

AT THE AUCTION

BY ELIZABETH MYERS

MARY BROWNE glanced disconsolately about the smoke-filled room.

"This is fierce!" she sighed. "A grand day, and nothin' to do this afternoon! When the Saturdays are wet, I've generally got a date to wear my joy-rags. Now here, to-day, if I had that swell lid to wear—gee, I wish it would rain!"

If you had been playing the alphabet five and a half days a week, come rain or shine, clicking out other folks' money projects on a noisy typewriter that broke your highly polished nails, you would feel a bit miffed yourself to find a perfectly good afternoon going to waste. It is also painful to have in mind a wonderful hat which would petrify your friends with envy, and make the most callous sit up and take observations, and to know that all that stands between you and it is a plate-glass window and fifteen dollars. Wouldn't that agitate a saint?

Miss Browne took one last vigorous chew on an overworked piece of gum before consigning it to the waste-basket. As she dropped it into the receptacle, filled with its heterogeneous collection of the day's débris, her eye, practised in parting the wheat from the chaff, saw a card lying face upward. Being a woman, and naturally curious, she picked it up. It was a card of admission to the sale of the goods and chattels of the late Thomas Van Brunt.

Now, Miss Browne could tell you all about Mr. Van Brunt, if you had asked her. No, she didn't know him personally, but she had seen him driving by on the avenue, and had had him pointed out to her. That always makes one feel more or less acquainted, so to speak. In fact, from that time Miss Browne had read every scrap printed about the great man, and could put you wise as to his latest movements.

Then, again, the sale was to be at auction, and Miss Browne had never attended one

of those functions. The date on the card said January 16. The daily calendar on Miss Browne's desk coincided with the figures on the card.

"I'll go," she decided. "I've never been to an auction. I bet there'll be a bunch of swells there! It'll be somethin' to do, and I'll have a chance to sport me diamonds. And say—if I only had that hat! Anyhow, I bet I can show some dames a kick as good as theirs. I wish some of my gentlemen friends was in town to buy me a taxi! It's fierce to know so many traveling gentlemen; they scatter about something awful!"

II

At three o'clock Miss Browne presented her appearance and an admission card at the door of the Union Art Galleries. Both the appearance and the card being good—the first especially, as voted by the doorman—she passed on, and found herself in a large room where daylight had been given the right-about by the twenty-candle-power electrics.

She glanced about in some tremor. If it is your first offense at an auction sale, and you go unsupported, the first few moments of getting one's bearings are generally played *tremolo*. Nevertheless, Miss Browne smiled her satisfaction. The swells were there, all right. She could see rich furs and diamonds *ad libitum*.

To rub up against the swells is almost as good as being one of them. From the peanut paradise of the theater one gets but a bird's-eye view, and sometimes not even that, when one's opera-glasses, which one has just got with trading-stamps, happen to be good to look at but useless to look through. To stand side by side, elbow to elbow, with some swell in Russian sable and a bird of paradise; to touch, surreptitiously, the satin broadcloth coat and note its quality—that is a treat not often afforded to a young person like Miss Browne.

There were men there, too, lots of them, with their dinky canes and plastered, shining hair. There were other men, too, as Miss Browne noted with displeasure, who were slouchy and dirty-looking by comparison. They were fingering printed papers and jotting notes on the margins.

The seat she got was on the aisle, near the front, as good as a two-dollar one at a regular show.

"No one has nothin' on me!" she noted with a sigh of satisfaction.

Suddenly the platform was brilliantly lighted. The show was going to begin.

A gilt settee was placed in position by some uniformed attendants. It glittered so brilliantly that it made her eyes ache.

"What am I bid for this beautiful gilt settee, No. 56 on your catalogue?" cried the auctioneer in a stentorian voice. "Ten dollars! Thank you! At ten dollars, at ten dollars—at fifteen!" He looked around. "At fifteen—at twenty, at twenty!"

His voice chanted monotonously, accenting at intervals, or ending the last syllable in a minor third. Miss Browne noted this as a familiar sound. Where had she heard such tones before? Ah, yes, the biscuit-shooters at the dairy restaurant, she commented to herself, chanting their orders. Yes, it certainly was familiar.

