Mata the Magician

A Romance of The New Era

BY

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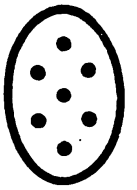

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TO

C**** I****,

BELOVED FRIEND AND TEACHER
OF THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS.

It is intimated by theologians that experiences denied us here can be obtained in the "next world."

Then why come here at all?

If our development as spiritual beings can be secured in the spiritual realm, it were worse than folly for even the happiest of men to have lifted the dark curtain of mortality.

—*John Emery McLean.*

MATA THE MAGICIAN.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW PATIENT.

After an excellent seven o'clock dinner, I retired to my comfortable study to enjoy the rest that I could thoroughly appreciate at the end of a day spent in driving over the hills and dales of the country surrounding the picturesque little city of Jamestown, where I had established myself as a practising physician. I was a young bachelor, just starting out upon the rough and rocky road that leads to fame and fortune. By careful management I had been able to get through college with fair success, and, while still undecided as to where to settle, an old physician suddenly died in this small city—situated so near the beautiful Lake Chautauqua—and a friend gave it as his opinion that I would do well to go there and take the doctor's place. I did not deliberate long upon the suggestion, but packed my belongings and shortly was established in a comfortable office in one of the principal streets of the city.

The days preceding the eventful evening with which this story opens had been unpleasant ones. It was the thirtieth of November. The wind blew cold and raw, and occasionally a few snow-flakes fell in warning of the storm that had been threatening for some time. Settling myself in my reading chair, my slippered feet resting upon the fender, *The Evening Journal,* a box of good cigars, and a bowl of egg-nog on the table at my elbow, I felt comfortably indifferent to the advancing storm. The fire in the grate burned brightly, its warm glow filling the room with cozy cheer; and, while I listened to

the howling of the wind outside my snug quarters, I hoped that I would not be compelled to go out again that night.

While in the midst of my reveries the bell rang and my office boy announced a caller. Trusting it was some one for a prescription only, I entered my office and found a little girl awaiting me. She informed me that her "Guru" was in bed and had sent for me. I looked at the child in surprise. In appearance she was an odd little creature—not more than ten years of age, I thought—with eyes like purple pansies and shining golden hair. Her face was shaded by a monstrous hood that seemed much too large for her; but the sun-glinting curls hung below it, and the wind had blown them into a tangled mass.

I asked her who had sent for me, and she repeated her first assertion—that it was her "Guru." I was at a loss to comprehend her, and once more questioned her. She stepped nearer to me and very distinctly said:

"Guru is in bed and sends for *you*. No one is ill. Are you coming? I cannot wait longer."

Thinking of my bowl of egg-nog and the warm fire, I pushed aside the curtains and saw the snow falling rapidly. Then, turning to the child, I asked:

"Who is your 'Guru'?"

Her quaint appearance amused me. When she had drawn her long cloak together and had deliberately arranged the ties of her hood, she replied:

"My Guru is he who has always cared for me. I know no other father."

At last I understood that a *human being* was in need of a physician. It was not a pleasant prospect—that of leaving my glowing fire to plunge out into the storm and darkness of that miserable night. But I was poor, my reputation was yet to be made, and here was, perhaps, a new patient. On asking the child if I should need my horse, she replied:

" No, sir—not if your legs are as good as mine."

Putting on my hat and overcoat and taking my medicine-case, I followed the child out into the storm through which she fairly seemed to fly. The night was very dark and the snow blew so persistently in my face that I could scarcely see where we were going. Occasionally my companion disappeared for a moment, and then again I saw the flutter of her cloak and knew she was not lost. We dodged round corners and down back streets until we reached the portion of the city known at that time as the "Boat Landing." It was a lonely place at any time of day, but at that hour of the night it was said to be positively dangerous. I began wondering if I had not been indiscreet in neither taking my horse nor leaving word with my office-boy as to my whereabouts. I was about to refuse to go further, when my small guide suddenly stopped, asked me to wait a moment, and then disappeared. I shivered and looked around me. This adventure was by no means a pleasant one. I had waited for perhaps ten minutes, when I heard the voice of my companion, saying:

"Will you come through, sir?"

Vainly I looked for a gateway in the high board fence before me. Then I felt a touch upon my shoulder, and heard her say:

"This way, if you please."

Thus guided, I saw an aperture in the fence, about three feet from the ground. The child was standing in it and was holding a door open, waiting for me to enter. I hesitated, while all the blood-curdling tales I had ever heard about persons being enticed into dens, to be robbed and murdered, came into my mind, and I wondered if such would be my fate if I went on. Then came again the child's voice, asking:

"Why do you not enter?"

Ashamed of my cowardice and resolved to see the end of this adventure, whatever it might be, I placed my hands upon the sill of the doorway and sprang through. Instantly the door slammed shut behind me, and I found myself in a large

inclosure that seemed to be private grounds—so far as I could see in the blinding storm. In one corner stood a building that I concluded must be the house the child lived in. She had vanished from my sight; and I was about to knock upon the door for admission when it opened, disclosing the girl holding a lamp in her hand. She invited me to enter.

I stepped into a room scrupulously clean. The floor had been scoured till it could be no whiter. The furnishings in this apartment consisted of a small cooking-stove, three or four kitchen chairs, a long cupboard standing against the wall, an old-fashioned settee, a cross-legged table, and an antique clock with weights and long chains reaching to the floor. The windows were covered by heavy shades, and the door was of massive oak ornamented by an ancient brass thumb latch.

After taking a survey of my surroundings I turned my attention to the girl, who had thrown aside her wraps and stood before me—apparently much older than I had supposed her to be. She was about fifteen years of age, and, though short in stature, was developing from childhood into womanhood. Her complexion was wonderfully fair, with exquisite coloring; her teeth were like little pearls; her perfect lips were red as rubies; and over all were those golden curls that the wind had blown into the most abandoned confusion. Her eyes were wonderful; they were large and reminded one of purple, velvety pansies; and they were given a darker shade than they otherwise would have had by the long, dark lashes that fringed the pretty, snowy eyelids. Her eyebrows were dark and delicately arched, giving to her forehead, by deep contrast, the appearance of pure white alabaster.

So absorbed was I in contemplating this bit of feminine loveliness that my patient and errand were entirely forgotten, until the tinkling of a little bell in another room brought me to my senses.

The fair vision stepped to the china-cupboard and touched a small button; the ponderous thing immediately swung out of

sight, and the girl motioned to me to enter the next room. Removing my damp coat, I at once stepped forward and then stood spell-bound at the picture before me.

CHAPTER II.

MAGICIAN OR LUNATIC?

Never shall I forget the scene my gaze rested upon. The room was at least forty feet square, and the floor was covered with a green velvet carpet into which my feet sank at every step. Near the further end was a couch, and upon it lay an old man. Recovering my composure, I stepped to his side, but sprang back in horror. The pillows upon which his head rested were supported by a mass of serpents, coiled and intertwined in such a manner as to form the whole head of the couch. From the center of the mass the head of the largest reptile was raised, and, with open mouth and fangs visible, seemed about to spring at me. Not being especially friendly to the snake family, the sight of so much serpentine ugliness was appalling, and I was about to rush from the room when the thought suddenly came to me that *these* snakes were stuffed. Reassured, I turned again to my patient.

He appeared to be at least one hundred years of age, with hair snow white, eyes deeply sunken, and skin—seamed and crossed with wrinkles—of the color of old parchment.

I bade him good-evening and attempted to feel his pulse; but, drawing his hand away from mine, he began speaking in a peculiarly musical voice—a voice that did not sound like the cracked and trembling tones of an aged person.

"Young man, I did not send for you to prescribe for me," he said; "I do not need your medicine. It is in quite another way that I desire your services. Be seated upon that chair."

Somewhat surprised, I obeyed and prepared to give my attention to what he was about to say. He waited for a few

moments before speaking again, and, during the interval of silence, I had an opportunity to look around at the strange objects in the room. There was no lamp nor chandelier nor any other means of illumination; and yet a soft blue light, very beautiful, I thought, but decidedly uncanny, filled the whole apartment.

On one side of the room were arranged book-cases filled with volumes that I knew were very old. Some of them had no bindings and were composed of parchment sewn together. Others were bound in leather and showed much usage. Between the book-cases and the couch stood a small table. Its top was composed of many different kinds of jewels and precious stones set into cement; and in the weird blue light they sparkled and shone with a strange luster. At the further end of the apartment was a large mirror, decorated so profusely with vines and flowers that it reminded me of an entrance to a bower of climbing roses. And when I looked for the door through which I had entered, nothing but a blank wall appeared in its place. So far as I could see, there was neither entrance nor exit to this wonderful room. Glancing upward, I observed that the ceiling was composed of windows, and concluded that it was through these that the air and sunlight were allowed to enter. At this point in my observations my patient drew my attention to himself by remarking:

"My young friend, if your curiosity regarding my surroundings is gratified, perhaps you will now give your attention to me. I am about to drop this old body. It has served me well for one hundred and twenty-five years; but it is pretty nearly worn out and I am greatly in need of a new one. It was to tell you of my plans and to ask for your assistance that I sent for you to-night; and, since the time for my stay is so short, you will pardon me for bringing the business in question to the point at once."

I began to believe my patient was a lunatic and needed my professional services. After a pause the old man continued:

" I know you very well, although you do not know me. I knew your grandfather, your father, and your mother. It was through my influence that you were advised to settle in this city. I know what planet you were born under; what your character is, has been, and will be. Your blood is of good old stock, strong and pure, and I like you.

"You followed Mata here against your will, and against what you believed to be your better judgment. As you supposed, you came to visit a sick man. You were mistaken. I am not sick, although—you would say—I am about to die. These old eyes will never see the sun rise again; and it is now nearly midnight. I have much to tell you and must do so before leaving my body, because it is easier to communicate with you now than afterward.

"Mata is my own great-great-grandchild. She also has good blood; but I have not the time now to enter into the details of ancestors and family prestige. All that is written down in manuscript for you to read at some future time. There is no one with whom I can trust her but yourself, and you will marry her here to-night before I go. The marriage contract is written, ready for you both to sign. I do not desire the services of priest or magistrate, because I have no respect for either. A marriage is a promise between two persons to live together according to any manner in which they can agree; and a rule that would apply well in one case might not in another. Therefore, the marriage promises should be specified, and a written contract should be created for each union. Marrying people by the same ceremony indiscriminately, regardless of the dispositions or individual development of the contracting persons, is a great mistake. You are thinking that you are a young physician and cannot support a wife."

Such evidence of his ability to read my thoughts was most surprising to me; for, strange as it may seem, I was thinking precisely this, and before I could form a reply he continued:

"You need not trouble yourself to speak, because I am read-

ing your thoughts as I read my volumes in yonder book-cases; and, since the time is so limited, I will do the talking.

"Mata is too young to be your wife—save in name—for some time to come. She should be sent to school for five years and then she will be fitted to assume the duties of wife and companion. I have kept her with me since she was six months old. Other than myself, she knows no father or mother. I have taught her to call me *Guru,* a Hindu word meaning 'teacher.' She speaks grammatically in English, French, Italian, and German, and understands Sanskrit well enough to read it; but she knows nothing of mathematics, nor of music, painting, drawing, nor of any of the little feminine arts. She has never had the companionship of women nor of other children; she cooks our simple food, consisting of rice, cracked wheat or corn, and, as you see, keeps the house scrupulously neat. She mends the gowns I provide for her ready made, but knows nothing of the world outside the fence inclosing these grounds.

"Personally, I have been a student all my life, and have traveled over all the world seeking knowledge. I have gold in abundance, and jewels that, if sold, would bring a large fortune; but I must leave all this material wealth with you, since, where I am going, it will be of no use to me. Now I am coming to the most important part of my instructions; listen.

"You and Mata will stand before me and promise to keep the contract you are about to sign—I see that you are trying to decide what to do with this madman; and yet, deep in your mind, you are not sure that I am mad."

At that moment I was actually thinking thus, and yet, however strange and sudden it may seem, the thought of a possible marriage with Mata was not disagreeable to me; but that the grandfather was mad I had not the least doubt. However, I did not reply to his remark, and he continued:

"My young friend, you will find that every word I have

spoken to you is true; and although you may not realize the fulness of the truth for many years to come, you will do so ere you lie where I do to-night. In the course of my studies in arts and sciences that have long been forgotten by the world, I have learned that the souls of men return again and again to earth, assuming at each return different personalities—more commonly called physical bodies—and in this manner do they acquire, through these varied experiences or earth lives, the knowledge that must be gained before perfection can be attaind by them. As I have previously remarked, I am in need of a new body, since this one is badly worn and, like an old machine, has become useless and unmanageable; so I make this proposal to you. Marry this child, send her to school for five years, and at the end of that time assume the relationship of husband and wife. The first child born to you will be the personality that I shall possess during my next appearance upon earth."

Here the old man closed his eyes and remained silent. What should I do? Shut into this room at the hour of midnight—with a madman—and none of my friends having the slightest conception of my whereabouts, my heart thumped like a hammer against my ribs; my ears buzzed and the blood coursed rapidly through my veins. While I was trying to decide what to do, the picture of the girl in the next room seemed to rise before my mental vision, and, notwithstanding our short acquaintance, I felt that, should I ever marry, it would be she whom I would desire for my wife. But fame and fortune were to be won first, and marriage at present could not be considered for a moment.

While my mind was racing round like a whirlwind, trying to decide upon some course to pursue, the old man began speaking again, and, from his words, I knew he was indeed able to read my mind like an open book—as he had declared in the beginning. I had heard of such powers being developed sometimes, just before death, as if the mind gained then a deeper

insight or knowledge of things before unknown to it. But, never having been a witness to a circumstance of this kind, I was decidedly skeptical, even to the point of unbelief; so my preconceived notions received a fearful shock when he said:

"Yes, that is partly true; you have fame to win but not fortune, because I am leaving enough for you and Mata. You cannot take her for your wife in reality now, and there will be plenty of time to decide, within the next five years, whether you want her or not. Her character is as lovely as her face. I have written her horoscope and yours, and the stars have told me you are fitted for each other.

"Come, say quickly; what will you do?"

CHAPTER III.

A CONTRACT OF MARRIAGE.

Before I could reply the tinkle of that little bell again sounded, and seemingly the wall opened and the girl entered the room. The old man called her to the bedside.

"Look at her!" he commanded. "Do you not think her fit to be your wife?"

The pale blue light at that moment burst into the brightest refulgence, lighting up her golden hair till she was surrounded by a halo of light. In speechless wonderment I gazed at the picture she made, until it seemed that all the beautiful tints of the rainbow were blended into a background for her form. Her beauty was exquisite. I thought I was standing in the presence of a being from another world and bowed my head in reverence. The old man spoke to her:

"Mata, will you sign the contract I have prepared?"

"Yes, Guru; I shall do whatever you bid me," she replied.

He looked at me and waited for my answer. I knew I must speak, but my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. My

lips formed the word *yes,* but no sound came forth. He understood, and said:

"Very well. Go to yonder table and press your finger upon the large carbuncle in the center of the circle of moonstones."

