

THE CONVERSION OF SEXTON MAGINNIS

BY MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN

Author of "The Soul of Sexton Maginnis," etc.

AFTER the marriage of Mrs. Juno Fortescue Towner to Mr. Michael Carmody, echoes of her prosperity floated to the humble home of Maginnis at the Curtice Place. That she had leisure was evident, since hardly a week passed without a letter, written in purple ink, in a large hand, reaching Mary Ann Maginnis. Mrs. Carmody was happy with "her noble husband," who was now earning his "hundred and fifty a week" on the "legitimate" stage. "No human being could ever say with truth that Juno Carmody had forced the man she loved to give up his art even for the best suite of rooms in one of New York's smartest apartment houses, in which a number of the 'Four Hundred' had rooms no better than hers," Mrs. Carmody wrote. Michael Carmody had come into his own at last; she had come into her own at last. He was now acting the title-rôle in her own tragedy of "Heliogabalus" to crowded houses. This information was reiterated.

"She's got him under thumb," said Maginnis, with satisfaction, when Mary Ann had read aloud one of the most glowing of these epistles, which read like a page from the inimitable "Duchess," "and she's made him work—more power to her. Carmody had his faults," added Maginnis, with a sigh, "but I'd give a great deal to hear him sing 'The Kerry Dance.' Sure the freshness of an Irish May mornin' came over me when I heard his voice—bad luck to him!"

These letters filled both Maginnis and his wife with a consuming desire to see New York. Mrs. Carmody's pen was eloquent when she wrote about the gay "White Way," and Mary Ann began to

dream of "sky-scrapers," the electric lights, the luxury of Mrs. Carmody's "flat," and Mr. Michael Carmody's "art." Maginnis seldom had money ahead, and a trip to the metropolis seemed a hopeless fantasy until, as he expressed it, "a bolt from the blue knocked him into smithereens." The remote cause of this frenzied change was the need of upholding the honor of the House of Magee as represented by Himself; the immediate cause was the visit of Mrs. Magee's nephew, Mr. Martin Dempsey. Mr. Dempsey, at the age of twenty-three, had come from his father's comfortable public house in a flourishing town in the County Kerry to take a look at America. He was a tall youth, made pallid by overmuch tea-drinking (as his father kept a public house, he was not allowed to touch "spirits"). He frankly owned that he did not like America; the American bacon did not please him, and he announced that if he *had* to work, he preferred to work at home. He was dissatisfied, too, he privately informed Maginnis, by his aunt's social position. It was not what he had been led to expect. Whatever Mrs. Maginnis's opinion of her nephew was, she heroically kept it in her own mind.

"Ah—oh," said Maginnis to Mary Ann, "Herself's been attendin' a mission, and is in a state of grace; but wait till she gets out of it, and we'll have her opinion of this upstart." In the meantime the nephew played music-hall airs on the accordion, and tried to teach Mary Ann to waltz in the kitchen of the Curtice Place. "Look at the gentility of him, and him just from the old sod," remarked his aunt. "He has n't the trace of a brogue, and he

is as content with his tea as some people—I name no names, Mary Ann—are more than contented with their whisky.”

Mary Ann understood the allusion, and cast down her eyes. “When I see the like of *him*,” commented Maginnis, on being informed of this remark,—Mary Ann, like a good wife, never kept anything from her husband,—“I begin to believe that the only good Irishmen are in America.”

Mr. Dempsey, who, by command of Herself, was domiciled at the Curtice Place, determined to take his departure. It was then that the bolt from the blue fell. It was necessary for the honor of the Magees that their disdainful relative should be “seen off,” but Herself could not go to New York. The aftermath of neuralgia which regularly followed the annual and breezy housecleaning at the Olympia Laundry was upon her. She moaned over her condition, and finally suggested that Mary Ann should go in her place as far as the steamship pier. “The Kerry people would make a long story of it if the poor, lonely boy had to leave America with never a chick or child to see him off. You ’ll go, Mary Ann.”

“Is it me?” asked Mary Ann. “I ’d be as timid as a hare in that big place alone.”

