

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOHN LONGWORTHY,

M. F. KOAN IN AVE MARIA.

No Thoroughfare.

Miles Galligan solemnly examined the handkerchief, while the sounds of gay music came from below. There was no mistaking the little Maltese cross embroidered in the corner. John Longworthy, like many bachelors of his age, had been a very methodical man, and he had, like all bachelors, idiosyncrasies. One of these was the practise of having in his desk hundreds of envelopes, of all sizes, marked with the little cross. They were convenient, and he never paid a bill except in clean notes or absolutely bright silver, enclosed in a suitable little envelope. He held the opinion that much handled paper money carried contagion, and at frequent intervals he instructed his clerk to change all the currency that happened to be paid him into fresh crisp notes or glistening silver. This "crank" of John Longworthy amused his friends, and his superstition about the Maltese cross amazed them. But as the most "advanced" and unbelieving of them had superstitions of his own, it was not so wonderful, after all. There was old Bob Akers, for instance, an agnostic of the most pronounced type, who felt nervous all day if he spilt the salt, there was Miss Wesley Horton, who declared that religion was a failure, and yet believed in palmistry and a whole group of the credulous incredulous.

Miles had gathered every possible point of interest about John Longworthy from that gentleman's servant, and had made enough notes of all the minute details of his surroundings and habits to satisfy the most scrupulous detective. He knew the Maltese cross well, and as he held the marked handkerchief in his hand trembled.

"Where did Arthur Fitzgerald get that handkerchief?" he asked himself. Was the long-sought clue in his hands at last? He sat down near the table, a changed man. He did not hear the soft sound of music or the echo of pleasant chatter from the parlor. Arthur Fitzgerald had become a person of immense importance to him; for the moment there was no one in the world so important to Miles as the young man who had carelessly entered the house an hour or so before. Miles locked the door and examined the handkerchief again. There could be no mistake about it: it was John Longworthy's; his servant had shown many of the same kind to Miles, saying that his master had bought a large supply of them at Belfast. Miles felt that this was a golden opportunity; but how was he to make use of it? Should he return the handkerchief to Arthur Fitzgerald, and at the same time point out the tell-tale initial? Perhaps. And, as this thought flashed through his mind, he said to himself that he had never cared much for Fitzgerald, anyhow, that man down-stairs knew too much about Longworthy's taking off.

Miles thought and thought, oblivious of all except his thoughts; and at last he came to one determination. He would not take anybody into his confidence; he would watch and wait. If Fitzgerald—and just then he caught sight of the slight drop of blood on the linen and shuddered—had helped to put Longworthy out of the way, some motive for it must turn up.

He forgot that Fitzgerald was his old schoolmate, and that the worst thing he had been hitherto able to say of him was that he was "stuck up." Fitzgerald suddenly became lurid; and Miles' imagination, slow enough at ordinary times, was made vivid by suspicion. How could Fitzgerald afford to dress so well and go out so much, and be seen with lots of "swell" whose names Miles barely knew? The money must come from somewhere. And of late Fitzgerald had seemed more than usually prosperous. It was understood that he had a little money of his own, for he was sent to the Jesuits' school by his guardian; and the girls, who know him by sight, often said he was acquainted with socially nice people, but everybody was aware that it took as much money to keep "in the swim" with people who were socially nice as with people who were not socially nice. Miles knew this to his cost; for his associates, the ward politicians, were not nice; but, nevertheless, they were expensive. From these Fitzgerald

had always held aloof, and some of Miles' irritation against him was due to this fact.

It must be admitted that the thought of Fitzgerald's social superiority gave him great pleasure now. Miles reflected how bitter was the fate of a man who went out to dinner in a "swallow-tail coat" three or four nights in the week—and this, he heard, Fitzgerald was in the habit of doing. It must lead to all sorts of extravagance, and finally to ruin. A fellow that would lie in that polite way—and wasn't it as bad as he to induce another chap to tell stories about old school-days just as a blind?—would steal. And if a man begins to steal, where will he end? Miles felt a thrill of pity for his old school friend as he heard his voice, a fair baritone, begin the recitative to "Rest thee, O Mother!" from "Trova-
tor:"

"If the dread moment of darkness oppress me—"

Azucena's words, in Arthur Fitzgerald's voice, sounded weird and terrible to Miles; and when Esther's pure soprano came in, with the soothing notes of Manico, he felt a certain sorrow for his old schoolmate.

"After all," Miles said, his eyes moistening as he thought of his own magnanimity, "I could not give him up to justice, and perhaps he may only have been accessory to the crime. If he'd tell me the whole thing I'd be satisfied, though I'd like to have that reward. Justice or no justice, reward or no reward, I must find the clue to the mystery."

And yet Miles could not decide on any course of action. His brain was in a whirl. He raised the window-sash and looked out. The moonlight and the keen air cleared his head. After all, Arthur Fitzgerald could not be a villain; he was a fool, of course he always had been a fool, but Miles had never been quite sure of it until he played that mean trick by which he deserted him and got into the parlor; and yet he was incapable of serious crime. The fresh air helped Miles to this conclusion.

"It seems to me they've grown very well acquainted," he said, as the parlour door opening, he heard Arthur Fitzgerald, in a buzz of laughter, saying good-bye, and gaily promising to come again. Then Mary's voice called out:

"Miles! Miles! Mr. Fitzgerald is going."

Miles took his resolution. He would try the effect of a surprise. He unlocked the door, took the handkerchief in his hand and walked slowly down-stairs into the brightly lit hall, where his sisters were standing; for they were not fashionable enough to say a cold good-bye at the drawing-room door. Fitzgerald had put on his own coat, and stood hat in hand.

"Don't forget the music from 'Mignon' when you come," Esther was saying.

Fitzgerald looked radiant—in the best of humour with all the world.

"Good-bye, old boy!" he said, extending his hand. "I've had a jolly evening, thanks to you."

Miles, with a grave air that struck his sisters as rather funny, nodded his head, and put the fateful bit of linen into Fitzgerald's hand.

"There's your handkerchief," he said.

Fitzgerald thanked him, and carelessly tucked it into his pocket. He had started down the steps when Miles darted toward him and whispered:

"That's not *your* handkerchief."

Fitzgerald probably did not hear the words, for he responded, making his way down the stoop: "Thanks! It was careless of me to drop it. Thanks!"

Miles' face, when he closed the door and turned to his sisters, betrayed conflicting emotions. Mary looked at him in surprise and doubt.

"O Miles," she said, "I hope you have not been drinking—"

"I haven't," he answered. "I've been thinking—about, that brass-faced monkey."

A little later Mary knocked at his door timidly, and handed in the pitcher of lemonade. He felt the reproach, but he only ground his teeth. "Girls are such idiots!" But what was he to do now? All night he stayed awake and through the long hours Arthur Fitzgerald took many shapes before him.