As one in a dream, I obeyed him. When I touched the glowing stone the table split into two parts and underneath was a box containing papers, heaps of jewels, and canvas bags filled with coin. Immense wealth lay before me. The old man said:

"Bring to me the paper that lies topmost—the one that has not been folded."

I brought it. Then he asked the girl to bring a quill pen and some ink from a drawer in one of the book-cases. She obeyed him. He raised himself to a sitting posture and requested me to read the paper aloud. My voice had now come back, and I read:

Contract of Marriage.

We, the undersigned, do truly and solemnly agree to fulfil the conditions named in this contract; to live together as husband and wife so long as we can both agree to do so. There shall be no obedience required of either contracting party. Each shall have possession and full control of his or her property, to do with as may seem best to each without interference from the other. The husband shall not rule the body nor the actions of his wife. The wife shall not rule the body nor the actions of her husband.

If the time should come when the husband desires to be released, then the wife shall not hold him longer to this contract. If the time should come when the wife desires to be released, then the husband shall not hold her longer to this contract.

Should children be born of this union, and the contracting parties desire to separate after the birth of such children, then the mother shall have the care of them until they are of an age to choose which parent each desires to live with; the father and mother submitting willingly to such choice as their children may make and contributing equally toward the support of those children until they shall reach an age capable of self-maintenance.

To fulfil all these aforenamed conditions, we do most solemnly agree in the presence of this witness.

Signed,
Signed,
Signed,

When I finished reading the contract the old man asked:

"Will you sign that paper?"

I signified my willingness by an inclination of my head. He dipped the pen in the ink and offered it to me. I took it and wrote my name. He dipped it again and offered it to Mata. She took it and also signed. Then he took the pen and traced below our signature the name: "Crapo De Anno," and wrote:

"Sole witness to this Contract of Marriage between Frank Bennet and Mata De Anno. Entered into by them on the thirtieth day of November, eighteen hundred and thirty-three. And now may Divine Love bless and maintain, forever and forever, the *reunion* of these two souls.

"A-U-M."

Then, settling back upon his pillows and closing his eyes, he lay silent and motionless for several moments. Presently he opened his eyes, and said:

"I have a few more instructions to give. This house [looking at me] is deeded to you; and you may keep or sell it as you choose. The books are very old. The parchment volumes were written one thousand years ago and are very valuable to me. I desire you to box the furniture in this room, and provide a safe place for its keeping until you have finished the house for which I have left full directions in the manuscript of which I have previously spoken. You will then fit a room exactly like this one for my occupancy.

"Under this couch is a secret vault, in which a casket is prepared for the reception of this old body. To enter the vault, remove this couch and press your toe upon a white knob you will find in the floor under the edge of that rug. A large trap door will then swing aside, disclosing a stairway leading directly down to the vault. Carry down the body, place it in the casket, turn the handles at the head and foot as far as you can, and leave the vault for one hour. Then return, take what is left of the body, put it into the vase that stands in the corner on the floor, seal it, and, when you have boxed the articles of furniture, place it among them. And now I am going to leave

you. Please attend to these directions to-night; and when you go, take Mata with you."

I felt as if I were recovering from a nightmare; but Mata stood watching her grandfather, apparently unmoved. He closed his eyes, composed his limbs, and, while I kept my fingers on his pulse, it beat slower and fainter until it stopped altogether. When his breathing ceased, I turned to her and was about to speak. She raised her finger and whispered:

"Hush! He is just passing out."

Looking in the direction she pointed, to my amazement I saw a bluish-white, vapory cloud that seemed slowly gathering above the old body. It swayed for a few moments and then, assuming the outlines of a human form, it stood out distinct and clear—the perfect counterpart of the old man, every feature being plainly visible.

Speechless, I stood before this apparition. With eyes that seemed looking into my very soul, it returned my astonished gaze with a smile of love and tenderness. Then it slowly faded from our sight. Mata was the first to speak, and in a tone of sadness murmured:

"Good-by, Guru, until you come again."

And now there came a strange sensation in my head; it could only be compared to that of lifting off the cover of something. Instinctively my hand went up to my scalp. It seemed stationary, and I felt relieved. Then I counted my fingers. The usual number was there. Evidently my optic nerves were doing their regular work. The girl had seemed to notice nothing unusual in either my manner or appearance, so I concluded my reason had not left me.

I had been horrified at what the old man had said concerning his intentions regarding a future reëmbodiment. My own ideas had never been quite clear as to what the human soul is, and I had been rather inclined to take a materialistic view of death.

That a soul, that intangible thing that nobody had ever seen

or could analyze or describe, could come back to this earth and enter into another body—that too of an infant—seemed preposterous to me. I felt that so unreasonable an idea could not be entertained for a moment by a rational man. And here this apparition had upset all the theories that I had been arranging to my own satisfaction for years. I was left without a shred of my old belief to hold to, and my mental condition was chaotic.

As the soul of the old man faded from our sight the refulgent light, which had been produced in some mysterious manner, began to dwindle until there was but a dim twilight in the room; and the thought that perhaps I should be left in darkness to finish the work assigned me hastened my movements. Turning toward my companion, I asked if we had not better proceed at once with the caring for the body, since it was already growing dark. She replied:

"Guru will not expect us to obey his orders in darkness; the light will last as long as we shall need it."

I asked her whence the light came. She shook her head.

"I cannot tell you," she replied. "That is Guru's business; it was always so in this room. When he desired light, he willed it and it came."

I moved the couch and found the small white knob he had described. Pressing my foot upon it, instantly a door swung out of sight leaving an aperture in the floor about six feet square. There were the top steps of a stairway, but the bottom was entirely hidden in the shadows below. I asked Mata to bring a light. She replied:

"When you descend light will be furnished as you require it. No lamp will be needed."

I hesitated. That the girl was truthful, I had no doubt; but that her promise of light without any visible source would be fulfilled, I did not believe possible, and I did not feel equal to the taking of that lifeless form in my arms and carrying it down into that Egyptian darkness—after all that had occurred.

Deciding to put her statement to the test, I invited her to accompany me to the underground room first, and with apparently perfect fearlessness she passed before me.

When she stepped upon the top step of the stairway, the whole vault was flooded with the weird blue light that had pervaded the room above. Every object was distinctly visible from where I was standing. In the center of the vault stood an iron casket, unlined, and resting upon a huge, square, box-like apparatus, the composition of which I was unable to determine. At the head and foot were two crank-shaped handles, and I observed that small copper wires passed directly from each into the box below and disappeared under the casket.

It was a ghastly-looking thing, and seemed an uncomfortable couch for the last resting-place of the old man; but, since he had desired and provided it, there was nothing to be done but to follow his directions.

The room was devoid of furniture. Not even a chair or table was there, but on the floor in a corner stood an odd-looking vase. It was bowl-shaped at the bottom, with handles on either side to lift it by; the neck or top was drawn in till the opening would scarcely admit my hand. Beside it, on the floor, lay its cover, representing a small serpent coiled, with its head raised in the center to form a handle. Two emeralds, glowing and sparkling in the unnatural light, formed its eyes, and gave me a decidedly creepy feeling—for the thing seemed positively alive.

Mata stood beside the casket, with the look of abstraction on her face that I had observed at the time her grandfather died. Suddenly she remarked:

"Guru is anxious that this work shall be completed before the sun appears. He is not pleased with this delay."

As she finished speaking, the same spiritual form that had appeared in the room above stood before me. It was straight and well formed and looked about thirty-five years of age. That it was the etherotype of the corpse, I could not doubt, and I

began to realize then that the physical body of a man *is* but a husk for the kernel—the covering of the real individual.

But my meditations were suddenly brought to an end by a gesture indicating a desire that I should proceed. Hastening to the upper room, I took the motionless form in my arms, and to my surprise found that I could carry it with perfect ease. It seemed like a featherweight to me. Placing it in the casket, I composed the limbs and then asked Mata if she desired to take a last look at her grandfather. She raised her eyes to my face in surprise, as she said:

"My grandfather?"

"I understood him to say he was your grandfather."

She looked at me wonderingly. "Do you believe the envelope to be the message?" she asked.

I did not reply, and she continued:

"My grandfather stands yonder waiting for you to proceed—I think we have lingered too long at this task."

I seized the handle at the head of the casket, but was unable to reach the one at the foot at the same time. Mata saw the difficulty and turned it for me. The effect was wonderful. In a few moments the great square block on which the casket rested became fiery red, and then turned to a white heat. That the body was to be reduced to ashes, and that it was for the reception of those ashes that the vase had been prepared, I began to understand. And when the whole plan of cremation became clear in my mind, it seemed that I would go mad. Rushing up the stairs, I found the door to the next room closed. Possibly my face partially expressed my nervousness, for Mata followed me immediately and asked:

"Are you ill? You look very pale."

With as much composure as I could command, I asked her to open the door. She pulled a cord that hung from the ceiling, and the magic door opened. I ran from that room, opened the outer door, and plunged out into the storm.

CHAPTER IV.

DUST TO DUST.

The snow was falling and the wind was blowing a blizzard. I took a turn or two around the inclosure without hat or coat. Never did I enjoy anything more than that howling storm. It was real, and something I could understand. My thoughts were in a tumult and I could think of nothing but that mysterious room: the dying man, the phantom, and the wrinkled old body at that moment being reduced to ashes in the vault below.

After a while I suddenly became conscious that my head and hands were bare and I was shivering with cold. Opening the door, I again entered the kitchen. It seemed that an age had passed since first I saw that room and its simple furnishings. Mata was sitting upon the old settee and I seated myself beside her.

"Did you know all this was going to happen?" I inquired.

She looked up into my face with those beautiful, truthful eyes, and replied:

"I knew that Guru was going to leave his body to-night, and that he intended to place me in your care while he took the rest that he needed; but of the contract I was ignorant."

The contract! I had entirely forgotten it in the excitement that had followed the signing of it; and now I remembered. This child was my wife! While I sat thinking, she continued:

"I knew that you were to care for me, because Guru told me as long ago as I can remember that the stars had told him of you, and our destinies would be united after to-day."

I could not understand how one so young, apparently but a child, could manifest such perfect composure under such

trying circumstances. It did not seem that she was human. Other girls would have become hysterical; yet this child had not even wept. I was a man and a physician, and believed myself possessed of as much courage as the majority of my sex; yet the strain on my nerves had been so great that I was in danger of lapsing into feminine hysterics at any moment. I wondered if she cared for her grandfather.

"Did you love your Guru?" I asked.

A look of surprise passed over her face as she replied:

"Most certainly I do. Why do you ask if I *did* love Guru? Do I not love him now the same as always?"

"But he is dead. How can you love him now?" I asked.

"Guru dead?" she repeated; "I do not understand you. What is it to be dead?"

I was startled; she was fifteen years of age, yet did not know the meaning of the word "death."

"Why, when a person is dead he lies upon the bed just as your grandfather did," I said; "he cannot speak or move, he does not breathe, and after a while he decomposes and crumbles into dust and you can never see him again."

She looked as if she were trying to understand my meaning. Presently she replied:

"I can see him when he visits me. It is not he that lies upon the bed so helplessly—it is his body, after *he* has left; and it alone decomposes and turns to dust. You ought to know," she continued, "that the body is only the vehicle or instrument with which every one must manifest, in this world of matter—during the time he is not sleeping; and since he has to sleep a part of each twenty-four hours, and does without his body then, why is it so strange for him to do without it altogether for a longer time than while he is sleeping?"

I listened in astonishment to the words of the child. What sort of a being was she to sit so quietly and speak thus of that dread monster, Death—comparing it with sleep?

"But how do you know all this is true?" I asked.

"Because I have seen it," she replied. "Did not Guru leave his body in our presence? He has done that many times before to-night, when he did not wish to be burdened with it; and when he was ready he returned to it again. But we have not time to speak longer; the hour is nearly ended and we must finish our work."

I cast a hurried glance at my watch. It was true; the hour had expired and we must return to the vault.

Mata touched the spring that swung the ponderous cupboard aside and we entered the adjoining room. She went directly to the vault and I followed her. The great square box had resumed its natural color and I stepped to the casket and looked in. There, upon the bottom, lay all that remained of the old mystic—a few handfuls of dust. While wondering how the ashes could be removed to the vase, I stood stupidly staring into the casket till Mata brought a small brush and carefully gathered them into a little heap. Then she brought the vase and a tiny dust-pan, and after the task was finished she motioned me to bring the cover and precede her up the stairs. I was glad enough to go, and moved with alacrity. We found the neck of the vase smeared on the inside with a green, gummy substance. Mata pressed the cover into its place and held it near the stove till the gum was thoroughly melted. Then she carried it to the next room and locked it in one of the book-cases, with the remark that it would be safe there till the furniture should be moved.

The next difficulty to be overcome was to get the child and her baggage home with me through the storm—and what should I do with her afterward? I had bachelor quarters in the rear of my office, but it seemed scarcely the proper thing to take a young girl to them. While I stood thinking about it Mata inquired what troubled me. I replied that the snow was now knee-deep and was still coming down. The wind was blowing it into great drifts, and the stable where my horse was kept was at least a mile away.

"Why do you not go after your horse while I pack the jewels and coin?" she asked.

"I thought you would be afraid to stay alone," I replied.

"There is nothing for me to fear besides myself, and I shall be too busy to get into mischief," she said, innocently.

I could not understand a nature like this; the girl was an enigma to me. Without replying to her remark I put on my coat and told her to listen for the whistle I would give when I should return, and left the house.

An hour later I was again at the door, and in response to my signal Mata appeared carrying a well-filled traveling-bag and told me that a similar one—too heavy for her to lift—awaited me in the kitchen. I went in and found a bag half as tall as myself filled with things so heavy that I had to try several times before placing it on my shoulder. It was no easy task to get it through the aperture in the fence, and when at last it was loaded into the sleigh there was little room for me. But we reached my office without serious mishap, and the two bags were well hidden away in an old trunk. Mata's snowy hood and cloak were hanging by the fire, and we were warming our toes at the grate when Ted, my office boy, called out:

"Who comes there?"

"A robber could carry away the whole house and you with it. Suppose you go to the stable with my horse, now that you are awake," I replied, with assumed severity.

Ted tumbled out of bed, hurried into his clothes, and rushed away to do my bidding. I left Mata in my private office, and went to my kitchen to prepare breakfast for her and myself.

CHAPTER V.

A LYING CANNIBAL.

As I built a fire and arranged the table I thought of the

sudden change that, within the last ten hours, had come into my life. For two years past, economy had been one of my chief studies; but all that was changed. I was now the possessor of a fortune, and my bills would no longer appear to me as if seen through a magnifying glass. I should not be obliged to deny myself the necessities of life, and could have many of the luxuries. Then, too, I was now married and should no longer be compelled to dodge the managing mamas whose daughters were looking for "catches," and, not knowing of my poverty and the struggle I was making to keep up appearances, were constantly sending me invitations to attend teas and theater parties, hoping to entice me into a matrimonial net that, financially, I was wholly unprepared for. My heart swelled with happiness at the thought of how I would answer a certain woman the next time she should say: "Doctor, you really ought to marry. You know a man without a wife never has the confidence of his patients that is enjoyed by the man who is settled in life."