No more was said, but when she reached home she found a more than usually picturesque letter from Juno Carmody. It described the furniture of her “flat” in the “Lonsdale Arms,”—the number of buttons on the bell-boy was even enumerated,—which, Mrs. Carmody continued, was situated “in the swagger Nineties.” To Mary Ann, the Nineties, the Palisades, and the Flatiron Building were equally mysterious and entrancing. There were references to a hurling match which Mr. Carmody had attended, and this made the eyes of Maginnis glitter for the sport of his youth.

“That would be the best of all,” he said, “next to seeing Mike Carmody in ‘Helio-ga-boo’-lus.’ Accordin’ to his wife, he ’s great entirely in the part.” Maginnis listened with ardor in his soul while Mary Ann read of what her correspondent called “the Paradise of dreams realized.” Shakspeare was out of fashion in New York, she assured Mary Ann; not even the genius of Carmody could revive him. She, devoted to Art and Carmody, would

have perished rather than live on the wages of infamy earned in vaudeville, but happily New York demanded Carmody in something splendid, something that Shakspeare might have conceived had he known Carmody. And New York now had it in the tragedy of “*Heliogabalus*,” which she, the once poor, struggling widow, had been inspired by him to write.

“Does he sing ‘The Kerry Dance’ between the acts?” asked Maginnis. “That would bring down the house.”

Mary Ann shook her head. “He ’s above that.”

“I pity him then,” said Maginnis, emphatically.

Mrs. Carmody continued to describe the wonderful success of “*Heliogabalus*,” and then she analyzed the drama. “I was, as the authoress, called out thirteen times after the third act,” she wrote, “and the spangled satin and chiffon of my court train were quite worn out trailing over the stage.”

It appeared from the analysis that Mrs. Carmody, now known as the famous author Juno Fortescue, could take liberties with history. She had represented *Heliogabalus* as a gentle creature, forced into wickedness by the world, and especially by the Roman senate, which had passed a decree forbidding him to marry a beautiful slave-girl. The great scene, Mrs. Carmody wrote, was in the third act, after *Heliogabalus* had determined to smother the senators with roses, in order to soothe the pangs of a death which they richly deserved. “The showers of roses, red,” Mrs. Carmody wrote, “as the heart of love and June, amber as the dying blush in a daffodil sky, and white as the undriven snow, illuminated by a crimson calcium light, drift heavily and sullenly down. Carmody is simply grand here. He stands,—you should see him in a Roman toga,—on an *atrium* and says:

So ye must die in odorantine scent
Which wells in clouds in the ambrosial air,
And, like the Orient with its frankincense,
Chokes while it giveth life. O luscious rose,
Thou emblem of my pride, which cannot see
Aught but the joy of death; ah, strew them
 deep
And bury them, the cold and soulless men
Who know not love! Let not the cruel
 thorns

Sting them amain; I would not have them know

The pangs that are not needful! Yellow rose—”

“Who says that?” asked Maginnis.

“*Helio-ga-boo'-lus*.”

“And they dyin’?”

“Yes.”

“It is n’t natural,” said Maginnis, indignantly knocking the ashes out of his pipe by striking it on the kitchen table.

Mary Ann seldom felt superior to her husband, but she did now.

“Maginnis,” she said, “from what I can make out, you can’t be legitimate in the theater and be natural, too. Carmody was natural in ‘The Kerry Dance’; that ’s the reason he despised himself for doing it. If you ’re natural in a big, fashionable theater, you ’re gone.”

“I was never much for poetry,” continued Maginnis, “except for ‘Moore’s Melodies’ and ‘Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn.’ But let ’s hear the rest of it.”

“Then,” continued Mary Ann, reading Mrs. Carmody’s letter slowly, “the slave-girl *Aurelia* begs for the life of *Glaucus*, the youngest and handsomest of the senators. I intended to act *Aurelia* myself, but Carmody thinks I am too patrician-looking to take the part of a slave-girl. When *Aurelia* had finished her speech there was not a dry eye in the theater. She says:

I will not,—nay, I cannot call thee god,
O Emperor, though thou art, indeed, a god,
Until thou givest me from yonder pyre
All scented with the odors of the East,
That pile of death upon the marble floor,
Making a stain of red, where Marshal Niel
Mingles with pink La France, when Jacqueminot,

Thy favorite flower, Emperor, flames among
The glory of Die John, and roseate Lancaster
Tinges the snow of York—the one I love!
Oh, spare him! See the odiferant buds
Rise to his very throat. I beg thee, spare him!”