"Twenty-five am I bid?" the auctioneer's voice continued. "At twenty-five, twenty-five—at twenty-five! Are you done?" There was a pause. "At twenty-five—going—going!"

Miss Browne gazed at the auctioneer, transfixed. He had a grand voice, so big and strong; but nobody else seemed to bid. The hammer came down, and the gilt settee was whisked out of sight.

One piece of furniture after another went by. There was an awfully good-looking young man standing on a pedestal in front. He was something like Mr. Jenkins, a drummer of Miss Browne's acquaintance, now in Chicago. He seemed to be looking about for some one. Occasionally he would shout out a number, which the auctioneer would take up. Poor fellow, he was trying very hard to help sell, but bidders were backward. He *was* good-looking!

Miss Browne tried to catch his eye—surely an excusable exhibition of sympathetic interest; but he looked to the right, to the left, and all about—never at her.

A hideous table, big enough for an orphan asylum, was brought out. No wonder they could not sell their goods—moth-eaten carpets, all faded and torn, and rickety chairs that wobbled when set up. She certainly was surprised that a big man like Mr. Van Brunt had such junk.

"No. 270 on the catalogue—a solid mahogany table, old colonial. What am I bid? Twenty dollars! At twenty! Twenty-five am I bid? Hand-carved legs, fine work—twenty-five, at twenty-five! Will any one bid thirty?"

Miss Browne watched the young man. She was not interested in the old table. The auctioneer's monotonous voice echoed through her brain a constant reminder of the chop-house. She nodded unconsciously, looking intently at the young man. Instantly his glance caught hers. She smiled coyly. What was the harm?

"Thirty!" shouted the young man.

The auctioneer took it up. From the other side came a bid of "thirty-five." The young man was staring at Miss Browne with all his might. How rude, but—how nice!

Mary hitched her four-inch collar one-twentieth of an inch higher. This was a great place, all right! She certainly liked auctions. Even the shabby man who sat near was taking note of her, and across the aisle one of the plastered dudes was looking her way. She was glad she had dolled up before coming!

"Forty!" yelled the young man, as she again nodded her head in time to the auctioneer's cry.

As one marks time to music with the foot, so the reiterating numbers sung in monotone found Miss Browne keeping time with her head. It was an almost imperceptible nod, just a gentle inclination; but not a motion was missed by the facetious young man, who bellowed intermittently five dollars more than the bidder on the other side.

"At forty, at forty—at forty-five, at forty-five—at fifty, at fifty! This beautiful table at fifty dollars! Who bids fifty-five? It's a bargain!"

"I don't call that old thing a bargain!" murmured Miss Brown, still nodding.

"Fifty-five!" shouted the young man, glancing at the nodding head.

There was no call from the other side.

"At fifty-five—going at fifty-five!" bellowed the auctioneer. It was the last piece,

and he was in a hurry to be done. "Going! Going!"

The hammer was poised ready for descent; there was no further bid. The instrument struck the desk with a finality that allowed no argument.

The show was over. Miss Browne sat back and looked around. People were pushing back their chairs preparatory to departure. A few of them made for the rear of the platform.

"Heavens!" she murmured, as she saw the young man coming up the aisle in her direction.

Her heart beat fast. He handed her a slip of paper.

"What's this for?" she stammered, smiling up at him.

"Please write your name and address," he said briskly.

"Well, of all the nerve!" she breathed, but complied.

What did he want with her address? She felt that she had done wrong to give it.

There was a commotion at the back of the room. An old man in a fur-lined coat, who appeared to be a somebody, hurried down the aisle. As he walked, Miss Browne could see the mink lining flapping against his knees. It was real mink, too, not the dyed kitty that she had seen so often among her friends.

He stopped near her seat and accosted the young man.

"Did No. 270 go up to-day?" he asked, with a note of anxiety in his voice.

"The last piece, Mr. Morton," replied the young man.

"Confound it!" said the newcomer. "How much did it go for?"

"Fifty-five dollars," was the reply.

"Tell the party I'll give seventy-five for it. Ask if they'll sell."

Again the young man approached Miss Browne, who was turning to leave.

"The gentleman wants to know whether he can buy that table for seventy-five dollars," he said.