At this point in my speculations the tea-kettle boiled over and I turned my attention to the work of supplying the required food for my empty stomach. Being quite a cook, on account of my past necessities, I soon had breakfast upon the table, and then called Mata to take her first meal with me. I gave her a seat and helped her generously to some beefsteak and potatoes; then I poured a cup of hot coffee and bade her feel perfectly at home, as I was sure she was both cold and hungry after the drive she had taken. Then, after performing the hospitable duties devolving upon me, I began eating in dead earnest. Having swallowed one plateful, and while preparing for another, I noticed that Mata had touched nothing, but seemed greatly distressed about something.

"Why don't you eat?" I asked, in surprise.

She shuddered at the inroads I had been making upon that beefsteak, and with a sorrowful ring in her sweet voice replied:

"You are eating the flesh of some animal. I cannot eat another's flesh."

"This is beefsteak," I replied, in astonishment. "By the expression on your face, one would think I were a cannibal."

"You *are* a cannibal, sir," she said, and then looked at me so piteously that I could not be angry with her.

"Don't you eat meat?" I asked.

"I have never tasted another's flesh," she said, sadly.

I could not have swallowed another piece of that steak had I been starving, and pushing away my plate I saw that she was about to cry. I could understand that the thought of having fallen into the care of a cannibal was not reassuring to her peace of mind, and in some way felt that I had behaved like a brute to cause her such distress; but just what I had done was not quite clear to my mind, and I asked:

"What can I get for you?"

"Have you grain of any kind, or milk?"

In the larder there was some oat-meal and some milk. When I brought them her face brightened and she smilingly offered to cook her own breakfast.

By this time Ted had returned from the stable, and I looked up to see him staring at Mata as if she were a specter. Believing some kind of explanation necessary, I remarked:

"Ted, this is my little sister, who has come to visit me for a few days."

Mata raised her eyes to my face with a look of sorrowful reproach and I saw she was about to speak. Fortunately for me, however, the office bell rang at that moment and Ted left the room before she had time to correct the lie I had told.

"Why did you tell that falsehood about me?" she asked.

"What could I say? I could not tell the truth, because there would be a great sensation, and the papers would be full of it before night."

"Then if you cannot tell the truth you should keep silent," she observed.

"But what will the boy think about my bringing to my bachelor quarters, in the early morning hours, so beautiful a girl as you—if I don't make some kind of an explanation?" I asked.

"What *can* he think, and why should he think *anything?* Why should I not come home with you, since you went home with me last night?"

She looked at me with so innocent and inquiring an expression upon her sweet face that I could not explain to her that the people in the outer world would imagine evil to be where it was not; and that if I were to tell Ted the real truth he would not believe it, but, putting his own construction upon my story, would repeat it to please himself—and the probable result would be that the whole city would be thrown into a fever of excitement. I should be suspected of some kind of mischief, and thereby lose my reputation as a physician and perhaps my liberty. I did not like to seem a culprit, however, and was about to try to pacify her in some manner for the little white fib I had told, when Ted came back and announced a caller. Glad to get away from those searching, truthful eyes, I hastily made my excuses and left the room in considerable embarrassment.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. SMYTHE.

My visitor proved to be a wealthy patron, a Mrs. Smythe, who had a daughter past the first blush of maidenhood. As is not uncommon with such damsels, she had been looking anxiously for a husband for several years, and was not at all particular if the candidate presenting himself for the honor of her hand should be her junior. Her friends called her an "old maid." She knew it, and had determined to put an end

to the disagreeable title by assuming that of "Mrs.," and I was quite well aware of the intentions of both herself and her mother to make of me a victim. Flattering myself that I was shrewd enough to elude their traps, however, I held my position as their family physician, and thus far had escaped serious embarrassment. But this morning I was taken by surprise, when Mrs. Smythe rushed forward, seized my hand, and while working my arm like a pump-handle exclaimed:

"Oh, Doctor! Do come and see Arabella! She's very bad—was taken with a spasm before breakfast. I couldn't trust anybody to come after you for fear he would bring some other doctor. We can't have any one but *you.*"

I *thought* it would have been more to the woman's credit if she had remained at home with her daughter—if she were so ill—than to come after me when a boy could have done the errand quite as well, but *said* I would go at once. I had begun to collect my hat, gloves, and medicine-case when Madam suddenly turned and saw Mata's wraps hanging by the fire. Instantly her face turned the color of a peony, and her eyes flashed with jealousy.

"May I ask if you have company, Doctor?" she inquired, pointing to the cloak and hood.

Remembering what the child had said about telling the truth, and having resolved to try her advice, I evaded the woman's question by asking another, and wanted to know if she had brought her sleigh.

"Of course, Doctor," she said; "I could not wait for your horse. Poor, dear Arabella may be dead now before we can reach her."

After we were seated in the sleigh and were speeding along behind the fine span of black horses that Madam always drove, she began questioning me again about the hood and cloak.

"Oh, Doctor!" she exclaimed, "did you have a patient at your office and come away forgetting all about her—for my Arabella?"

Without looking at the woman, I answered "No"—to the last part of her question.

"But I saw a woman's wraps hanging by the fire in your office," she persisted.

I was so angry with her for meddling so impudently in my affairs that I could scarcely control my voice when I answered:

"They were wet, and I hung them there to dry."

"But how came them wet?"

"The storm wet them," I answered, innocently.

"Now, Doctor, I hope you are not trying to deceive me. My poor child would be broken-hearted if she thought you admired any one else. She is so confiding and trusts you so implicitly."

I did not reply, and she continued:

"Perhaps I should not speak of Arabella's feelings toward you, but being her mother, and therefore deeply interested in the dear child's happiness, I feel it my duty to talk confidentially upon this subject now. I understand the reason you have not openly declared your love for my child——"

"Really, Madam," I interposed; but, placing her hand tenderly upon my arm and looking almost lovingly into my eyes, she continued:

"Now, Doctor, please don't interrupt me. I am going to have my say, and you *must* listen. I understand and admire your diffidence in this matter. You being a young practitioner, without means other than your small income, feel that you should not aspire to the hand of a wealthy heiress like Arabella; therefore, you are keeping silent and in this way are causing both yourself and my child much needless suffering."

"Mrs. Smythe," I began, "you are placing me in a most embarrassing position. I——"

"Now, Doctor," interrupted the lady, "I understand all about it, and it is useless for you to try to evade the point I

am about to touch upon. Just listen to what *I* have to say, and then you will be better able to reply."

Leaning back against the cushions I shut my eyes and waited, while Madam affectionately patted my arm and continued:

"Now, my dear boy, I know all about you and your people, and am going to tell you how adroitly I managed to inform myself about your family affairs. You will think I am a born detective and ought to be on the 'force,' when you have heard what I have to say;" and the woman laughed aloud at her own witticism.

I groaned inwardly and wondered what a man was expected to do under such circumstances as these. Mata's words, "if you cannot tell the truth, then you should keep silent," came into my mind just at that moment and prevented me from filling this silly woman's ears with polite nonsense and conventional falsehoods. But she believed she had a diplomatic task to do and proceeded with her work before I really had time to answer her:

"When my dear child first became interested in you, I felt very kindly toward you; and since you had come to our city a perfect stranger, with apparently no friends or relations, it was my duty as her mother to look up your pedigree. A detective was engaged for that purpose, and this is the substance of what he told me:

"You have neither brother nor sister nor any rich relatives from whom you can expect a penny. You were twenty-eight years old the fifteenth day of last June, and your fortune is yet to be made—unless you are lucky enough to marry one. You came from a fine old family in Massachusetts, and your ancestors can be traced back in a straight line to the old Puritan Fathers; and, although poor, you are a true gentleman in every sense of the word—worthy to become the husband of any woman in the world.

"Doubtless many of my friends will think me foolish for

taking this position regarding your eligibility as my daughter's suitor, since she is so rich and you are poor; but I am fond of you. Arabella loves you devotedly, and we believe that you have the ability to become a man of whom we may both be proud. So don't let your foolish pride stand between your happiness and my child's any longer. Go in and win, my son; you have my free and full consent."

At last the woman was silent, and my feelings were in a chaotic condition. I thought of everything, anything, and finally nothing. Then the picture of my beautiful child-wife rose before my mental vision and I compared her with Arabella Smythe—with her tall, gaunt figure, thin face, and peaked nose—and shuddered. The idea of loving a woman a whole head taller than myself—and twenty years older, if she was a day—was too much for me to contemplate with equanimity: even if I were single and at liberty to do so.

I opened my lips to tell Madam of my marriage with Mata; then the thought came to me that she did not deserve my confidence after hiring a detective to pry into my private affairs, as she herself confessed to doing. So I decided to keep silent; and should Miss Arabellá propose marriage to me, I would then inform them both that one of my family matters had been overlooked by their detective, and that was my marriage with Miss De Anno.

At the moment this conclusion was reached, we dashed through the great open gates guarding the entrance to the grounds surrounding the Smythe mansion. Everything looked dreary on this particular morning. Jack Frost had stripped all the trees of their foliage. The fountains had long ago ceased playing and there were huge mountains of ice in the fountain-basins that sparkled in the sunshine like millions of diamonds in frosty settings. The rustic seats were cushioned with snow, and the summer-houses, with the leafless tendrils of climbing rose-vines still clinging to them, looked desolate indeed. A long drive wound in and out among the

shrubbery and fountains and brought us to the front entrance of the house, which was a fine brick structure with broad piazzas on all sides and with wide marble steps. When the sleigh drew up before the door I alighted and assisted Madam down. Leaning confidingly on my arm for a moment, she looked tenderly into my eyes and whispered:

"Now, Doctor, don't tell Arabella a word of this. The poor child would be overcome with shame were she to know that I had told you of her love. She is so modest and unassuming and would eat her own heart out before giving you a sign; but I do really believe her present illness is caused wholly by her anxiety lest you should not reciprocate her affection. I understand the matter because I am older than she and can realize the delicate position you are in; and now let me give you both my blessing—after you have seen her this morning."

I was making a pretense of searching after my medicine-case, which had been left among the cushions in the sleigh, and did not reply to Madam's remarks. She ascended the steps, and when I reached the door the presence of a servant prevented any further conversation upon the subject so dear to her.

"Kate, show the doctor to Miss Arabella's room at once, and then I want you to assist me for a few moments," said Madam, and, smiling encouragingly at me, she disappeared behind some draperies.

Following the maid, I was ushered into Miss Arabella's room, which seemed a perfect bower of beauty. There were plants and trailing vines, velvet carpet, cushions, and Oriental rugs; also a bright grate fire, mirrors, and easy-chairs. I was bewildered at the sight of so much splendor, and stood wondering where my patient was hidden, when a faint voice lisped:

"So good of you, Doctor, to come and see me."

Then I saw the mistress of all this luxury reclining upon

a Turkish couch, piled high with silken cushions and almost concealed by crimson velvet curtains draped and held in place by heavy gold cords.

Taking a seat beside the couch, and bidding her good-morning, I attempted to find her pulse; but she confidingly clasped her long, bony fingers around my hand and held on, while she gurgled:

"Oh, Doctor, you were so lovely to come so soon."

Then she dropped her eyes and tried to blush, but the powder on her face was so thick that no color was visible, although she held her breath for nearly a minute. Her gown was indeed a wonderful creation. It was composed of ruffles, lace inserting, spangles, and fringe. The jewels she wore seemed more appropriate for a ball than for a physician's morning visit, and her coiffure would have delighted a court beauty in "ye olden time."

Disengaging my hand from her loving clasp, I attempted again to find her pulse; this time I was successful. She was in a perfectly normal condition, and I asked what the trouble was. She simpered and looked foolish, but replied that this morning when she was ready to go down to breakfast she fainted, and when she regained consciousness her mama had gone after me.

Taking some *innocent-looking* little pills from my case, I laid them on the table and rose to go, after giving directions that one must be taken every hour till they were gone.

Raising herself to a sitting posture, she seized my hand and, looking up at me with an appealing expression on her face, exclaimed:

"Oh, don't go yet! Can't you stay a little while with me? I'm *so* lonesome."

"Other patients need my attention, Miss Smythe," I replied, gravely, "and it will be impossible for me to remain a moment longer than is absolutely necessary."

To this she made no reply, and, glancing down at her, I

observed that her eyes were filled with tears and her lips were quivering as if she were about to cry. Wishing to avoid the threatened deluge, I started for the door; but she called out to me:

"Doctor, don't you like me a bit?"

Turning, with my hand on the door-knob, I replied:

"Why, certainly, Miss Smythe; I have always esteemed you very highly. What makes you ask such a question?"

"Oh, oh, you are so blind, *so* blind!" she sobbed, hysterically.

"I hope you will pardon my haste, this morning, Miss Smythe; but really I have not another moment to spare. Good-by." And I closed the door behind me.

Mrs. Smythe was waiting for me at the bottom of the stairs.

"Is it all settled?" she asked, anxiously.

"There is nothing to settle. Your daughter is suffering from a slight bilious attack and will be entirely well to-morrow. It will not be necessary for me to call again," I said, carelessly, as I buttoned my gloves.

Madam did not reply, but her crimson face, tightly-closed lips, and flashing eyes indicated that a storm was raging within her maternal bosom; and when I bade her "a very good-morning," she turned her back upon me and marched down the hall without speaking a word.

CHAPTER VII.

SEALED INSTRUCTIONS.

After a long, tiresome day among my patients, I took my dinner at a hotel—not wishing to shock Mata by my cannibalistic tendencies—and on returning to my office found she had prepared her simple little meal and was quite ready to talk; so I sent Ted home for the night, promising to answer the door myself if any one should call, and soon we were examining the contents of the two traveling-bags that we had brought from the old house at the Boat Landing.

The fortune in gold and jewels together was very great; of that I was confident. The value of the gems alone I was unable to estimate, since my knowledge along that line was very limited. Mata looked at the heap of wealth before us with as much indifference as if it were nothing more than marbles or brass buttons. But I did not know what to do with it all, and got so nervous lest some one should discover our possessions and rob us of them that I began to tremble.

"Are you cold?" asked Mata. "Your face is white like a phantom's, and you are shaking like one with the palsy."

My teeth were chattering and the cold perspiration was standing out all over my face. Rising, I went to my medicine cabinet, poured out half a glass of brandy, and drank it. Then I remarked that the day had been very cold, and I had been badly chilled during my long drives. To divert her attention from myself, I asked her to read the instructions left by her grandfather. She commenced reading and soon I regained sufficient control of my nerves to appear natural, though inwardly quaking with apprehension as to how a

safe place could be provided for our possessions. But the old man had thought of a way, and in his letter to us relieved me of the responsibility I dreaded to assume. This is what he wrote:

"*To my Children—Frank and Mata:*

"The failing strength of this old body warns me that the time is near at hand when I must abandon it and take a new one with which to continue my work in this material sphere.