“It ’s not natural,” reasserted Maginnis.

“It ’s poetry,” said Mary Ann.

“G’wan!” answered Maginnis, resignedly.

“You cannot imagine what Carmody is in the next speech, where he says, to slow music, adapted by myself from the well-known waltz, ‘My Queen’:

O thou *Aurelia*, do not think I change
My great ideals so lightly. They must die,
And he, too, with them; yet I soften pangs
With roses and the pulsings of the lute—

“Here *Aurelia* starts. She alone is aware that *Glaucus* is really the brother of *Helio-ga-boo'-lus*, and though she knows that it is dangerous to remind even Emperors of relatives they do not wish to acknowledge, her brave spirit does not quail:

He is thy brother, hidden for a time
By one who hated thee, who thought to still
Thy young affections by disuse, and make
thee monstrous.

O my Emperor, how oft the loving heart can
see

To love indeed where there is none to love!

Helio-ga-boo'-lus: ’T is true!

Aurelia: This *Glaucus* is thy brother!

Helio-ga-boo'-lus: Say not so! ’T is true indeed?

My very heart-strings twang, and like the minstrel harp,

Struck by the sounds of home, I echo love.

“Carmody is *magnificent* here.

Then for thy love, and also for the love
I bear my youngest brother, I forbear
To lessen *Glaucus*’ life. Why let him live!

“While the roses fall, Chopin’s ‘Funeral March’ is played by a concealed orchestra.”

“What ’s that about choppin’?” asked Maginnis, growing a little sleepy.

But Mary Ann went calmly on: “When Carmody waved his scepter and embraced *Glaucus*, who rushed from among the dying senators, the applause was deafening; I, even I, wept. A lady in the right-hand box, one of the Four Hundred, threw her ermine from her ivory shoulders and actually howled.”

“’T was a fool thing to do,” commented Maginnis; “but I suppose them

that 's used to theayter-goin' understand it."

"They do," said Mary Ann, emphatically, "or Mike Carmody and his wife would not be living in luxury now. There 's not much more of it," continued Mary Ann, returning to the letter: "Carmody, looking every inch a *Helio-ga-boo'-lus*, calls out:

'T is my imperial will that he be saved—
He, Glaucus, and no other, whom gods
ordained
To be my brother.

Glaucus, in his turn, pleads for the lives of the other senators. *Helio-ga-boo'-lus* yields when he finds out that *Aurelia* is a descendant of Julius Cæsar by the female line, saying:

O manes of Cæsar, I refuse thee nothing!

Helio-ga-boo'-lus clasps *Aurelia* to his heart, the proud senators, hearing that *Aurelia* is of the House of the Cæsars, withdraw their opposition, and the curtain goes down, while only pink roses—emblems of hope—fall. And love is triumphant. The managers that once spurned Carmody," the author continued, "are now anxious for his 'Hamlet' at any price; but no immortal bard for him as long as his wife can write. Ah, my friend, it pays, in the mind and heart, to spurn the low ideas of the populace. You say that you will never be able to come to New York. That is sad; I wish you could see our apartment. We are at home on Sunday night, when we have a little saloon—"

"Saloon," said Maginnis, decisively, deceived by Mary Ann's pronunciation, "if I had to keep a saloon, and was any kind of a man, I 'd not leave it to my wife. But I thought there was Sunday closin' in New York."

"It 's not that kind of a saloon; it 's spelled with one o," answered Mary Ann, hastily passing the word. "Mrs. Carmody says, 'If you ever come to New York, though that seems impossible, I shall be happy to entertain you. I shall never forget your motherly kindness to a homeless girl.'"

"Girl!" echoed Maginnis. "The old creature 's dreamin'; but let that pass. She means well, and she 's made an honest

working-man of Carmody, which I never expected. 'T would be a great thing if we could go, Mary Ann; we never had a weddin'-trip yet, an' I 've never seen New York. I 'll be sorry all my life that when I came to this country I took a tramp steamer from Queenstown to Norfolk. 'T would be a pleasure, Mary Ann," sighed Maginnis, thinking of the hurling match.

