

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOHN LONGWORTHY.

M. P. EGAN IN AVE MARIA.

I.—Broadway at Night.

John Longworthy walked up Broadway, swinging his umbrella rather recklessly. Fortunately, there was not anybody in lower Broadway to be prodded by its gyrating point; for eight o'clock had just struck, and, until he came to Fulton Street, Broadway was a desert. He walked rapidly, unheeding a slight drizzle of rain. He had no need to be in a hurry as he had just dined and yet he dashed under the heads of the horses of a street-car that was turning into Broadway, as if it were twelve o'clock noon and he were a broker late for an expected arrangement on change.

Longworthy was not satisfied with himself or the world. He had dined at the Twilight Club, which met periodically in a restaurant in the top of a great building down town. He had heard a number of speeches on the subject named for discussion at this symposium. Mr. Henry George and Mr. Redpath had spoken; a popular Baptist minister, a Conservative young lawyer, and a Catholic priest had given their opinions; and yet nobody had quite convinced Longworthy that there was any way out of the muddle into which modern civilization had gotten itself. The question had been, "How Shall We Help the Poor?"

The Catholic priest's utterance had struck him as having a practical ring, but it seemed to Longworthy that he laid too much stress on the spiritual condition of the poor in New York. And yet he seemed to know them better than the others, and that was an advantage. Most people whom he had heard talk on this burning question seemed to feel that the less you knew of the poor personally and the more you knew of them statistically, the better you were qualified for defining their wants. The priest seemed to know the poor of New York, and in them John Longworthy was very greatly interested. But, not being a Catholic, he failed to understand why the priest put so much stress on sin and so little on sanitation. He was of the opinion that if you gave poor people light, pleasant rooms, gymnastic apparatus, swimming schools, good music, and lectures improving to their literary taste, you would make them as contented as mortals could be. It suddenly occurred to him, as the priest spoke, that perhaps it would be well to know the poor and what they considered their needs before prescribing for them.

John Longworthy was forty years of age and a bachelor. There had been a romance in his life ten years ago. He had admired intensely a young Italian girl, but religious differences had been an insuperable barrier to their marriage. This experience made him graver in tone than he had been. Being moderately well off, he travelled much in out-of-the-way places. He had written two books—on "The Science of Politics" and on "Social Questions and their solution." It was the prestige of these volumes which had earned for him many invitations to the Twilight Club. He had gone thither in search of light on questions which—his books said—he had already answered. Somehow he felt that he was outgrowing these volumes, although they continued to sell. He had in contemplation an article for the *North American Review*, in which he would show that the essence of all religions was to be the religion of the future, and that this essence was reverence for ago and love of little children. Apart from those feelings possible of cultivation in every breast, and which should be cultivated by the State, religion was a collection of ancient odds and ends, barnacles,—*roba di Roma*, and other effete places. Reverence for the old and love for the young should be cultivated by perfect plumbing, annual poetical celebrations, good music, and the introduction of Longfellow's poems as a text-book in all schools. He had determined to find out who said "I love God and little children," and to put it—if it happened to have been written by Jean Paul Richter—at the head of his paper. It meant really the essence of all religion,—for of course "God" stood for the forces of nature.

All this ran through Longworthy's mind as he walked up Broadway in the rain. To passers by he was a tall, well-dressed man in a hurry. If you had seen him in the *Herald* office—into which he dropped to give an advertisement to the clerk at the desk—you would have seen that he was a man

with a high forehead, a healthy color, kindly blue eyes, a rather long blonde beard and mustache. His eyes were grave eyes with a latent spark in them; he carried a light overcoat over his arm; he wore a dark frock-coat, gray trousers, and a silk hat; a bunch of violets in his lapel did not distinguish him particularly, for the New Yorker has become as fond of flowers as the ancient Roman. He paid for his advertisement—he wanted a copyist, and turned away from the desk, forgetting his umbrella. The clerk called after him, but Longworthy did not hear him. It had ceased to rain. Before the clerk could get out from behind his rampart, Longworthy, had jumped into a *coupe* which happened to be passing.

The clerk looked at the umbrella curiously. It was a good one, with a handle of some foreign polished wood, and the initial "L" on a little silver plate. The clerk thought with complacency that his own name was "Long." He went back to his work, feeling that the day had been a lucky one; for a man who was capable of leaving an umbrella behind him on a damp night would in all probability not remember where he left it. The clerk reflected that a man who could afford to take a *coupe* when he felt like it, and to wear a nosegay of Parma violets in December, would not miss his umbrella much; and he examined the engraved "L" again, with a certain feeling that virtue, in his case, had been rewarded. A newsboy who had watched the clerk congratulated him, and said "the bloke that lost that umbril was his uncle, and that the property ought to be given to him to take home."

The driver of the *coupe* stopped at Canal Street. Longworthy had told him to drive to the Union League Club, where he expected to meet his publisher, and he introduced to a member of Parliament who had read his "Social Questions." There was a block at Canal Street, because a circus company was moving its luggage and animals. The carriage paused ten minutes; when it stopped again, in front of the Union League, the driver waited a moment in the hope that his "fare" would open the door himself and get out. As there was no sign, the driver descended and opened the door. There was nobody inside! The driver was astonished; he lit a match and found a two-dollar note on the seat.

"It's queer!" he said to himself. "The man looked like a gentleman—and so he was!" he concluded, as he fingered the note. "Some people, if they wanted to try this game, would have beaten me out of my fare."

He did not say anything about the matter, until he saw in the papers of one day after that Mr. John Longworthy, an eminent man of letters, had disappeared. The last people who had seen him were the clerk in the *Herald* office, the driver, and the newsboy. They were heroes of the moment, and the umbrella with the "L" on it divided public interest with them.

The clerk described the upper part of John Longworthy—the forehead,—he had taken off his hat at the window, for the walk had heated him,—the violets, and the color of his coat. The newsboy described his trousers and the pair of white over-gaiters he wore. He had gone, and his friends believed that he had been murdered; but the driver scoffed at this, until his hat, with a card pasted in it, was found, battered and almost shapeless, in a gutter in Canal Street. Even then he reluctantly assented to the theory; for it was his opinion that a gentleman who might have had a free ride and did not take it was too good to come to any bad end. He was alone in this opinion, though John Longworthy's friends, in a series of interviews, declared that he had not an enemy in the world. As his publisher, too, was loud in this assertion, it seemed to be true. He had disappeared,—that was certain.

II.—The Scent of the Violets.

All the daily papers had theories about John Longworthy's disappearance. It was a case of murder or suicide. He had been dragged from the *coupe* and sandbagged. He might have walked into the river in a fit of temporary insanity. He was considered to be eccentric at times, and perhaps some sudden trouble had driven him mad. But there was no trace of sudden trouble. His last letter to a friend in Paris lay half finished in his study. It was printed in all the papers. It ran:

"Your report of the condition of the poor in Paris makes