"I must leave my grandchild, Mata De Anno, in the care of the man whom the inexorable Law that governs all things has decreed shall be her protector after the thirtieth day of the coming November.

"For the sake of those who may love her better because her soul is templed in a noble body, I will say that all her ancestors were closely connected with royalty; but she has lived with me since her babyhood and has been taught that the first lesson to learn in life is to place the lower nature in complete subjection to the higher or spiritual soul—also to destroy all *selfish* love for material possessions.

"It is quite useless to attempt to teach others until your own nature is well disciplined. Look within your own heart-garden, and cast out all weeds growing there, before turning to look for weeds in your brother's garden. Excuse the faults you see in others, but *never* excuse your own.

"You, my son, are entering a professional life. You are filled with ambition to gain fame and fortune. Fame will be but bitter fruit in your mouth if you sacrifice your honor and your virtue to gain it. It will never satisfy your soul. The praise of men is like the soap-bubble on the end of a child's pipe—beautiful for a moment, but, bursting with the faintest opposing breath, it disappears, leaving nothing in its place. For a moment it is admired, and then forgotten.

"Fortune is equally unstable. Devote your life to the accumulation of gold for gold's sake, and at the end of your

mad rush your soul's jewels, the only real wealth that lasts, have been overlooked and trampled beneath your feet. Here are a few instructions, which I trust you will follow for your own sakes as well as mine.

"You, my son, will come into contact, not only with poverty and wealth, but with ignorance and vice as well. You will be called upon to teach the truth to men's souls as well as to administer to the needs of their bodies. Do not work with the sole object of receiving something in return for your labors, but work for the good of mankind; then all things needful will come to you.

"It should not matter how poor a patient may be: you should attend him with as much interest as if he were able to pour out his gold in exchange for your skill.

"Mata will go at once to the convent school in Buffalo, N. Y., and you, my son, will accompany her there in the relationship of guardian. During her absence you will purchase a suitable site and there build a home. Expend as much money on the place as you choose; but build the house of stone, and let it face the west. Let all the rooms be large and light, and, with the exception of a suite on the upper floor, you may arrange them all as you desire.

"But the rooms that I shall occupy will be built after the following directions: In my apartments there will be a bedroom with bathroom adjoining; a sitting-room, and a study. All windows shall be placed in the roof, and shall be opened and closed by the aid of steel chains passing through glass rings arranged at intervals along the walls. These windows shall be protected from injury by a finely-woven copper wire screen, stretched from side to side and from end to end, covering them at a distance of two feet above the roof. This screen shall be supported at its edges by an iron parapet. In each room a fireplace will be built—not for ornament, but for use. But one entrance to the suite will be needed—from the corridor into the sitting-room. The whole eastern half of

the topmost floor shall be given to my suite of apartments, and this arrangement will cause the corridor on that floor to run north and south, while the corridors on the floors below will run east and west. From the side of my study next the corridor, a space measuring four feet will be partitioned off the length of the room. In the extreme southern end of that space will be left an opening for a sliding door three feet wide. This door will be of oak, with a large French plate glass mirror set into its frame instead of the usual oaken panels. Inside the space I have just described there will be no divisions, because a stairway leading to the observatory upon the roof will be built therein.

"The observatory will be fourteen feet square. The eastern, northern, and southern sides will be of French plate glass, and must be protected from storms by outside blinds. The western side of the observatory will be built with a double wall, leaving a space similar to that divided off my study. Inside this space the stairway leading from my apartments to the observatory will terminate. The partition separating this last-named space from the main room of the observatory will be of wainscoting composed entirely of sliding panels fastened with secret springs. There shall be two entrances to the observatory—one from my apartments and also a winding stairway; and the latter will be for the use of the other members of the family.

"The designing of the remainder of the house, stables, gardens, and grounds I leave entirely to your judgment, my only request being that they shall be sufficiently commodious to avoid crowding.

"The fortune I leave to you is ample, the gold coin being about one-sixteenth the value of the jewels. It would be well to deposit the money in several banks; but the jewels may be wrapped in a coarse towel and be placed in a vault, to which you each shall have a key. The gold will be sufficient to supply all your needs till I come again.

"Mata will not return to the city until the house is finished and is ready for the furnishing, and you will take up your abode in the house when she returns.

"The carpenter who will construct the secret stairway, the sliding panels and door, will come to you when the house is finished—ready for him to complete these small additions. You will prepare the spaces according to my directions and leave them till he appears. He will show you a ring upon the third finger of his left hand, which will bear the occult sign of a serpent biting its tail, thereby forming a perfect circle. In the center will be two triangles interlaced in such a manner as to form a six-pointed star; and in the center of this star will be a character formed by placing the letter o above the letter T. This man will call upon you unostentatiously, show you the ring, and ask: *Do you need help?* You will ask him no questions as to who he is or whence he comes. Whatever information he chooses to give will be for your benefit alone, and must be voluntarily offered. Let him do the work, without advice or instructions from you—you furnishing such materials as he may require.

"And now, my children, I am about to end this letter. But, before placing my signature, I will say something about your social relations. You will enter freely into the society of your fellow-men, neither of you becoming an ascetic. You will have one great object in life, and in it you must be united; that object is *to help humanity.* Teach by your example as well as words; live pure lives and be true to your higher natures. Be faithful and honest at heart. It has been the prevalent belief that, to be successful, a man must tell falsehoods and steal from his fellows. That belief is one of the wretched delusions under which humanity is at present laboring—a delusion that can bring only sorrow to those deceived by it. There is one law that cannot be evaded. It governs all beings, and is called the law of *Compensation.* You may foolishly believe that you possess intellects brilliant enough

to secure your entire free will. But, my children, I have seen many generations come and go and I have never known it to fail in rewarding or punishing as the case required. Some time and somewhere the compensation comes to all—be it pleasant or unpleasant. The rich and the poor, the wise and the ignorant, must all bow before its measure of justice. It rules nations and countries as well as individuals. Supplications are of no avail; tears will not soften or appease it. The fiat has gone forth: 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' 'Men do not gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles.' Place yourselves in perfect harmony with this grand old law—a law that appeared with the first pulsation of life that throbbed in the Great Incomprehensible Source whence all things emanated. Seek not to show your puny strength by battling against it. Love it; work with and be in full accord with it—

'and Nature will regard thee as one of her creators, and make obeisance.

" 'And she will open wide before thee the portals of her secret chambers, lay bare before thy gaze the treasures hidden in the very depths of her pure virgin bosom. Unsullied by the hand of matter, she shows her treasures only to the eye of spirit—the eye that never closes—the eye for which there is no veil in all her kingdoms.

" 'Then she will show the means and the way, the first gate and the second, the third up to the very seventh. And then the goal, beyond which lie, bathed in the sunlight of the Spirit, glories untold, unseen by any save the eye of soul.

" 'There is but one way to this path; at its very end alone the *Voice of the Silence* can be heard. The ladder by which the candidate ascends is formed of rungs of suffering and pain; these can be silenced only by the voice of virtue. Woe, then, to thee, disciple, if there is one single vice thou hast not left behind; for then the ladder will give way and overthrow thee. Its foot rests in the deep mire of thy sins and failings, and, ere thou canst attempt to cross this wide abyss of matter, thou hast to lave thy feet in waters of renunciation. Beware lest thou shouldst set a foot still soiled upon the ladder's lowest rung. Woe unto him that dares pollute one rung with miry feet. The foul and viscous mud will dry, become tenacious, then glue his feet unto the spot, and, like a bird caught in the wily fowler's lime, he will be stayed from further progress. His vices will take shape and drag him down.'

"These, my children, are some rules from *The Book of Golden Precepts,* which were given, many years ago, to the Brotherhood of which I am a member. It is well for you to know and apply them in your daily lives.

"The body of your first child shall be the temple in which my soul shall dwell during my next earth life. You will not recognize me in early infancy; but at the age of seven years you will witness a change, and at the age of fourteen I shall be in full possession of my temple.

"Until I shall return, good-by, my children.

"Your Guru,

"CRAPO DE ANNO."

After Mata ceased reading, the silence was unbroken for several moments. Then I asked if she were satisfied with the arrangements her grandfather had made.

"Guru was always right," she replied; "and whatever he bade me do, that I did, trusting always to his goodness and wisdom."

"Then," said I, "we will make the arrangements to-morrow for your journey to school. It is now nearly midnight, and, not having any sleep last night, I am very tired. You may occupy the bed in this room, and I will take the couch in the office."

Replacing the contents of the traveling-bags, I hid them again with the papers in the old trunk, locked it against the prying eyes of Ted, and then retired.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT DEATH'S DOOR.

Strange as it may seem, I rested well; and, had not Ted pulled early at my door-bell for admission, I should have slept

quite late on the following morning. Covered with snow, he came in, and while taking off his overcoat and mittens he amused himself by shaking the feathery flakes all over the floor and telling me of the blockaded condition of the railroads, declaring it an impossibility for anybody to leave town that day.

There was no alternative. The trip to Buffalo must be postponed, and Mata must remain where she was till the storm abated. She seemed satisfied with the prospect of a longer visit with me, and we left the date of her departure undecided upon.

While Ted filled the office stove and removed the ashes, I prepared breakfast in the kitchen, carefully avoiding a repetition of my previous mistake—that of beefsteak and potatoes. I compounded to the best of my knowledge and ability some innocent-looking pancakes, and cooked the oat-meal as Mata had done on the previous morning. When everything was ready Ted went to call her. She came and smilingly declared it a wonderful spread—but scarcely tasted anything.

While preparing to leave my office that morning I observed that she sat near the stove and sometimes shivered as if chilled. Thinking it possible she had taken cold during the ride home with me, after her grandfather's death, I inquired if she were feeling well.

"Not very," she replied. "I did not sleep last night on account of a pain in my side. I do not seem to get warm, and my hands and feet are like ice—but it is nothing," she added, hastily, seeing my look of alarm; "doubtless I shall be well to-morrow."

"You have symptoms of a possible attack of pleurisy; and I don't feel like leaving you here alone to-day," I said, anxiously.

"I beg you not to be alarmed on my account," she replied.

"You must take the mixture I shall prepare, once in thirty minutes, till you are better," I said, searching among my

bottles for the remedy I believed to be needed for her case.

"Oh, sir, I never took medicine in all my life," the child replied; and she seemed greatly disturbed at the prospect of medical treatment.

"Never took medicine! How did you manage when you were ill?" I asked, in astonishment.

"I never was ill—that is, not *very* ill. When I began to suffer, Guru always cured me in a few moments."

"He couldn't cure you without medicine, could he?"

"He never used medicine, and I do not know how he did it; but whenever I felt bad he sat by me or held me in his arms with my head on his shoulder for just a few minutes, and then the pain was all gone;" and a piteous look rested upon her pale face.

A great wave of sympathy filled my heart as this child described the womanly tenderness with which her grandfather had cared for her; and as I thought how utterly alone and friendless she must feel, now that he was dead and there was nobody in all the world for her to turn to for love or companionship, I made a silent vow that she should never have cause to regret being placed under my care and protection.

"I don't understand your grandfather's method of treatment," I said, "but have no doubt it was a good one. I shall be obliged, however, to use such remedies as I know are good for your case, and will return to you as soon as it is possible for me to do so. There are several long rides out into the country that I shall be obliged to take to-day; but if you will keep warm, and take your medicine regularly, I am sure you will feel better very soon;" and I smiled encouragingly down at her.

The child tried to conceal her loneliness by attempting to smile at me, but the effort ended in utter failure. The poor little smile turned into a pitiful sob as she covered her face with her hands.

"There, there, my dear; I am sorry to cause you this distress," I said, stroking her hair soothingly. Just how I had been the cause of it was not quite clear to me; still, it seemed that in some way it was my fault if she was not happy. I wanted to take her in my arms and kiss her, but felt she was too sacred for me to fondle or caress, as I would have done with an ordinary child.

Recovering her composure after a little while, Mata looked up with her lashes wet with tears, and said: "Please forgive me; but I miss Guru so much—never having been separated from him for a whole day in my life before. Then, my side hurts, and for a moment it seemed that I could not go on without him. But I must, because it is the Law that has decreed this separation, and I have no more right to shirk my duty than has any other person—and it is not right to distress you with my selfishness."

What a strange child this was—begging my forgiveness because her heart ached, and because just for a moment she had wept over the loss of the only friend and parent she had ever known! I felt it would be an utter impossibility ever to understand such a character. At that moment Ted brought my horse around to the door, and, after giving him instructions for the day, I bade her good-by and drove away.

After a tiresome day driving over roads much worse than I expected to find, I left my panting horse at the stable and at nine o'clock in the evening sat down to a hot restaurant dinner. All day Mata's tear-wet eyes had haunted me, and now as I rose from the table a sudden feeling of dread came over me. Something was terribly wrong somewhere. This apprehension increased as I neared my office till I almost reeled under an awful presentiment. I found the rooms cold and dark, and Ted was nowhere to be found. I knocked upon the study door and called his name loudly. There was no response. Then I shouted:

"*Mata!* Where *are* you, and why is it so dark?"

There was no reply. I opened the door and found that room as dark as the office. The fire in the grate had gone entirely out. "This is strange," I muttered, while fumbling in the box for matches. Before a light could be made, I heard a sound as of labored breathing and a moan as if some one were suffering. "What *has* become of those infernal matches?" I roared. "I'll smash every bone in Ted's body if I ever see him alive again! The idea of his going out and leaving things like this!" Again a piteous moan, and then I recognized Mata's voice, saying:

"Guru! Oh, my dear old Guru! I am so tired."

It seemed as if those matches never would be found. At last I remembered there was a boxful in the kitchen. Making a rush for it, I seized a handful and lighted them all at once. As the light blazed up I caught a glimpse of Mata lying on a pile of pillows and cushions in a corner of the study. I lighted a lamp and then approached her. The poor child was suffering from typhoid pneumonia, and did not recognize me. The disease had taken so strong a hold upon her that I feared it could not be broken. Searching out her night-dress from within her bag of clothing, I undressed and put her into my bed, built a fire, and soon had the atmosphere in the place at a more comfortable temperature. But in spite of my efforts she got rapidly worse till it seemed that she would stop breathing. Not daring to leave her for an instant, I stood by the bedside all night, working over her and applying such remedies as would relieve a sufferer under ordinary circumstances.

At dawn of the following morning I had so far succeeded in stopping the pain that, with the aid of an opiate, she had fallen asleep and was resting more quietly when the office bell rang. Fearing it was a call to visit a patient, I was tempted not to answer the summons. At the second ring, however, I changed my mind and opened the door—to find an honest Irish girl, Kate Maloney, waiting to see me. My greeting was so enthusiastic that she looked surprised, and

hesitated when I invited her into my study. But when I told her of the illness of a little girl who had been placed in my care by her dying grandfather, of my fears regarding her recovery, and my great need of a female friend to help me nurse the child, her warm Irish heart opened at once and she began pulling off her wraps.