"'T would, indeed," echoed Mary Ann, reflecting on the beauties of Mrs. Carmody's flat and the splendors of "*Helio-gabalus*."

The unexpected happened. Mrs. Magee's neuralgia increased in violence, and, in desperation at the thought of the disgrace that must come to her family if her nephew were permitted to board the departing steamer without one of his "kith or kin" to present him with, at least, a box of cigars, at the last moment the custodian of the family honor reluctantly consented to pay the expenses of Maginnis, as well as of Mary Ann, to the city of desire. This was, as Maginnis said, as unexpected as a bolt from the blue of a smiling heaven. The biggest trunk was packed, with the addition of appropriate souvenirs; Mrs. Magee graciously sent for the children, so that their mother's mind might be clear; and Maginnis and Mary Ann left Bracton in an ecstasy of anticipation.

"Mind," said Mrs. Magee, "to find out all about the Carmodys. I don't believe a word of all that woman has written. '*Helio-ga-boo'-lus*,' indeed! It 's only song and dance *he 's* fit for. To think of his marrying a woman as old as his grandmother," she added, with a scornful laugh.

The relative from Kerry was "seen off" on Saturday morning. He said very frankly that he was glad to leave a country where you could not sit still a minute; he scorned some of the souvenirs,—with apparent reason, as one of them from his aunt was a huge conch-shell, spotted like a tortoise-shell cat, and another, "*Lives of Famous Irishmen*" in six volumes. He did not hesitate to say ungratefully that they were not easy to carry. The last words of this unsatisfactory relative were that there was n't a decent cup of tea in America, and that he would never leave his native land unless compelled to by

starvation. Maginnis, whose pride was hurt, merely substituted a box of Pittsburg stogies for the Havanas he had been commissioned to buy, and shook hands untearfully. Then he and Mary Ann faced two days of delight.

"Keb?" called a man as they left the dock, and, with a recklessness that struck Mary Ann as fearful, her husband took a hansom. New York is the city of the Celt. Why? is a question the answer to which might reflect on the temperament of the Celt, and the nature of the attractions of this fascinating city. Maginnis sniffed the sea air with delight, and for the midday dinner found a place the polished cherry-colored tables of which pleased Mary Ann. Maginnis soon put himself on terms of comradeship with the white waiters; he was in the habit of disdaining the colored "help" at home. He pointed out celebrities with an air that almost deceived Mary Ann, but as she knew that these celebrities really existed in New York, she was not keen as to whether her generous husband showed her the real thing or not. The Brooklyn Bridge, the Cathedral, all the wonders!—and then after a short supper at Sweeny's Hotel, the theater, to see the miracles of "Helio-ga-boo'-lus." But in the papers the waiters had amiably brought there was no mention of this tragedy. Maginnis could not understand this. "Perhaps Carmody, the lazy devil, is taking a night off. 'T would be like him," said Maginnis.

Mary Ann was visibly disappointed. "I have set my heart on it," she said dolefully.

The search was in vain, but Maginnis found an announcement under the head of "Vaudeville." It was in big letters, and read: "Unlimited success: 9:30: Rafferty in the Kerry Dance."

"There we'll go, Mary Ann," he said.

To these country-folk, the turns on the program preceding the great Rafferty were delightful. When the curtain rose on "Number five" and revealed a delicately lighted green landscape, with a stream in it that might have been painted by a young and hopeful Constable, Maginnis whispered:

"You can see the water-cresses in that little run. 'T is home."

A prelude on the air Maginnis knew so well, and Rafferty, apparently young, very

alert, and with a delicious Kerry "Top o' the mornin' to everybody," entered.

"He's one of the boys at home," whispered Maginnis, clutching Mary Ann's arm. "How it takes me back! I've seen him somewhere before, Mary Ann. It brings a lump in my throat to hear his voice: I feel just as I did when Carmody sang that same song."

The melody rose lark-like and full, with a softness sweetened by the brogue which seemed to be all little curves and grace notes.

"I smell the primroses and see the fairy-ring," said Maginnis, as the delicious notes melted into longing for past happiness, and then rose again in ecstasy for present joys, and moonlight fell over the scene.

