best fellow in the world."

"Then she'll marry you, Bryce," said Curzon.

Prescott stopped short in his walk.



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