

SOULS for SALE

By RUPERT HUGHES.

(Continued From Yesterday)

Then ensued a long battle over the letter, Mem insisting upon reading it, fighting for it as for a cup of poison held out of her reach.

And it proved to be a cup of poison when finally she got it from her mother's reluctant fingers.

Dear Wife—The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. I have lost you and my darling daughter and my head is bowed in shame and loneliness, but I can still say, "Thy will be done."

I think you should know, however, how things are here. Otherwise I should not write you. But I am afraid that the daughter that was once our bitterest foe of the hanks of sin and wish to come home repentant.

Bitterness filled my soul when I learned that she was leading a life of riotous mockery, and when I saw the picture of her smiling in waiting at the side of that smiling French general, I had it in my heart to curse her. I wrote in haste, I repented my hardness of heart and bowed my head in humble shame when I read your angry reply. I had lost your love and your admiration, but that was deserved punishment for the idleness that had grown up in my heart towards you. I have made mistakes I must have made in not giving our erring daughter better care.

But now it has pleased the Lord to pour out the vitals of his wrath on my gray hairs. The old mortgage on the church fell due long ago, but foreclosure had been postponed from time to time. We gave a benefit to pay it off, but everybody was too poor to respond, and it did not pay expenses. The manager of the motion picture house here offered to share the profits on the showing of a picture in which, as he had the impudence to tell me, my daughter played a part. But while it would have drawn money for our lobby that would not have responded to a Christian appeal, I felt that it would be a compounding with evil, and I put Satan behind me and ordered the fellow out of the house.

Then I made a desperate appeal to our banker, Mr. Scipp, and he promised to do what he could for us. But the other day his bank was closed after a run upon it. He had previously mortgaged his house and sold his automobile—the one that killed the poor boy, Elwood Farnaby, whom you will remember as one of our choir. The banker was our only wealthy

member and with him failed our last hope. The crops have been poor and the hard times have affected the local merchants so that few rents have not been paid and the usual donations have been withheld.

There were no conversions at the last communion. Even the baptisms and the weddings that brought me an occasional little fee have been wanting.

The campaign was made to close the motion picture houses on Sunday was lost at the last election. We are fallen on evil days.

What small religious enthusiasm away to other churches where there are younger ministers with more fashionable credits and fresher oratory. I have not been spared overbearing, carelessly cruel remarks that I was too old to hold the pulpit any longer and should give way to a fresher mind; but I have not known where else to go, as I have no calls from outside. And I could not—God forgive my vanity—I could not believe that I was yet too old to toil in the vineyard of the Lord. I have endured every other loss but that, and now the vineyard is closed.

The church is to be closed. We had no left in the town has been drawn away to other churches where there are younger ministers with more fashionable credits and fresher oratory. I have not been spared overbearing, carelessly cruel remarks that I was too old to hold the pulpit any longer and should give way to a fresher mind; but I have not known where else to go, as I have no calls from outside. And I could not—God forgive my vanity—I could not believe that I was yet too old to toil in the vineyard of the Lord. I have endured every other loss but that, and now the vineyard is closed.

What I should do, or how take care of the little children that still cling to our home, the Lord has not yet told me in answer to my prayers. Her old-fashioned heartache and eye shower ended in an old-fashioned hysteria of shrieking laughter, of farcical cynicism at the ridiculous sub-

limities of life. She started her mother by crying, suddenly. "The Lord is another Charles Chaplin, mamma! He's just planted another kick where it will do the most harm."

CHAPTER XLIX.
Mem had been dreading what make of car to buy. Cars were cheaper in price now, and wonderful bargains were to be had in slightly used cars purchased by hardy used stars who could not complete the payments or keep the gasoline tanks filled.

She had cried herself into money—not much, but a good deal considering the hard times, the general unemployment, and her inexperience. She had spent little of it. She had no time to shop or even to go down into the streets and stare in at the windows.

She had hardly found the time to read the advertisements and study the fashion plates in the Sunday supplements. What car to buy and what new house to rent had been amusing conundrums for life moments of musing. And now those conundrums were solved. Her mother sobbed: "What on earth can I write the poor darling?"

Mem replied: "The answer is easy. I'm going to send him all the money I've got."

Her mother cried out against robbing one of her loves to pay another. It seemed a cruel shame to take the first bit of cake from her daughter and sell it to buy bread for her husband.

"You'll need it yourself. You may not have another job soon. You need new clothes and a rest."

"Rest and the clothes can wait." Her mother kept a miserable silence for a long while before she could say: "Your father will never accept money that you have earned from the pictures. You know him. He'd rather die. He'd rather the whole world would die."

at first, but she was afraid to have it put through the bank at Calverly lest her father hear of it. She instructed the doctor to make up another of his scenarios about a repentant member of the congregation wishing to restore some stolen funds—or anything that his imagination could invent.

Then she set the wheels in motion to secure an immediate engagement with the next to the greatest comedian on the screen, Ned Ling, a man whose private life was as solemn as his public life was frantic and foolish; whose personal dignity was as sacred as his professional dignity was degraded; a man of intellectuality, a reader of important books, a debator of art theories—but above all a man afraid of nothing so much as he was afraid of love.

The Bermont company was declaring another holiday, letting out such of its people as were not under contract, farming out such others as it could find places for in the shriveled market.

torpid seas. Wise men were trimming sails to the least breeze and jostling perilous cargo. The too courageous ones were sinking, vanishing, blowing up, dying of famine.

When Mem spoke to Bermont of her desire to play a comedy with Ned Ling, Bermont leaped at the idea. It would take her off his salary list for weeks and it would help her fame. He was not altogether selfish. He arranged a dinner under the pretext of a private preview of Tom Holby's new picture. It was not yet in its final shape, but the producers were glad to lend it to Bermont.

Bermont warned Mem to wear her best clothes. There was a certain shame in her heart at being such a tramp, but she felt now that she had a higher purpose than her personal ambition. She was working for her father and his church as well; and religious motive has always been a wondrous sedative to a conscience.

she had worn hitherto had once given her a simple nobility. In her first scene she had been as bad as Miss Devan, forever pulling her skirts down. Her muscles remembered when her mind forgot. Kenrick had yielded to her once. "In God's name, Miss Stedden, forget your knees and don't advertise them by always covering them."

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Bermont saved her the price of a gown by lending her a fashion Parisian miracle from his own big wardrobe. It was astonishing to him as it was to Mem to find what a change clothes make in a soul. The simple things



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