Mary Ann's eyes were moist. "'T is beautiful," she murmured. "'T is better than 'Helio-ga-boo'-lus' a thousand times, and I should think Carmody would do this rather than the great, big tragedy. The singing is just like his, only better."

Maginnis shook his head; his eyes were full of tears. The house was silent; it was the fine touch of nature, and even those who could not see the water-cresses and smell the primroses and knew nothing of the fairy-ring, felt the truth and beauty in the air.

"'T is like Carmody at his best, I must say," said Maginnis, his eyes glistening.

The sketch was slight, a monologue in which an old woman was quoted as to the past of her happy youth, with a snatch of song:

Look on the wren who pays no rint,
And is contint.

Only a little ballad of the primrose-time, and the joyous dance, and yet Maginnis, and those with memories like his among the auditors, were touched; many eyes filled with tears. The "boy" of the sketch had the magic of a voice that made heart-strings vibrate. Again and again he was recalled. He was lithe and he appeared young; his hair was brown and curly. Maginnis knitted his brow. "Mary Ann," he said, as the curtain fell after six recalls of the actor, and "Number six" went up, "'T is Carmody!" The tears dried up in his eyes. "And he's ashamed of *this*!"

"'T is not legitimate," answered Mary Ann, amazed at the discovery.

"But it 's nature, it 's real, it 's not make-believe!" exclaimed Maginnis. "And from this he 's drawin' his money, and he ashamed of it. Carmody and his 'Helio-ga-boo'-lus,' " he added with contempt. "I 'll give him a piece of my mind! Heaven and earth," he added, with conviction, "how I hate a liar!"

"I 'm thankful that we 've found it out without their knowing it," said Mary Ann. "'T is the kindest thing to say nothing when we see them."

"Helio-ga-boo'-lus!" muttered Maginnis. "And he ashamed of this!"

Maginnis was moody during the rest of the entertainment. "His art," he muttered, "and he makin' his wife lie about it all the time! I 'll teach him! oh, I 'll teach him!" he vowed, and nothing that Mary Ann could say softened his fierce resolve.

On Sunday night, after some happy hours slightly embittered in the mind of Maginnis by the memory of Carmody's perfidy, the "Lonsdale Arms" was found. There was a little boy in a blue suit with innumerable brass buttons in the arched doorway, two top-heavy plants in green buckets, and other evidences of splendor.

Maginnis had not thought it necessary to announce his arrival in town, so when the pair had made their rather tremulous journey upward some distance in the elevator, they found Carmody unexpectant in his own drawing-room. He was thinner, his hair was grayer, but he was happier-looking. He reclined on a turkey-red sofa, almost buried in Sunday papers. He welcomed the visitors somewhat perfunctorily, but when Mrs. Carmody, more blondined than ever, appeared in a mauve and purple teagown, enthusiasm filled the room. She was unmistakably fairer, fatter, and fortier; but the stamp of success was upon her.

"I 'm the happiest girl on earth," she said, "but Carmody does n't love me," she added coquettishly; "he lives only for his art."

Carmody protested, with an air of having learned his lines. Maginnis warmed under the welcome, accompanied later by high tea in a tiny dining-room, furnished "in Mission," as Mrs. Carmody described

it. The drawing-room was mostly occupied by a Turkish "cozy-corner," over which a statue of "The Bather" bent between two crossed scimitars and a large colored engraving of "Alone at last," on which Mrs. Carmody said she "doted."

"Are you staying over to-morrow night?" she asked with a slight trace of fear in her voice.

"No," said Maginnis, promptly.

"What a pity, Carmody," said Mrs. Carmody, who was evidently relieved. Then her regret became gushing and girlish. She was desolate. "You can't see Carmody in my play. He 's great in 'Helio-ga-boo'-lus,' as I told you. It took me nearly a year to write it, and every manager in New York rejected it—nearly every manager," she corrected, with a slight flush. "But *now*—oh, now!"

"He 's great," said Mary Ann, who was absorbed in the Morocco brass tray that glittered under a Japanese lantern in the "corner"; she spoke unconsciously, as one in a trance. "I never recognized Carmody until the people called him out for the sixth time. Yesterday——"

She paused, flushing and realizing the mistake into which her absorption in all the splendor had led her. A strained look came into Mrs. Carmody's face; Carmody gazed at Maginnis, appalled.

