

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOHN LONGWORTHY.

M. P. ZOAN IN AVE MARIA.

XXVIII.—The Dance.

BASTIEN and Fitzgerald made their way into the ball-room. At one end of it was a stage, with the curtain down, representing Vesuvius in eruption. A gallery crowded with spectators ran around three sides of the hall. They took their stand beneath this gallery, and the Lady Rosebuds and their attendants filed past them.

Nellie Mulligan, leaning on Miles' arm, headed the glittering throng. Her train was respectfully followed by Jim Dolan and Lou Simmons. Jim was almost as splendid as Miles; his badge was similar, and his nose-guy even larger. Later in the evening he met with a misfortune, which exposed him to some derision. Owing to a bad investment—he had spent five days in lounging on the corners, owing to a disagreement with his employers about a Saturday's half holiday,—he had been unable to hire his "full dress suit" until an hour before the opening of the dance, and consequently he had omitted to notice that a small tag bearing the words, "S. Nathan, 3d shelf," depended from the neck of the coat. The discovery of this caused him much pain; particularly as Miles, in his humorous way, called attention to it. It was the one blot on this red-lettered night; otherwise he triumphed.

Nellie's rival, Miss Simmons, who was red-haired and always wore blue, was thought by some to be even more stylish than Nellie herself. Her fan hung by her side, suspended by a long ribbon and in her left hand she carried a large bunch of yellow roses. Then followed pink gowns and white gowns, black gowns and red, attached to every sort of young man in every variety of dress. There were no low-cut bolices, as there would have been in "society,"—Bastien noticed with satisfaction; and those, like Nellie Mulligan's, which were not very high, were covered with lace. The young ladies were not all so resplendent as she was; there were many very plain dresses, relieved merely by a knot of ribbon or a bright-colored fan.

The band played a resounding march. Slowly and solemnly the procession moved around the hall. No one spoke, no one smiled. The picture was bright enough, if one did not look at the faces. On each was an expression of settled sadness. Suddenly the cry was heard above the music: "Ladies to the right! Gents to the left!" And the couples separated, performing various evolutions, and then joining each other again. At last, after a number of bewildering changes, they formed for a quadrille, and the real business of the evening began.

Later, in the intervals of choosing partners and dancing, the "gents" went down to the bar in pairs and returned livelier than ever, with the scent of beer mingling with that of musk and hothouse roses. The ladies were offered sandwiches, coffee, and lemonade. Still later, the fun became fast; etiquette was less stringent; and those timid creatures who sat under the galleries because their coat collars were not up to the regulation standard, came out and waited together, unnoticed by the hitherto rigid floor managers. After a while there were heard many shrieks of protest, called out by the determination of some of the "gents" to know the reason why other "gents" did not act properly. And still later, solicitous Lady Rosebuds, a little dishevelled by the furiousness of the whirl, might be seen supporting their escorts through the mazes of the square dances. But nobody seemed to mind it.

Miles had behaved "like a gentleman" to all possible constituents. He had divided his attention impartially between the bar and Nellie Mulligan. His eyes grew smaller, his face redder, and his voice huskier, as the merry hours rolled by.

At midnight Fitzgerald, who had been sitting under the gallery with Bastien since half-past ten o'clock, arose.

"Let us go," he said; "this makes me sick at heart. I hate to see those young girls pulled about by the drunken brutes."

"We'll come back," Bastien answered. "I'd like to see the thing out."

They strolled into the dressing-room. It was cool and

deserted. Now and then one of the younger men came to get a glass of iced water from a round tank in the corner of the room, his wilted collar showing that he had been dancing through the whole programme.

"And these are the poor, Fitz?" Bastien said when they lighted their cigars. "And this is one of their amusements?"

"These are the children of the poor," answered Fitzgerald; "and they look forward eagerly to amusements of this kind."

"It's a revelation to me," said Bastien. "There is more beauty, if less grace, than there would be at any fashionable assembly in any great city. Certainly, the young woman in the same position of life in London would not show such refinement of manner or taste in dress as these girls show. It is a revelation. And yet you say that many of them come from tenement houses like 'The Anchor'?"

"Most of them. Where else could they live in New York?"

"Ah, yes!" said Bastien, with a sigh. "If it were not for the beastly willing of beer, the extravagance, and the fact of these young girls being out long after midnight without a chaperone of any kind, it would not be so bad. It seems to me," he added, with a short laugh, "that if one could find methods by which society—I mean the society that dances at Delmonico's—could be made freer from vanity, envy, extravagance, license of all kinds,—could be made simpler, more—"

"Christian," interposed Fitzgerald.

"Well, have it so,—we could easily apply the same methods to these people and succeed, too."

Fitzgerald's face brightened.

"I am glad you have found that out. Your people in Fifth Avenue have good music and lovely pictures, and good food and gentle manners, and high cultivation and æsthetic tastes,—very well. These people do not care for really good music; Liszt's Polonaise is less to them than that mere waltz the orchestra is now rattling out. Their idea of art is rudimentary, and their food depends on circumstances. Their manners are governed by their feelings—which is about the worst thing one can say of anybody's manners,—and they don't know a good picture from a bad one; and yet they are in need of the very same influences which, if cultivation could exert in Fifth Avenue, would make the rich and the poor what Our Lord wants them to be—brothers."

Bastien pulled at his cigar for some time before he spoke.

"You mean to say that my theories are foolish,—that if culture cannot exalt the rich to a knowledge of their duties, to a sublime altruism, it can do little for the poor?"

"Exactly. I mean that. See, these people are imitating the amusements of the rich. Naturally, they love color and light, and quick motion to lively music, and they arrange them all for their enjoyment after the manner of the rich. Is Miles Galligan there better because he has learned that an evening coat is better form after six o'clock than the coat of any shape his father wore? You say flowers help the poor,—they are here in abundance; but will all the roses and heliotrope the girls display make them more considerate to the old folk at home, less fond of the distractions of the city streets, less anxious to outlive their neighbors in dress; more industrious, more simple, more content?"

Bastien threw away his cigar, but did not answer.

In the meantime Nellie Mulligan had been told by Miles of his interview on Christmas night with his sisters. She heard it with flashing eyes after the last Lancers Quadrille. She stamped her foot angrily on the smooth floor, regardless of the precious white satin shoe on it.

"So I'm not good enough to marry into the Galligan family!" she exclaimed. "Oh, good gracious! I've half a mind to call Jim Dolan and tell him. How he would laugh at the idea! Oh, my! I don't want to say anything against your sisters, Miley, but if I hadn't more style about me than they have, I'd drown myself! The idea!"

"You are stunning!" said Miles, in admiration and embarrassment. "I wish you hadn't asked me about the girls. I'm sure I didn't want to tell you,—and you don't have to marry them, do you?"

"But if I marry you I'll have to live in the same house with them," said Nellie. "Oh, do button my glove! Try it again, clumsy! So I'm not good enough to marry into the Galligan family! Oh, my!—excuse me, I must laugh!"

"If they only knew you," said Miles, in desperation, "they'd change their opinion."