"Och, the poor darlint," she said; "an' it's sorry enough that I is fer yees; but it's glad I'll be to sarve ye, fer many's th' bad spell ye've pulled me through, Docther, an' I'll stay wid ye till th' poor child is betther or dead, so I will."

I had never been a regular attendant upon any kind of religious worship, and my devotions had been somewhat neglected; but I mentally resolved then and there that should Mata be spared to me I would build a chapel as a sign of my gratitude to an overruling Providence who had sent Kate to my assistance.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAGIC FLUID.

All that day we watched at the bedside of my child-wife, who was burning with fever and raving with delirium. Her temperature ran higher than I had ever known it to do in a patient who afterward recovered. All indications pointed to the appalling prospect that my darling would die; and as I watched her fighting for breath, tossing her arms, rolling her head from side to side and calling for Guru, it seemed that my cup of happiness had been raised to my lips only to be dashed away before I could taste its contents. Kate did not leave her post of duty for a moment, and until the hour of midnight we watched and worked together to keep the beautiful soul imprisoned in its temple of clay.

Mata raved of Guru, declaring he was present. "Can you not see him?" she asked, in her quaint, womanly way. "There

is Guru; I should like to go with him, but he waves me back and tells me that my work is not yet done. I hear him whisper: *'Not yet! not yet!'"*

That Kate was getting frightened was evident from the expression on her face. She could bravely bear the fatigue of caring for the sick child, but the thought of a "spirit" being in the same room with her was too much for her nerves. She grew white and trembled violently; and, fearing she would fail me altogether, I suggested that she should sleep for an hour or two upon the couch.

Glad of an opportunity to escape, she retired to the next room, and when all was still I bowed my head upon the table and moaned in anticipation of what was coming. The case had passed beyond my control; there was no possible hope for my darling's recovery, and I could not bear that other eyes than mine should witness her departure from this world. I must be alone with her at the last.

Suddenly a distant bell began tolling, and I raised my head to count the number of strokes that it would strike. There were twelve, and then I remembered that 2 A. M. was the hour most trying for the sick, and the time when more souls pass out than at any other. As the last stroke died away, the child suddenly looked at me with an expression of reason in her eyes, and, pointing to the opposite side of the bed, whispered: "Look!"

Following with my eyes the direction indicated, I saw the ethereal form of the old Guru as plainly as on the night he had laid aside his worn-out body. The flame in the shaded lamp was turned low, but it seemed to drop still lower, as if invisible hands were slowly extinguishing it, while round the form of the specter radiated that wonderful weird blue light that had filled the room on that other night. The shadowy form came nearer; the blue light grew brighter. It seemed to encompass the bed upon which the child was lying. Covering my eyes with my hands, believing he had come to

take Mata away from me, my heart stood still in an agony of suspense. Again I heard her whisper: "Look!"

The phantom was suspended directly over Mata, and from his hands were streaming bright golden rays of light. He was apparently throwing upon her powerful electric currents, and a great change was taking place in the symptoms. Her respiration grew slower and slower, till it finally reached a normal condition. The fever-flush faded from her cheeks, leaving them white as the pillows they rested on. Her eyelids drooped until the long dark lashes lay motionless on her cheeks; and then I knew she was out of danger. With my heart throbbing joyously I watched those streams of health-giving light till they faded, and then a voice—sounding as if it came from afar—said:

"Sleep, child. Your hour has not struck. Your life work is not done."

Then the phantom began to fade, and, just before disappearing from my sight, it turned and smiled at me. Another moment and it was gone. The lamp upon the table again shed its softened and shaded light over the room, and glancing at the clock upon the mantel I saw that the hour was half-past two.

"Is it really true," I asked aloud, "that Guru came from the spirit world to cure Mata? And could he, with his wondrous power, accomplish in thirty minutes what has baffled my skill and set my knowledge at naught for two days and two nights?"

My heart was softened and filled to overflowing with gratitude. It was with a flush of shame that I remembered my skepticism and the flippant remarks I had once made about death putting an end to the career of all living creatures. And as those cold, hard doubts died one by one, there came into my heart a strange new feeling of satisfaction. My whole being thrilled with happiness when I thought of the man who had left his material body not a week before, and yet still

lived and was in full possession of all his previous knowledge and power.

Mata did not waken until dawn, and when Kate came in to see her the child looked up and smiled, while a divine radiance seemed resting upon her face.

"How do you feel now?" I asked.

"Quite well, thank you," she replied.

"Sure, sur, the child is betther!" exclaimed Kate, in surprise.

"Yes," said Mata, "I am quite well, and will rise and dress, if you please."

When we were seated at the breakfast table, and Mata was doing full justice to her dish of cracked wheat and milk, Kate stood behind my chair gazing at the child in unbounded amazement. Finally, her wonderment at the sudden change in Mata's condition could be repressed no longer, and she exclaimed:

"Sure, Docther, ye air a wonderful mon to cure the child wid th' pills an' th' powdthers that quick; ye air indade!"

Mata looked up quickly, and was about to tell the whole story of how she was cured when I, fearing the truth would frighten the ignorant Irish girl out of the house, interrupted her and replied:

"I take no credit upon myself for the sudden recovery of the child. A higher power than any earthly one interfered to save her."

Kate devoutly crossed herself and muttered a prayer; Mata seemed satisfied with my explanation, and the meal was finished in silence.

CHAPTER X.

MY MOTHER.

When we returned to the study, after breakfast, Mata declared she must start that day for school; that Guru had said last night when he was here that there should be no further delay.

"But are you able?" I asked, in surprise.

"I feel as strong and well as ever, and Guru would not have bade me go if it were not best," she said.

I asked Kate to remain at my office during my absence, and to tell all callers that I would be at home on the following Sunday, but on no account to mention Mata nor my errand. The girl promised faithfulness to all my directions, and added: "Divil a bit o' satisfaction'll ony wan get from me regardin' the whereabouts of ye, docther."

At the convent school I made arrangements for a five-years course in such studies as were needed to fit Mata for the social life she would lead, and returned well satisfied that she would be nicely cared for in her new home.

I found Kate had cleaned and regulated my bachelor quarters to a point of neatness far beyond my anticipations. Everything was in perfect order and the old study had once more resumed the look of comfort it had worn when Ted was housekeeper. She also had a warm dinner ready, and while I was enjoying it she undertook to tell me the news. Among other things that she regarded as important was the announcement of her own approaching nuptials. She and Pat were going to be married the very next day.

"Why, Kate!" I exclaimed, with my mouth full of hot mince pie; "how's that?"

"Ye see, sur," she replied, "Pat says as how 'tis foolish t' be waitin' ony longer, as he's a stiddy job an' has saved a thrifle o' two hundther' or so o' his wages, an' I have as much; we can go housekapin' on a small bit, av we both agrees to it, an' 'twould make a home fer both av us."

"A very good idea, and I shall give you a wedding present," I said.

Kate put away the dishes, swept the kitchen, and then came in with her hat and shawl ready to leave.

"I'm goin', sur," she said. "Good-by."

"Here is something to help you start your new life with," I said, as I held out a check for one hundred dollars.

"May the saints love an' purtect ye from all harrum so long as ye live, sur; but I'm afraid ye can't afford it," she said.

"Yes, I can; and with it I offer you my best wishes for the future. May you be happy and prosperous."

The girl wiped a tear from the end of her nose, where it had trickled down from her overflowing eyes, and, as she hid the precious paper away in her bosom, murmured: "Sure, ye air a thrue gintlemon, so ye air; an' I niver ixpictid so foine a prisint at all, at all. But if ye're iver in throuble an nade a frind, Kate Maloney's the wan t' sind fer, an' I'll sarve ye wid me heart's blood, so I will."

I thanked her and promised to let her know if at some future time she could be of assistance, and bade her good-night.

At last I was alone, and had time to think. Seating myself in an easy-chair before the fire, and leaning my head back upon its comfortable cushions, I let my mind wander backward in a mental review of the many events that had occurred during the last few years of my life. It was just seven days ago, to the hour, that Mata had called for me to visit her grandfather, and, as the panorama of events passed slowly before my mental vision, I could scarcely realize that it was I who had sat in that place, listening then as now to the winter wind as it

whirled round the corners of the building, shaking the window sashes and swinging the signs. It seemed that an age had passed since then, and that years instead of days had been registered on the calendar of time. Then my thoughts went back to the time when, a boy of fourteen years, I was left with my mother—one of the dearest and best of parents—to travel through life without the help and encouragement of a father: he to whom a boy is expected to look as a model for his own unformed character. Not having his advice and counsel, my mother assumed the double relationship—that of companion and friend as well as parent.

With true earnestness and sympathy she entered into the plans for future greatness that the coming years of manhood were expected to bring to me. It was her sweet face that always came between me and the temptation to do wrong; and, after I left her to undertake my course at college, her letters, like white doves of purity, came to me every week filled with loving encouragement. They served as talismans, bringing me good luck in my examinations and helping to quicken my intuition.

My mother was always true, and taught me that deception, whether acted or spoken, was a lie; and that the harm resulting from one was as great as that resulting from the other. She believed that truthfulness, charity, benevolence, brotherly love, and unselfishness were the soul's jewels, which should be treasured in all hearts and, by constant use, be kept shining so brightly as to illuminate one's whole life. Gold, she said, was a necessity only on the material plane, as a medium of trade; at best it was perishable and transitory wealth, and should never be compared in value with virtue.

The last conversation with my sainted mother I had always remembered. It occurred just before going back to college for my final term. That day stands forth more prominently than any other of my boyhood days. She looked so frail and fair as, robed in a pure white gown and with a fleecy shawl

wrapped round her slender form, she half reclined upon a couch and talked to me about my future.

"My boy," she said, "I have a presentiment that this is the last day we shall be together in this world. I am not strong and seem to tire with the least exertion. Before leaving you, I hoped to see you established in your profession and doing well; but I fear my hopes will not be realized, and there are some matters that must not be neglected or postponed. You know our means are not abundant. There will be, however, quite enough to take you through college and start you in a humble office in some small city where you must work your way to whatever height you may attain. I do not deplore the fact that you have not wealth, for many times it leads astray those who, had they been obliged to work for a living, might have kept in the path of virtue. It is no disgrace to toil; it is the law of Nature. The birds, the bees, and even God himself must work. Then why should man, the masterpiece of all creation, think labor beneath his lofty greatness? The idea that work is degrading is a great mistake; and one truth you must bear in mind is, that all men are dependent on their fellows for the necessities, comforts, and luxuries of life. The man who counts his gold by the bagful is dependent upon the man poorer than himself for his supply of food and fuel. He cannot eat, drink, nor wear his gold, and if there were no one in the world ready to exchange with him he would have to suffer want, although still in possession of his gold. Many attach great value to those glittering gems called diamonds; but they are only the artificial representation of the real jewels, virtue and honor. If you cannot afford but one kind, keep the everlasting ones—and these the poorest man in all the world may possess."

At that moment our interview was interrupted by callers, and we had no further conversation that day. At a later hour in the afternoon I took my leave and never saw her again alive.

The long up-hill journey from the day I took the last look at my mother's dead face as she lay in the casket had been filled with poverty and struggle. There was no disgrace attached to our name, nor had I ever done a thing I would blush to have her know. Sometimes the goal seemed not worth the effort made to attain it; then came the temptation to cease striving and drift with the tide. Now, however, my shadows had turned to sunshine and my poverty to plenty, and I was happy. But the shadows in the room gave warning that the fire was nearly burned out, and I decided to retire, hoping in dreamland to meet my Mata, look again into her glorious eyes, and listen to her sweet voice.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HON. JOHN BRUNT, ATTORNEY-AT-LAW.

At an early hour on the following morning I was waited upon by the Hon. John Brunt, attorney-at-law. This gentleman informed me that he represented Miss Arabella Smythe and her mother, and had called to see me for the purpose of trying to bring about some kind of an amicable understanding between myself and the ladies mentioned.

"What do you mean, sir?" I asked, in astonishment.

The legal gentleman was a very pompous man and seemed to realize that upon him rested a great and important duty. Drawing his portly figure to its greatest height, and setting his hat well back upon his head and a little to one side, he hooked both thumbs into the armholes of his vest, set his left foot forward, scowled, squinted his eyes, and looked down upon me for a full minute before answering my question. Then, with great superiority of tone, he replied:

"Young man, you know that these ladies proposed a mar-

riage with you—which you rashly and, I must say, impudently ignored. Mrs. Smythe offered her daughter to you for a wife; you have given her neither a favorable nor an unfavorable reply. You ought to know that your conduct is very ungentlemanly and betrays a lack of gratitude and politeness. The ladies feel this humiliation very much; Miss Smythe is completely prostrated, and her mother is—well, very indignant, to say the least."

I was dumfounded, and believed the case was without parallel on the American continent. When my wits returned sufficiently to allow me to speak, I exclaimed: "How could my conduct cause Miss Smythe prostration or her mother annoyance?"

My legal visitor inclined his head till he could look over the rims of his spectacles at me; he frowned so fiercely that his eyebrows met together over his nose, and, bringing his left foot down upon the floor with a slap that made the medicine bottles in the cabinet dance, roared: "Young man, do you realize that you are poor, without even a name to back you; that these ladies you've insulted are the wealthy leaders of society, to whom all the best people in town bow with the greatest of respect? *They are social queens!*" And the man let go his hold on an armhole long enough to make a sweeping gesture indicating that his clients ruled the social world.

I did not reply, and while he waved his left hand high above his head, he continued: "They're worth no end of money—did you know that? Zounds! I think you are a blooming fool to let such an opportunity slip through your fingers. I wish it had been presented to me."

"You are quite welcome to this great opportunity that is going to waste," said I, "for I shall not marry Arabella Smythe. His Satanic Majesty and the infernal regions would be preferable to me than either of those women. The mother is as desirable for a wife as the daughter; really there is no choice between them. If this is what you came for you will

oblige me by putting an end to this interview. My time is valuable." And I began putting on my overcoat.

"Hold on!" exclaimed the gentleman. "Am I to understand that you refuse to consider Mrs. Smythe's proposition under *any* circumstances? Could you be induced to reconsider your decision if a certain amount of money—say ten, or even twenty thousand dollars—were to be placed to your credit at the bank?"

Turning away in disgust, I remarked:

"Mr. Brunt, realizing that you are only saying what you have been hired to say, I am restraining myself from kicking you into the street. There is nothing either you or they can offer that would induce me to reconsider my non-acceptance of their proposal. I may be financially poor, but I am not ready to sell myself for the Smythe gold. Just why Mrs. Smythe should have taken the idea into her head to give her daughter to me for a wife I cannot understand. The woman is almost twice my age, and nothing has ever occurred between us that should give her reason to think that I am interested in her in any way. When the ladies have been ill I have attended them as their physician. I have never paid Miss Smythe any attention other than that imposed by my professional duties; and if she has been so foolish as to give her love away unasked and unsought, then it is her own mistake, and she must take the consequences—if there are any."

