

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOHN LONGWORTHY.

M. F. EGAN IN AVE MARIA.

SOME people have strange ideas about very poor folk. I have heard all kinds of remedies proposed by well-meaning philanthropists, but this is the first time I have known any body to propose to reform the tenement-house system by means of high-class music. The man interests me, I must say."

"He is abominable!" Esther declared. "He looks over one's head and talks with the most intolerable air of superiority. What an awful time his wife and children must have! I imagine his making them play instructive games and practice *fugues* and things! I should like to tell him what I think of him."

"He has an odd accent at times," Mary said. "Is he a foreigner?"

"I don't know," Esther answered. "Probably Mr. Fitzgerald can tell us something; he is going to sing a classical baritone conglomeration from a German opera at this concert."

Mary was silent. She began to search for excuses for not attending the concert; but there was no one else to go with Esther—Miles, in the present condition of affairs not being eligible.

When the carriage promised by Mr. Bastien came to the door Esther was ready, her mind divided between the "set" of her black silk frock and a nervous dread lest something might happen to spoil her playing. Mary had been ready for an hour; she put some Jacqueminot roses in Esther's belt, gave her hair a sisterly pat or two, and, accompanied by a large roll of music, the two drove off toward the resplendent temple of music which was such a contrast to The Anchor.

They were admitted to the rooms behind the stage through a side door, which opened on a narrow and muddy alley. Mr. Bastien and Arthur Fitzgerald were on the stage. Bastien was in evening clothes; Fitzgerald wore a frock-coat, with one of the roses he had picked up in Galligan's parlor in his button-hole. Mary had held it for a moment, yet here he wore it in her very presence and she did not recognize the delicate homage he was paying her. Esther noticed it, and thought it was rather faded; for lack of something to say she said so, and offered him one of the red buds she had. Fitzgerald had no resource except to put the white rose carefully in his left breast pocket, and to replace it with the dewy and fragrant one Esther offered him. Mary watched this episode with a touch of impatience. She felt a slight suspicion that Esther was something of a flirt, but she repressed it at once. Mr. Bastien nodded his head approvingly.

"I am glad you thought of the roses. The poor need to be taught the æsthetic use of flowers; and the best way to do it is to teach by example."

"I don't know where the poor are to get flowers," answered Esther, impelled by an almost irresistible impulse to contradict everything Mr. Bastien said, "unless they steal them from graveyards."

"Horrible!" Bastien exclaimed.

A rush of feet in the hall prevented him from making further comment. He went to a little lace curtained window at the side of the stage, and looked into the body of the hall. It was brilliant in color. The walls were crimson with gilded panels and crystal globes for the electric burners. The seats, of light wicker-work of a graceful pattern, were already half full; those in front were occupied by a number of gaily dressed young girls, attended by young men with and without collars, but nearly all with closely-shaved heads. There was a lapse between the fringe of the brightly dressed and a dark line around the doors. This dark line was soon seen to consist of Italian men and women, mostly with small children, and several Chinese.

Bastien glanced in surprise at the front row of benches. He turned helplessly to Esther.

"Look, please," he said, "and tell me where the poor people are."

Esther looked through the lace curtain, to see Nellie Mulligan, in her red garment, above which rose an elaborate hat.

Nellie ostentatiously held up the programme in a pair of carefully gloved hands. Next to her sat a rather chubby-looking young man, with a slight yellow mustache, a cropped head, and a scintillant breastpin in his purple necktie. His arm was thrown over the back of Nellie's seat, and together they read Mr. Bastien's programme with an air of amusement. Around these two were various friends of theirs—members of the Lady Rosebuds and other social circles. The night after Christmas was an "off-night"; there was almost nothing going on in society, and this concert offered an agreeable but not a too violent diversion.

Esther understood the meaning of Bastien's question at once. If all the young women were not as well gloved as Nellie Mulligan, they were as brilliantly dressed. There were *befathered hats in abundance*, and the assemblage looked like a flower garden into which a number of shaven-headed convicts had intruded.

The colorless young man was in the majority. There were many low-browed and weather-beaten young men. Many of the cropped heads showed white scars and knobs—tokens of bygone frays, in which the oyster shell and the tomato can had played a part. Some of the girls were thin and careworn, but many had bright eyes and clear complexions. They were in appearance greatly superior to the men.

"You don't know this world," Esther said with a low laugh that had a touch of malice in it. "The gay-looking people in the front row are poor enough, but they are very different to what you imagine them to be. The line of wretched-looking Italians, who stay down near the door because they are not dressed, are probably richer in possessions than these people near us."

"I don't understand," said Bastien. "Is there actually caste among these people?"

Esther enjoyed his helplessness, as the native of the plains delights in the fine airs of the citizen who attempts to ride a kicking pony.

"Of course there is. Look!" she continued, pointing to a bulldog-headed young man who was cracking peanuts between his teeth, "there's enjoyment! But Liszt's Rhapsody will make him forget his vulgar amusement."

Bastien gazed at her doubtfully. By this time the hall was filled, and several of the other singers had arrived. Mary and Esther were introduced to them. They were all people that sang high-class music; and Esther forgot her nervousness as she wondered how the audience would greet Miss Maud Thornton's sage-green and pre-raphaelite gown, and her warbling of Provençal *aubades* to the music of the mandolin. But the opening chorus was soon over; Mr. Bastien led Esther out to the grand piano, and with fear and trembling she began the Hungarian Rhapsody.

NX.—At Lacey's.

Nellie Mulligan had spent an eventful day. As one of the chief managers of the Lady Rosebuds, she had much to think of and much to do. Luckily for her, the rush of the holiday business had slackened, and during the noon hour of rest she kept the little cash-girls busy in doing her behests. Among these little cash-girls, whose uniform was a red frock and a white apron, was Rose O'Connor. As Rose, though small and fragile, was very good-natured, Nellie Mulligan found many errands for her.

In the first place, Nellie had her toilet to consider; and this required more reflection and ingenuity than most young ladies in society are obliged to give to it. It needed not only consideration, but much practice in the art of coaxing and promising. Rose, after she had helped to heat Nellie's tea, and brought in two dozen chocolate *celairs* and double that number of pieces of pie and doughnuts for the luncheons of the sales ladies was sent out to negotiate with the young man who had a flower-stand on the corner for some roses for Nellie. This needed many forced marches on Rose's part; for Nellie was very "particular" about flowers, and the young man, who had no invitation to the Lady Rosebuds, was not anxious to be obliging. Besides, Rose had been given several beer cans to fill for some of the more elderly ladies, whose constitutions needed stronger support than tea imparted. At last, the little girl sank wearily down in a corner of the room, and gratefully accepted the slice of bread and butter which Nellie Mulligan gave her.