He certainly was a nice young man, she thought, to ask her advice about the table, but she didn't quite know what he was talking about. Moreover, she was a little embarrassed to see the old gentleman eying her so anxiously. Never had she received so much attention before.

"If the gentleman wants the table, why don't you let him have it, then?" she said, smiling archly at both.

"Thank you, madam!" said the young man, disappearing with the Cræsus of the fur coat.

On the following Monday morning, a letter in a man's handwriting lay beside Miss Browne's plate. The writing was unfamiliar, but the legend in the corner set her heart palpitating. To think that the young man of the auction-room should have written to her so soon!

In the privacy of her two-by-four apartment she opened the envelope. A pink check fluttered out. It was made out to her for twenty dollars. There was nothing else.

"Well!" she murmured, in ecstatic recollection. "Auctions are great, even if they are funny! Now I wonder when he's going to call!"

THE GREATER LOVE

UNSTAINED, unwhipped by passion or desire,
A thing clean, strong, and true uplifts its head
Above all grosser things for sale or hire,
Above the grasping hand for gain outspread.
It takes no bribe, it asks no recompense
For largess of the heart, but, in accord
With noblest impulses of soul and sense,
In glory of the gift finds full reward.

It mellows, winelike, in the cask of time;
Knows naught of jealousy, the ego's crime;
Monopoly doth scorn, and to the end
Shares friends and freedom freely with a friend.
It stands alone, apart, all else above,
For friendship is the greater, nobler love!

W. E. P. French

THE COMING OF THE TALKING PICTURE

THE INTERESTING POSSIBILITIES OF EDISON'S NEWLY
ANNOUNCED INVENTION, THE KINETOPHONE

BY ISAAC F. MARCOSSON

THE scores of smartly gowned women, the troops of children, and the fair sprinkling of men who gathered at the Orange Country Club one afternoon late in January scarcely realized the historic importance of the occasion that brought them together. They had been asked to be the guests of their neighbor, Thomas A. Edison, at a demonstration of what was modestly called "an improvement in the motion picture." To most of them, the term "motion picture" meant the ordinary "movie," with its silent unfolding of the drama of life.

Nor was there any outward evidence of significant departure when the lights were turned down. Before the audience stood the familiar screen, and behind it, on an improvised elevation, the nose of a projecting-machine poked out. But if any one had looked up, he would have seen two wires running along the ceiling and connecting the picture-machine with the screen. These wires had an important part in the day's disclosures.

The buzz of talk continued even after the machine began its preliminary sputtering. A conventional drawing-room interior, containing a piano, was thrown on the screen. A man in evening clothes walked swiftly down toward the center of the pictured stage. He raised his hands, and then the miracle happened. He framed his lips to speak, and, even as he framed them, the sound of his voice came forth. By watching the lips carefully, you could tell that the words you heard were in reality the speech he was uttering. There was perfect unison between sound and action.

Then he introduced a girl, who played

"Annie Laurie" on the violin. She was followed by a woman, who sang "The Last Rose of Summer." Both were accompanied by a man at the piano, and again the unison of sound and motion was perfect.

The lecturer dropped a china plate on the floor. You heard not only the initial crash, but the lesser noise of the flying fragments. A bugler came on and sounded the reveille; there was the screech of a whistle; and, to end the amazing performance, some dogs were led on, and their barks were clearly heard as they scampered around the stage.

Other demonstrations followed. You saw and heard part of an act of "The Chimes of Normandy"; you beheld the story of a Dick Turpin spoken and acted in every detail; you laughed at the drollery of a politician trying to make a speech to his constituents while being coached from behind; you heard Verdi's "Miserere"; you got the opening of a minstrel-show, bones, blackface, jokes, and all.

When the display closed with the usual "grand finale by the entire company," which included the singing of the "Star-Spangled Banner," it was so real, so vivid, and so stirring that the audience rose to its feet. It was a spontaneous tribute to the actuality of an event that had a genuine scientific importance.

What had happened was simply this—the talking motion picture had had its first public appearance. By a curious coincidence, the audience was largely composed of the friends of the little gray wizard who had now finally realized a dream of many years by linking two marvels of his genius—the phonograph and the motion picture.