Again the old man looked over the tops of his spectacles, opened his eyes to their widest extent, and, with astonishment pictured all over his face, muttered: "Humph! Gritty little cub." Then in a tone of impatience he loftily replied: "Very well. I must see my clients before offering you anything more."

"You need not trouble yourself," I said; "my answer is final."

Muttering and gesticulating, the man shuffled out of my office without so much as saying good-by, and, considerably

perturbed, I started on my daily rounds of calls among my patients. The same afternoon I took a satchel filled with bags of coin and started for the First National Bank. The receiving teller knew me very well, but, believing me of no financial value and therefore of no consequence, he bowed coldly when I appeared at his window. From the sphinx-like expression on his face, I inferred that he believed me about to ask for the accommodation of a loan, and was ready to refuse; but when I informed him that I would deposit ten thousand dollars in gold with him that day, he looked incredulous, and when I lifted out the bags of money and laid them on the desk he actually gasped. Taking a seat and picking up the morning paper, I pretended to be interested in the perusal of its columns, while my gold was being counted. When my book was ready I looked it over, slipped it carelessly into my pocket as if this were an every-day affair, took my empty satchel, bowed as coldly to the teller as he had bowed to me, and left him betraying strong symptoms of approaching paralysis.

Returning to my office, I refilled my satchel and made my way to the Second National Bank. The same ceremony, with very little variation, was repeated until I had called at the different banks and had deposited the whole fifty thousand dollars. Next I hired a drawer in a vault and placed the jewels and papers in it, and when everything had been disposed of according to the directions of the old mystic I felt relieved of a great burden.

It had not occurred to me that the tellers of the banks would tell of my deposits; but when several gentlemen at the hotel who had previously refused to recognize me came forward that evening with smiles, greeting me with great cordiality, I concluded that the news of my sudden rise to financial prosperity had been given out, and that this interest was not for me, but for my money. I had an opportunity to decline three invitations to take dinner with different persons, and went back to my office to find poor little Ted waiting to see me. He was

very pale and looked so miserable that I instantly revoked my threat to chastise him for leaving Mata alone that day, and asked what was troubling him. He said a runaway horse had knocked him down the morning after I left. He was carried home insensible, and since I was not to be found another doctor had been called; and this was the first time he had been out since the accident. He wanted to come back to work, and I gave him his old position again.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SMYTHES' LAST APPEAL.

The next morning the Hon. John Brunt appeared at my office at an early hour. His manner at this second visit did not seem quite so pompous. I offered him a seat, which this time he took, and, taking off his hat, wiped his bald head nervously with his handkerchief. While I waited for him to speak he cleared his throat, fumbled in his pocket for something he did not find, looked into his hat, adjusted his spectacles on the end of his nose, and then looked over them at me with so owlish a stare that I leaned back in my chair and laughed long and loudly. My visitor became indignant, and with a very red face inquired what I was laughing at.

"At you," I replied.

"At *me!*" he exclaimed. "And what is there about me to laugh at? You don't seem to realize that this is a serious matter—one that should not be treated with levity."

The old man's appearance was so irresistibly funny that I could not restrain the feeling of amusement surging over me and I laughed again. This time he became quite angry, and with great dignity remarked: "When you are done with your laughing I will state my errand."

"You had better be about it, then," I said, "because in twenty minutes I have an engagement."

Mr. Brunt cleared his throat again. "Young man," he said, "I have come to say that my clients would like to see you at their residence this afternoon for the purpose of having some conversation regarding this matter."

"You may tell your clients that I have no time to spare and beg to be excused."

"Am I to understand that you refuse to see my clients anywhere?"

"Certainly, sir."

The old man fidgeted in his seat; he crossed his right leg over his left, uncrossed them, and crossed the left one over the right.

"But I have been authorized by my clients to make some kind of an arrangement with you regarding this matter. The ladies have set their hearts upon this marriage; they are very kind and generous—yes, they are generous to a fault. I don't think I ever met such charming women as those two clients of mine."

The old man seemed quite overcome by the loveliness of character displayed by the Smythes. I smiled broadly, but refrained from disturbing his meditations by another laugh.

"We will not discuss the characters of the ladies, if you please, but will assume that they are above criticism and come to the point at once, because I really must go."

"Yes, yes; that's more like it. Now you begin to talk reasonable—reasonable, sir. Ah, let me see; where was I?"

"You were about to say that Mrs. Smythe and her daughter had authorized you to make an arrangement of some kind——"

"Oh, yes, yes; I was about to say," interrupted my visitor—"well, *as* I was about to say, Miss Smythe is greatly humiliated because you have refused her hand. She is a noble girl and loves you, notwithstanding the shabby way you have

treated her; and she is still quite willing to place her whole fortune at your disposal—which is a great deal for her to do, since she is immensely wealthy—if you will only consent to marry her. She is so charming that you cannot help loving her when once you get accustomed to her—and the trifle of difference in your ages does not matter; you will never think of it, after you get used to it."

The laugh that was choking me would not be repressed another moment, and I almost roared. The man sprang to his feet and in his excitement knocked off his spectacles, and before they could be recovered he had ground them into powder under one of his number-eleven shoes.

"I wish you would stop laughing. It is, to say the least, very undignified!" he declared, vehemently.

"Then don't tell such funny stories," said I.

"*I* tell funny stories! Why, I never told a funny story in my life!" he exclaimed. "I was never given to such hilariousness; I take a more serious view of life."

Springing to his assistance I brought from under the couch, where it had rolled, his shining tile, and as I handed up the dented headpiece he glared at me and remarked that he should not soon forget the indignities he had been subjected to that morning. Then carefully placing the remains of his smashed spectacles in their case, and tipping his hat jauntily on one side of his head, he gave himself a little shake as if to adjust his rumpled garments, and asked:

"Well, what shall I say to my clients?"

"You may tell Mrs. Smythe that when she sent out a detective to look into my private affairs there was one thing he did not learn, and that was that I am already married. And since the laws of the State of New York allow a man to have but one wife at a time, it will be impossible to make any matrimonial arrangements with me."

"You a married man!" gasped the attorney. "Why in the name of all that's wonderful didn't you say so before?"

"For the simple reason that neither you nor your clients asked for a reason *why* I would not marry Miss Smythe, but insisted that I should. Then, Mrs. Smythe took pride in the shrewd manner in which she had traced my family affairs, even to the most minute detail, back to my Puritan ancestors. Under these circumstances I thought it unnecessary to offer any further information. However, this little thing has become so tiresome that I concluded to enlighten your clients regarding this one small fact that has been overlooked."

The legal gentleman bowed stiffly, and with all the dignity of a potentate marched from my office. On the same evening there appeared in the *Evening Journal* a notice that read:

"PERSONAL.—Mrs. Smythe and her daughter are about to close their elegant home, with the intention of spending the winter in the South, Miss Smythe's health requiring a change of climate. The rigorous winters of Chautauqua County are entirely too severe for her delicate constitution."

"And so this is the end of that affair," I muttered; "and tomorrow I shall engage an architect to make plans for our new home—Mata's and mine!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

Five eventful years had passed, and the time was near when Mata would come to the beautiful home prepared for her. It was now the month of August; the ground had been bought and the house built according to the last and most minute direction given by the old Guru. The carpenters were gone, the gardeners had arranged the flower-beds and bowers; the fountains, walks, and drives were finished and the stables were completed ready to receive the horses and carriages I would purchase as soon as Mata should be with me to assist in their selection.

The man that was to build the secret stairway had not yet presented himself, but I had been so busy attending to the completion of the place that his non-appearance had caused me no inconvenience and very little thought. It was now the twenty-first of the month. The weather had been unusually warm for several weeks, and this evening, after the daily duties were done, I laid aside my coat and sat in the twilight, in my study, smoking and thinking. My thoughts went back over the last five years and brought up many amusing incidents that had occurred since the dark cloud of poverty had passed from my horizon, and I smiled at the pictures as they passed before my mind.

When my financial value had become fully known to the "smart set" in our small city, everybody suddenly became anxious to know me; and my practise increased so rapidly and to such an extent that I had to secure the services of an assistant. Smiles and favors were showered upon me, and invitations to social functions came in so numerously that it was

quite impossible to accept half of them. Dozens of sweet little perfumed notes were sent by special messengers daily, and my reception-room was almost turned into a conservatory by friends who insisted upon keeping the window-seats filled with pots of flowering plants, geraniums, and climbing fuchsias. They drove poor Ted nearly wild in their efforts to keep my tables and private desk supplied with fresh bouquets; and on birthdays and Christmases there were boxes of all sizes and shapes delivered at my door, with "best wishes" and "happy returns" accompanying each.

These attentions were sometimes embarrassing and often annoying, because I was not in the least deceived as to the cause of all this effusiveness on the part of those who, in the old days of poverty, had treated me with unbending stateliness or icy coldness. It was impossible entirely to forget the day when one of my present warmest (?) friends had served a five-days notice on me to pay my office rent or move out; and I had to sell my mother's watch to settle the bill, or be put into the street. He believed the circumstance had been forgotten, but it had burned itself into my brain.

In the midst of my musing I was suddenly interrupted by a voice at my elbow, saying: "Good evening, sir."

The greeting was so unexpected that I started to my feet, wondering who had spoken to me. That the outside door was locked I was positive, and yet here was a man standing not three feet distant.

I lighted the gas and looked at my visitor in astonishment. He was of medium height, with dark skin and with eyes like black velvet; his hair was straight and black as an Indian's; and while I stood stupidly staring, not knowing enough to make him welcome, he smiled pleasantly, and, holding out a hand on the third finger of which was the ring described by Guru, asked: "Do you need help?"

Now that the prophecy had been fulfilled and the strange man was actually here, I was struck dumb with astonishment.

My caller seemed to understand the situation and pleasantly remarked: "Since you only received the keys to-day, I did not think it necessary to come sooner—even though you sometimes doubted the probability of my coming at all."

While I was trying to think of something to say, he seated himself and continued:

"There is no need for hurry; but you Americans rush so fast and live so far beyond the present that your most valuable forces become scattered, and when you need them most they are gone. A favorite expression of yours is, *'I have not time.'* You also expect disappointments. You do not seem to know that you are the creator of your own future and can make it what you choose. By crowding a great deal of work into to-day you hope to dispose of twice as much to-morrow. This is a mistake; you can live but a day at a time, and you are in eternity *now*. If the causes had not been created in the past to bring me here to-night, your present hopes or fears would have availed you nothing, because I could not have come."

"You are a fatalist, then?" I asked.

He smiled, and replied:

"I knew you would say that. No, not as you understand the word. Were I to believe that every incident in my life had been foreordained by a God who gives good or ill to his creatures according to his own caprice, and that my own good or bad behavior would weigh neither for nor against me in a day of judgment, then I would be a fatalist. When I tell you, however, that all men are governed by the law of cause and effect; that there are no undeserved favors bestowed, nor unjust punishments inflicted, but that each man generates the causes that bring inevitable results to himself—then you can at once discern the difference between fatalism and the law of compensation."

Instantly the words of Guru came back to my mind. He had believed in this strange law. When I listened to his words they seemed like the expressions of idle vagaries from an old

worn-out mind that had thought so long upon the solution of life's problems as to create and adopt a theory of its own. That it had never been taught from our pulpits nor in our colleges, I was positive; and much that he had said I had quite forgotten till this man's words recalled his statements.

The house had been built according to his directions—because my promise had been given that it should be, and also because Mata desired it. I knew she expected that some time and somehow he would return and occupy the apartments built especially for him; but when or how I did not know or care. He had given me a fortune and a beautiful wife; I had made a promise and kept it. Sometimes my doubts had whispered that it was a foolish waste of time, and that the strange man would never come to finish the stairway; but with me the principle of truth was involved, and it must be maintained.

Now that this man was really here, my curiosity was awakened and I decided to question him. "Do you expect me to believe in the theory that all men have lived before—have been other people on this earth, and will come again and be somebody else?" I asked.

"Will you consider for a moment the drama? One evening a great actor assumes the character of a king and thunders forth his mandates to his trembling subjects. At another time he assumes the rags of a beggar, and in poverty begs his bread from the king. Again he appears as a merchant selling his wares to both king and beggar; and yet he is the same man assuming all these different characters. You are now wearing the personality and doing the work of a practising physician known as Frank Bennet. Supposing that in one night you should exchange bodies with John Brunt, attorney-at-law, across the street. You could not convince your friends that you were not John Brunt, because they cannot look behind the mask, or your present personality, and recognize *you*. Therefore, John Brunt's own wife would declare that you were her husband, and all the arguments you could bring to bear upon

her would not induce her to accept anybody but yourself as her lawful protector."

As the picture of myself, wearing the personality of old John Brunt and standing before his wife trying to convince her that I was really Doctor Bennet, rose before me, I smiled broadly; but when I thought of the consternation that would be aroused at the convent, should I appear there—with all the old gentleman's peculiarities—and demand an interview with my beautiful wife, I laughed aloud. The dismay and confusion those spectacles and bald head would create would be very funny indeed. But if the change were discovered to be permanent for the rest of our life—ah, then it would not be so amusing, for me at least.

But here my thoughts were brought back to the subject whence they had wandered by my visitor saying: "It is in this way that people are deceived by outward appearances and judge a man by his personality and environments."

"What benefit is to be derived from all this masquerading?" I asked.

"All that you gain, of lasting or real value, is knowledge. You cannot gain it without experience. The babe may be told that the fire will burn, but the child will not realize the truth of the words till it has thrust its hand into the flame and has suffered the pain in consequence. It may forget the day it first burned its hand, but the knowledge that the fire is hot and cannot be handled with bare hands will always remain impressed upon its mind. You are no wiser in many respects than a babe, and must wear these different personalities and pass through all types of experiences before you are able to understand the varied conditions of life.

"In your heart you sympathize with the poor man who toils all day upon the ladder. You do not remember now that you were ever a hod-carrier, but, without understanding why, you are in sympathy with him that does that kind of work. You could not understand his condition well enough to pity

him if you had not at some time, and at some place, had a similar experience. Forgetting the experience, you have retained the sympathy—the essence or aroma that lingers round you long after the circumstances that produced it have disappeared.

"Among the people of the Western continent there is a prevailing belief that at the end of life they are to be interceded for and saved from the consequences of their acts by some great soul. As an illustration of a case of such ignorance let me describe a scene I witnessed on my way to your rooms this evening. A woman's voice was raised in supplication. Judging from the loudness of her tone, one would think she was speaking to some one at a great distance. Clothed in rags and kneeling upon a bare floor in a miserable hovel, which was as destitute of comforts as she was of knowledge, she shouted out her misfortunes and made her demands in a manner something like this:

" 'Oh, Lord help me, a poor sinner! I know I am awful bad. I've just got sobered up from another spree, and there's nothing in the house to eat. My children went to bed hungry and crying for bread. Tim's back is almost broke from the beating I gave him when I was drunk. My rent was due day before yesterday, and if you don't send me the money to pay it with we'll all be turned out into the street. Please, God, send money and bread and make me a better woman for Jesus' sake!'