"'T was great," said Maginnis, rapidly, "when *Helio-ga-boo'-lus* stomped on the stage, and them roses as big as cabbagees began to fall down, it was as exciting as a prize-fight. You 'll never do anything finer, Carmody."

Mrs. Carmody recovered herself almost instantly.

"Ah, Mr. Maginnis, what that play cost me!" Carmody seemed unnerved, but Mrs. Carmody took the cue instantly, and Maginnis was on the alert.

"Ah, ma'am," he said, more rapidly, "Carmody seemed six and a half feet high when he called out in centurion tones, 'Them roses must cease to fall,' or something to that effect. 'T was grand. If *Helio-ga-boo'-lus* had been born in our time, they 'd have had him in a movin' picture. I never expect to see the like again."

Mary Ann, bewildered, looked in open-eyed astonishment at the singularly gifted speakers.

"I never expect to see the like again," Maginnis repeated.

"You never will, Mr. Maginnis," answered Mrs. Carmody, calmly; "but you simply cannot forget it. If I had a husband who did not love his art, who would sacrifice it for even two hundred dollars a week, what would my life be? Life without ideals of art is a desert."

"True enough," said Maginnis, with decision, as the punch was brought on; "true for you!"

"When you come again," said Mrs. Carmody, generously, "you must let me give you a stage-box. I think that later I will portray the slave-girl myself."

Maginnis began a sound that seemed like a groan, but he stifled it, and asked for more lemon. After this the conversation between the two women drifted to Mrs. Carmody's social position and the New York price of hats. Maginnis and Carmody drank in silence. "Each of us," reflected Maginnis, "has his own thoughts!"

Just before midnight Mrs. Carmody threw her arms around Mary Ann's neck and bade her an affectionate good-by. Carmody and Maginnis shook hands gravely.

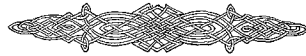
"Oh, Maginnis," began Mary Ann, as they descended, "how *could* you?"

"I don't know how I could or how I could n't," he answered shortly; "'t was what Mrs. Carmody calls 'temperament' that carried me away."

"'T was my mistake," said Mary Ann, humbly; "but I wondered at you."

"It 's hard," answered Maginnis, as they entered a car, "to show a man you think he 's a liar when you 're eatin' his meat. I would n't like it myself. Helio-ga-boo'-lus!" he repeated with a hollow laugh. "Mary Ann," he added solemnly, "I 've taken liberties with the truth myself, I admit *that*; but a *real* liar like Carmody is too much for me. And to think of him being ashamed of doing a good Kerry song and dance! I swear, Mary Ann, that when I get home to Bracton I 'll take a pledge before his reverence to stick to the truth as far as I can. And I 'm glad Carmody is no kin to me; I 'm done with liars, and he and his 'Helio-ga-boo'-lus.'"

And Maginnis became red in the face from violent and suppressed indignation. "If a man was ever converted by a terrible example, I 'm that man, Mary Ann," he added, as the couple reached Sweeny's Hotel.



DISCHARGING MARTHA

BY CARROLL WATSON RANKIN

Author of "The Adopting of Rosa Marie"

THE first applicant to respond to Brice & Pendleton's advertisement for an office-girl appeared fairly promising to Tom Page, who was too busy with tax-titles to look very closely at the young woman; so Martha Pratt, with "country-bred" written all over her, was promptly engaged.

At first Martha's innumerable mistakes were ascribed to her newness; but by the end of the first week, when no improvement was visible, Mr. Brice, clearing his throat ominously, waylaid Mr. Pendleton near the street door.

"By the way, Pendleton," said he, "that new girl does n't fill the bill."

"Tell Page to advertise for another tomorrow," advised Mr. Pendleton. "I meant to mention it this noon. He 'd better tell the girl, too. Of course we 'll give her a week's warning."

Martha, however, entertained no suspicion of this threatening state of affairs when, the next morning, she bounced into that quiet office, carrying three substantial buttonhole-bouquets.

"My grandmother sent them," beamed good-natured Martha, presenting her solid