"She does not assume the least responsibility for her own conduct. Neither does she realize the necessity of making an effort for herself, but throws that labor upon a being she calls God. Giving way to her appetites and passions, she deprives her children of food and clothing by using her money for rum. By the knowledge gained on former occasions, she is aware that the liquor will produce a terrible frenzy as soon as she drinks it; yet she deliberately generates the causes, knowing well what the immediate results will be. Then she closes her

petition by asking God to grant all these favors and *'make her a better woman for Jesus' sake.'* Will you tell me why she does not ask for her *own* sake? The Jesus for whom she seems to be soliciting money, bread, and virtue is not in need of these things, and how can he be benefited by the bestowal of them upon her? You call my statements regarding the law of compensation theories; what do you call this woman's ideas?"

I could not argue with this man, since the matter had never been presented to me in this light before; and, while I sat silently comparing the two faiths, the absurdity of the woman's prayer suddenly presented itself to me.

"It is because you do not think for yourselves that you accept these unreasonable things for truths," he said. "So far as energy, ambition, and business ability go, the American people are not surpassed by any nation in the world; but your spiritual blindness is both surprising and disappointing to the people of the Orient."

Here my visitor rose and remarked that on the following morning he would meet me at the house where the work was to be done.

"One moment!" I exclaimed. "Will you tell me how you entered this room with the door fastened?"

Smilingly he turned and replied: "Too much of your time has been taken up with theories, and, besides, you are in no condition of mind to accept or believe such an explanation as I would give. There are other matters that first need your consideration. Some time your question will be answered—if you continue in the desire to know;" and, turning, he walked before me into the outer room. I followed, and was about to open the door when he said, "At the house to-morrow at nine;" and then—before I could reply—he disappeared.

The door was not opened, and yet the man was gone—had vanished like a shadow. I rubbed my eyes and wondered if this were a dream. Returning to the other room, I looked for some tangible proof that my visitor had been a reality. The chair

he had occupied stood where it did when he arose, but that was not proof.

"I fell asleep and dreamed he came," I said aloud. Then I waited for something or some one to contradict my statement; but there was no reply, and, somewhat disappointed and mystified, I decided to retire.

The next morning I remembered the gardener wanted some things, and drove round to the house. At the front entrance I stood waiting for a few moments when some one came up the graveled walk behind me. Expecting to see my man of rakes and watering-pots, I turned, but to my astonishment saw the gentleman who had appeared in my "dream" of the previous evening. Believing him a ghost, I stood gaping without sense enough to speak. But he did not seem to notice my surprise, and walked quietly up the steps, began chatting pleasantly about the artistic arrangements of the flower-beds and fountains, and finally passed, like an ordinary mortal, through the door into the house. Without asking a question he preceded me to the apartments where he was to do his work. I followed, wondering who he was and where he came from; but my curiosity was not gratified, for, after looking round at the materials and tools awaiting his use, he nodded pleasantly to me and said: "You need not wait. Everything needed is at hand."

"Where are you staying?" I asked. "I should like you to be my guest while you remain in the city."

"My wants are amply provided for, and my stay will be very short, since this work will be soon accomplished," he replied.

"Is there nothing I can do for you?"

"Nothing at all; the materials are all here."

"Shall I not see you again?"

"Perhaps. I wish to say, however, in case we do not meet again, that my call last evening was very pleasant."

"Then you *did* visit me last night, and it was *not* a dream?"

Looking me squarely in the eyes, and without the shadow of a smile upon his face, he replied: "It was no more a dream than any other event of our natural lives."

A strange, magnetic thrill ran through my whole body while those velvety black eyes were fixed upon me. "And all that you said about cause and effect is really true?" I asked.

"It is a truth that some time you will fully realize," he earnestly replied.

There seemed nothing more for me to say, and I bowed to the strange being and left the house. All that day the words of this man kept repeating themselves in my mind, and I wondered if he meant to imply that *all* the events of our lives are but dreams—illusions. The thought troubled me and I decided to ask him. At an early hour in the afternoon I returned to the house, but he was not there. Hoping he would visit me again at my office, I went there and waited for him; but he did not come. When I called at the house again the work was completed and the workman gone, and to my great disappointment I never saw him again.

The mirror was fitted into the doorway at the foot of the stairs and its fastenings so carefully hidden that I could not find them. The partition in the observatory was finished and the panels appeared as stationary as the remainder of the wainscoting. The passageway from Guru's apartments to the observatory was indeed a secret to all human beings—except to the man who had built and locked its doors and had silently gone his way.

CHAPTER XIV.

MATA.

During Mata's absence at school, I had visited her once in three months, and my love for her had increased with every

visit. She had developed, from a half-grown child of promise, into a beautiful, stately woman, with a form tall and graceful and with a dignity of manner commanding both admiration and respect. Her pretty golden hair was now worn coiled high upon her head; but here and there a dainty little lock was always creeping out, crinkling and waving and showing what the whole mass would do if it were allowed to escape from the confining hair-pins. Her complexion, too, was faultless; neither paste nor powder was needed to enhance the beauty of her skin, and my heart swelled with pride when I thought how well my darling would compare with the insipid, gossiping creatures with whom she would mingle in our social set.

As the time approached for her coming home, my friends became very curious to know what she was like—if she were blond or brunette; but to all inquirers I gave the same reply: "Wait and see."

Knowing her tastes so well, I selected such furnishings for our home as would by their dainty lightness please her best. The walls in her own room were done in blue and gold; the carpet had a deep cream-colored ground with blue forget-me-nots scattered over it. At the windows were satin draperies of a golden hue, and the bed, with its canopy of shimmering yellow satin covered with billows of pure white lace, was a fitting couch for the lovely form of my darling. Especial pains had been taken to give such rooms as were furnished a homelike appearance, and our old friend Kate had supplied us with two good maids whom she introduced as "me own cousins." She also promised further assistance when my wife should come, and when I thanked her for the good will she had expressed she blushed and said:

"Arrah, now, docther! If it war not fer me family I wud be wan av th' gur-rls in yer foine mansion, so I wud."

Expressing admiration for the brood of little ones that were clinging to her ample skirts and peeping shyly at me, I

declared that I thought she had done much better than if she had remained out at service.

At last the fourth day of September arrived—the day I was to go after Mata. A cool breeze from Lake Chautauqua came in at the car windows as we sped along its shores. The season for summer visitors had ended, but the steamers were puffing and plowing their way through the silvery waters of the lake, and it seemed to me that the sun was shining more brightly on that day than it had ever shone before. The words of Longfellow ran through my mind as we rushed along, and it seemed as if they were written expressly for me:

"For my heart was hot and restless,
And my life was full of care,
And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear.

"But now it has fallen from me;
It is buried in the sea;
And only the sorrow of others
Throws its shadow over me."

Surely my future seemed filled with promise. I had succeeded beyond my wildest expectations, and, so far as I knew, had not an enemy in the world.

Arriving at the convent, I found Mata well and ready to accompany me home. The matron of the school expressed sorrow at the parting, and said: "During the time Miss De Anno has been with us I have never known her to tell a falsehood or commit even a trivial act of deceit. She has attended faithfully to her studies and is proficient in all the branches she has taken. Her conception of music is wonderful, and it is a pity to let her come in contact with the sin and trouble of an ordinary life; she should become a nun—a bride of heaven."

"But, my good woman," I replied, "this sinful world *needs* such women as she. What good could she do while confined behind the closed doors of a cloister? It is true the world

is full of sin, and she as my wife will come in touch with all classes; but her soul is so pure that it will radiate its goodness as the sun radiates its light. Many will be benefited by her example here in this life, while as a 'bride of heaven' she would only attend to her own devotional duties, and those who need her help would be left to their own wickedness. I think it a great mistake for any church to imprison its loveliest characters inside the walls of a convent instead of sending them out to work in the Master's vineyard. If heaven is what you believe it is,—filled with pure souls sifted from among the sinful ones of this earth,—then it does not need these earthly 'brides' so much as the world does; and it is a duty owed to the Master to work as he did for those left behind."

Mata appeared at that moment and our conversation was interrupted. Bidding the old convent good-by, she turned a smiling face toward the new life as my wife, and we started homeward—happy as two children in the contemplation of a cloudless future.

Since it was but four o'clock when we reached the home station, I requested the coachman to drive slowly, so that Mata could see the improvements made in the city during her absence. The old town was looking its prettiest that afternoon, our real wedding day, as if fully realizing the honor being conferred upon it, and had put on its real company manners as a compliment to the occasion. A slight shower had laid the dust in the streets, freshened the grass on the lawns, and washed the leaves of the trees. The expressions of delight and surprise with which she greeted every new feature as it presented itself pleased me greatly, since I was much attached to the place and hoped she would become so.

We drove past the house where her grandfather had died, and I called her attention to the fact that it had been left undisturbed. The furniture had been removed through the rear of the inclosure, leaving only the closely-drawn shades at the windows to give the house a sufficiently habitable look to save

it from the sticks and stones that would otherwise be thrown at it by the small boys of the neighborhood. The vines had grown over the small doorway in the fence, hiding it entirely from view, and the rust upon the iron lock showed that it had not been opened since the stormy morning when Mata and I had climbed through it with her belongings and it had locked itself behind us. Nobody had taken the trouble to inquire about it, and it was quite by accident that I heard a neighbor say that the place was owned by an old gray-haired man who had been very poor because of his extreme age and inability to work; that he was obliged to live on rice and cracked wheat because he could not afford meat, and finally had to close his house and go away to an institution where he would be taken care of free of charge.

When we entered our own grounds, Mata threw back her veil, and, if I had entertained any doubts regarding her satisfaction at my selection of a home, they were at once dispelled by her expressions of admiration of everything she saw. As the carriage stopped before the front entrance to the house, the smiling, rosy face of Kate was the first to greet us; and the welcome she gave was a hearty one indeed. When Mata offered her hand she grasped it with both her own and covered it with kisses, while the happy tears streamed down her cheeks.

"God bless ye, me lady! An' it's mesilf thot's happy to see ye lookin' so foine an' gay in yer new home," she said.

Mata was really happy to see Kate, and, much to the woman's delight, held her hand while she made inquiries about Pat and the babies.

"Me twins is in th' kitchen now. I fetched thim wid me 'cause they's much too small to lave behoind. Ye can see thim if ye wants to," said the proud mother.

Mata declared that nothing would give her more pleasure, but I suggested that dinner should be served first, since we were both tired and hungry, and promised that the babies should be brought in and duly inspected afterward. Half an

hour later my darling came down dressed in a creamy white gown composed of some sort of soft, clinging material. It was simply made, but fitted her graceful figure as if it had been molded into it. A bunch of velvety pansies was tucked into her belt and completed a picture that to my eyes was more radiant than anything I had ever beheld; and when Kate saw her she crossed herself and muttered something about the Madonna being on earth again. I did not catch all her remarks.

That first dinner at home with my Mata I shall never forget. No emperor was ever so happy as I on that first day of our real married life. The dinner over, the twins were brought into the parlor to be exhibited. Mata had never touched a real live baby, and these little pink things were as great a curiosity to her as is the Sphinx to the Egyptian traveler. It was amusing to see the delicate way she handled them. Laying one across her knees and taking its tiny hand in hers, she touched its flesh tenderly, and, with a look of reverence in her eyes, said:

"This is a little human being—a miniature earthly temple for an immortal soul. This little body has all the attributes of that of a grown man. Here are the tiny finger-nails, the thread-like veins filled with throbbing life blood. This little beating heart does its work with all the regularity of a full-grown heart, and the little brain has hidden in its tiny cells latent possibilities we can know nothing of as yet. As the great oak is unfolded from within outward, and grows upward till it stands the lofty monarch of the forest, so this child will unfold from the germ of Divinity hidden within its tiny mortal body into Man—the crowning masterpiece of all creation. The sculptor can imitate with his chisel the exterior, but none but the Infinite can supply the life principle animating this wonderful little human mechanism."

Kate stood solemnly by. She did not understand a word of what Mata was saying, but knew her babies were being praised, and that was sufficient happiness for her. At this point the

little human organism that Mata held let loose a screech, startling her so that she came near dropping it.

"Something is the matter," she gravely remarked. "A pin may be pricking it; you had better see to it at once."

"Sure, the baby is all right; he's only thryin' his voice," said Kate, calmly.

But the continued waiiing of the child necessitated his removal to the kitchen, and Mata and I undertook the pleasurable task of examining our new home together. We went first to the apartments of Guru. The furniture stood in its boxes waiting for her to suggest its arrangement in the rooms. I described to her the strange manner in which the carpenter had come and gone, and we both searched for the spring he had so carefully concealed that made the secret passage-way a mystery. Unable to discover it, we ascended to the observatory and looked out over the city.

The sun was just sinking into a golden bank of cloud; and, as we stood upon the housetop overlooking the many spires and domes of the city below, the last lingering light from the orb of day fell upon their metal-covered surfaces and seemed to transform them into burnished gold and silver reflectors. The trees shading the long avenues were just beginning to show the touch of autumn's frosts, as was indicated by the flaming colors of yellow and red that were mixed with the deep green of their luxurious foliage. Away in the distance were the silvery waters of Lake Chautauqua; and the long, dark river flowing from its southern extremity was plainly traceable by the inky blackness of its waters and by the fringe of trees, vines, and tangled undergrowth bordering its shores.

A silence too sacred to be broken by human speech seemed to settle upon us, and, slipping my arm round my darling's waist and drawing her head down upon my shoulder, we watched the enchanting scene till the shadows hid it from our sight. This was a time when all my miserable doubts were laid

aside; and it seemed that I was standing upon the border-land of a higher plane of consciousness. Suddenly a feeling of longing came over me—that the filmy curtain between it and me could be swept away, and that I might gaze upon the transcendental light of Glory-land. Then a great peace took possession of my soul, and a voice seemed to say: "My son, you could not bear it now."

Suddenly, as if just waking from a sleep, I became conscious of the falling dew and that Mata was shivering with the cold.

"You are not comfortable," I said. "We had better go below;" and we descended to the parlor.

Soon Kate appeared, bonneted and shawled, her twins tucked into the new baby-carriage that was having its christening on that special occasion. Both children were asleep, and the proud mother was all ready to go home to get, as she said, "the bit an' sup fer th' ould mon." She gave Mata numerous directions concerning the management of the household affairs, and then, bidding us good-by, went trundling her babies down the walk with an air of great pride and satisfaction.

As we watched her receding form, Mata remarked: "It is not those who possess the most gold who enjoy the most happiness. This woman would not exchange her humble home, with her beloved Pat and the babies, for the jeweled crown and the exalted position of a queen."

I was beginning to realize that heaven was not a locality, and that we do not have to lay aside our fleshly bodies before we can enjoy its happiness. Guru's words came very forcibly to my mind at that moment:

"Place yourself in perfect harmony with the great, inexorable Law, never rebelling against its justice but looking toward it as a friend, and you shall gain an inward peace utterly unknown to those who strive and rebel."

CHAPTER XV.

OUR "AT HOME."

The following month was fully occupied in selecting and arranging the furnishings for our home; and a trip to New York became necessary before our music-room was properly supplied with instruments. Mata availed herself of this opportunity to supply her wardrobe with gowns for the winter, and before we were aware of the lapse of time Thanksgiving was near. At last the carpets, rugs, and curtains were in their respective places, and we were ready to receive our friends.

How well I remember our first "at home!" Mata wore a pretty blue gown trimmed with careless knots of bright ribbon to relieve its plainness, and, without jewels or ornaments of any kind, looked a royal princess—so stately and self-possessed was she. Every caller was put perfectly at ease by the welcome she gave; and the manner she had of making each visitor feel herself to be the especial recipient of her attention was a great surprise to me, knowing as I did that in all her life she had never "received" before.

Among the early callers that evening were the Dalrymples. The mother, a fat, dumpy woman, waddled into the parlor followed by her two daughters, who were arrayed like peacocks in all the colors of the rainbow. They were decorated with feathers, flowers, bangles, streaming ribbons, and jetted fringe; and the rustle of their silken skirts, mingled with the clinking and jingling of the bangles, reminded me of the woman my old nurse used to tell me about, who "wore rings on her fingers and bells on her toes, making the sweetest of music wherever she goes."

In the course of the evening I had occasion to go to the

library in search of a book, and while there overheard a conversation between two ladies, who had withdrawn behind the curtains in a window to discuss the merits and demerits of my wife.

"What do you think of her?" inquired Miss Waixel. I recognized the voice of her companion as that of Mrs. Werdon, when she replied:

"Oh, she's pretty enough; but I can't see why anybody should rave over her so. I've heard nothing talked about but 'the bride,' 'the bride,' for the last two months. I'm perfectly sick of it all. My husband saw her driving the other day and he was struck—with all the rest—and he has done nothing since but compare every woman he knows with Mrs. Doctor Bennet. I just dread to have her introduced into society this winter, because I know all the men will act like fools about her. I wonder if she *will* flirt;—what do you think?"

"Why, I think she is the strangest creature I ever saw," replied Miss Waixel. "I had a little chat with her on the sofa, and had just spoken about that Smith-Vandergrift scandal when she looked at me with those great purple eyes till I felt the queerest I ever did. I know my face was crimson when she said: 'I have not heard of any scandal, and should be very sorry indeed to know that any of my women friends would talk about such a thing.' I didn't know what to say. She wasn't the least bit sarcastic, but really appeared genuinely surprised and sorry. Of course, I was ashamed of myself for mentioning the matter; but I don't see how anybody can live in this world and never know what is going on."

At this point in the conversation I found the book, and, leaving the ladies blissfully unconscious that their conversation had been overheard, I returned to the parlor and found Mrs. Dalrymple sitting beside my wife and telling a long story about a Mrs. Reed, "who is very fashionable and all that, you know, my dear, but quite an improper person to know." The old lady went on to say that probably Mrs. Reed

would call, because she was forever poking around where she was not wanted; but that my wife should have nothing to do with her because *she was not nice.*

Mata was looking at the old gossiper with surprise in her eyes, and I waited to hear the reply that was sure to come. When the woman paused for breath my wife said:

"Your remarks about Mrs. Reed are very uncharitable. Whatever she may have done I do not know, but I think if you cannot say something good about her you had better say nothing at all. It is possible she has been misjudged; she may have been imprudent, yet not wilfully wicked."

Mrs. Dalrymple's face reddened. "I didn't say she was wicked; I only said she wasn't nice nor the proper sort of person for you to call upon," she snapped.

"But she is invited everywhere—is entertained and entertains. From your own words I understand that you know her. How *can* you, and then make such remarks about her? Why do you not tell *her* of her faults instead of repeating them to others in her absence? Our true friends tell us of our failings to our faces, and then throw the mantle of charity over them in our absence."

Mrs. Dalrymple pursed her lips and tossed her head indignantly at Mata's rebuke, but offered no more advice, and soon I saw her and her daughters preparing to leave. She bade us both good-night, but there was a look in her eyes that meant she would not soon forget the snubbing she had received. Mata was as sweet to her as if nothing had happened to mar her enjoyment of the call; but *I* knew the old lady would never forget the "insult" and would attempt some time to get even with her in some way.

When the last guest was gone Mata turned to me and asked if these women were specimens of the company she would be expected to keep, and declared that she could not see how the deplorable political conditions would be improved by giving enfranchisement to women, who were no better fitted for the

administration of governmental affairs than were the politicians against whom there was so much outcry.

The next morning we received an invitation to attend a reception to be given at the home of Mrs. Doctor Cinder, a woman of considerable importance—in her own estimation—and quite a social light in the city. The function was to be given on Thursday evening of the following week, and Mata seemed almost childishly pleased at the prospect of this new experience. Happy in her happiness and vain enough pleasurably to anticipate the sensation she would make among those who had not met her, I was extremely anxious that her costume should outshine all the others in its beauty and magnificence, and therefore ordered a tiara of diamonds made for the occasion, selecting for the purpose some of the finest stones from our collection. Her gown was made *en princesse,* of creamy white satin with a white lace drapery falling over the train and held in place at the back of the neck by a diamond star; and when she was dressed and stood before me for my approval I wondered if any of her royal ancestors could compare favorably with her in face, form, or character.

We were a little late—as I intended to be—and when our names were announced a hush fell upon the buzz of conversation, and all eyes in the room were turned toward my wife, who, perfectly unconscious of the fact that she was the center of attraction, came gracefully forward to be presented. Our hostess, a stout woman, was dressed in a costume decidedly *décolleté*, and the broad exposure of naked bosom, shoulders, and arms quite startled Mata, who was not accustomed to such a sight. For a moment I feared she would lose her self-possession, but with only a deepening of the flush on her cheeks she chatted about the lateness of the hour, apologized for our tardiness, and then passed on to speak to others whom she recognized. With few exceptions the women were all dressed much like the hostess. The waists of their gowns were hardly worth mentioning, and the display of plump and

scraggy necks and arms were positively horrifying to a delicate, well-bred woman. In the course of the evening Mrs. Dalrymple brought Mrs. Reed, and, with as much apparent interest as if she had not spoken a word against her, introduced her to Mata with the remark:

"I do really hope you will like each other, because I'm so fond of you both, and we can have such delightful times driving and going to matinees together."

Mata acknowledged the introduction more graciously than usual, I thought, and to my satisfaction I saw her chatting very sociably with Mrs. Reed, who was really superior to many who cast suspicious glances at her. The little lady was pretty and vivacious and the most graceful dancer among them all. The gentlemen liked her and would leave the side of any of the maidens to have a dance or chat with her, and I believed that jealousy was the cause of all the buzzing and warnings given out about her.

In the course of the evening one of the Dalrymple girls was invited to sing. She simpered and made excuses, but her manner said: "Coax me!" After considerable delay she was led to the piano by a dudish young man who had just begun to be included in the invitations given this season to his mama and sisters, and his self-consciousness was sometimes very amusing to his friends.

Miss Dalrymple rendered the ballad in a thin, tremulous voice, entirely regardless of pitch. The higher notes were aimed at, but never reached; and when the song was ended I drew a breath of relief. Many of her listeners applauded with their hands while they criticized and ridiculed her behind their fans.

Then our hostess asked Mata to sing and to accompany herself on the harp. She declared it would be a pleasure, and, without the assistance of an escort, seated herself at the instrument. After striking a few chords, she sang "A Dream of Peace," that soulful composition by Pinsuti:

"The sunset shadows softly flit
Across the oaken floor,
And where the Western hills are lit
I see an open door;
And thro' the rifts of ruddy gold
That lights the fading West,
I see a face within the fold
Smile from the land of rest.

"Only a dream of the days gone by,
Only a light in the fading sky,
Only a lamp in an angel's hand
To light my way to the far-off land.

"The sunset shadows softly fade
Above the brow of night,
And 'mid their mingled light and shade
I see a star of light.
Its gleam falls on the oaken floor
Just where time bade us part;
Its message lights forever more
My darkened home and heart."

Her voice was as sweet and clear as the tones of a silver bell, and before the first strain was finished the buzzing of voices ceased and the silence in the room was like that of a cathedral. She seemed to have forgotten her surroundings and was really looking beyond the clouds to the land of rest where the great soul whom she loved so well was smiling down to her. When the song was finished there was silence for several seconds, and then her listeners seemed to forget they were in a parlor, for the applause was tremendous. Mata blushed in confusion at the unexpected enthusiasm and rose to leave the instrument, but they refused to be satisfied and begged her to sing again. This time it was "Home, Sweet Home," and she rendered it with so much feeling that there were tears in the eyes of many of the fashionable dames who listened.

I understood that it was because she had been confined so long in the convent school, and was so happy now to have her own beautiful home that it was to her like reaching heaven

after a long pilgrimage upon earth. Mata always felt her music deeply. It was for her a means of expressing emotion, and therefore a language more beautiful than words. It came from her pure heart; hence, it reached the hearts of every soul who listened.

After the last song the applause was repeated, and she was surrounded by admirers who paid her the most extravagant compliments; but she was growing weary of all this pretense and sham, and I whispered that we would go whenever she wished.

"Let it be now," she replied, and we began saying good-night.

When we were seated in the carriage Mata laid her head on my shoulder and sighed.

"How did you enjoy the reception?" I inquired.

"There is something very wrong with the world," said she, "when women bare their bosoms and arms and shoulders for the inspection of men. They tell me that it is fashionable; but who made it so? How can a modest woman expose her person in such a manner; and what is her motive? If a gentleman were to enter a reception-room in the presence of ladies without his coat, all society would exclaim at his rudeness, and no doubt he would be assisted from the house by the servants. Should he appear with his chest and arms *bare,* the ladies would scream and faint; yet we do not expect to find so much modesty in men as in women! Surely my Guru knew of what he was speaking when he said the people in the world were vile, and there was so much for the few to do that he must come back and help reform the world."

I tried to comfort her by saying she would not be responsible for the mistakes of others, and all that could be required of her would be to set a good example; but, shaking her head, she gravely replied:

"To a certain extent we *are* responsible for our brothers' and sisters' conduct. We may not wash our hands of them,

and, wrapping the cloak of self-esteem round ourselves, say, 'Oh, I am not my brother's keeper.' We are all children of the Great Father, and there are no exceptions. We are branches of one great Vine. Some leaves are weaker and more feeble than others, but all are supported and enlivened by the life-giving sap or current that throbs and pulsates from the Root invisible. If a twig or leaf is broken from a vine, then the remaining leaves and twigs must suffer. If a worm or insect comes among them burrowing or biting, you will soon see that what affects one affects all; and if the enemy be not removed the foliage and bark will be destroyed and the vine be robbed of its beauty. It is precisely so with humanity. We are all one another's keepers, and must not allow our fellow-beings to go wrong without raising our voices and wills against it; and I must consider what will be the best thing to do to eradicate this evil—this immodest dressing that leads to such dreadful results."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE THEATER.

A few days after the reception it was announced that a noted actress was coming to the city to play *Cleopatra,* the Egyptian queen. Society tingled with anticipation and rushed to secure seats for the first evening's entertainment. An old friend of mine engaged a box and sent invitations to my wife and me to share it with himself and wife, and, since Mata declared that nothing would please her so much as to see the great American actress, we accepted.

Our friends were seated when we arrived at the theater, and, while waiting for the performance to begin, Mata examined the decorations of the house and the curtain through

her glasses, making new comments in her original manner upon everything she saw—much to the amusement of our companions. The glare of the electric lights and the crashing of the orchestral music were entirely new features to her, and, with eyes open wide with wonder, she watched the rising of the curtain with as much seriousness as if it were a great and important event in her life. But, when the maids of honor appeared with their arms and bosoms exposed, a change came over her face, and sitting back in her chair she flushed to the roots of her hair. With the appearance of the star—a voluptuous, sensual woman, with form half clad in a gown slashed and draped to display a portion of her body and lower limbs—poor Mata was overcome with shame. Unconscious of the fact that the actress was in tights, and believing her nearly naked, she turned to me with tears in her eyes and whispered:

"This is dreadful! We must go home."

"Wait a little, till the first act is finished; our friends will be offended if we leave now," I replied.

She sank back into her seat and covered her face with her fan, while the audience went wild over the play. Our companions were as delighted as the others, and the floral offerings sent up to the star were numerous and beautiful. Everything but the great actress had been forgotten, and not until the end of the first act did Mrs. Fitzgerald become conscious of our presence. Then she turned to Mata and exclaimed:

"Isn't she divine? Her figure is positively angelic! Such limbs! Such a bust!"

Mr. Fitzgerald joined with his wife in expressing the greatest admiration for the star, and for different members of the company; after exhausting their vocabulary of descriptive adjectives they discovered that my wife did not respond at all to their enthusiasm.

"What is the matter, dear? Are you ill?" Mrs. Fitzgerald asked, anxiously. "You look positively miserable. Wouldn't you like a glass of wine?"

Mr. Fitzgerald rose hurriedly to go after the wine, but Mata stopped him.

"Do not trouble yourself, sir," she said. "I do not drink wine; neither am I ill."

"But what ails you? You don't seem to be enjoying the play at all, and I expected you would be enraptured with it. This star is the finest upon the American stage."

I expected Mata would say something, but was not prepared for what came, and I stared at her in astonishment when she began speaking. She said:

"Mrs. Fitzgerald, I cannot understand how you—a lady supposed to be imbued with womanly modesty, the mother of growing daughters and the wife of an honorable man—can endure the beastly wantonness of this entertainment. Never having attended a theater before, I expected to hear some good music, to see some pretty dresses and scenery, and to be amused by the play; but I find the whole affair unfit for human beings to witness. This performance is a disgrace, and indicates a degeneration rather than a progression of the people who participate in it. Those women have disrobed their bodies for the indecent admiration of men; and these men are nothing but animals, or they would not encourage such an exposure by looking at them. And you, a sister of these misguided creatures, unblushingly applaud when one of them outdoes another in her immodest display of that portion of her person which common decency demands should be kept decorously covered. What do you expect will be the result of all this? The rising generation will not know the meaning of the word *modesty*. Your own daughters, brought up to witness such orgies and seeing their father and mother going into ecstasies over such vulgar scenes, will naturally think it the correct thing to do and will try to imitate these women over whom you rave. Your children will know nothing of spirituality. They will never realize that they are immortal souls, but will consider their bodies the real women, and will waste

their whole time decorating and ornamenting that portion of themselves which is perishable and must return to the dust of matter from which it was created."

Here Mata paused a moment for Mrs. Fitzgerald to answer her; but the woman was completely crushed and sat looking foolishly at her. Since she did not reply, Mata continued:

"They are about to raise the curtain for a continuance of the display which I am not willing to encourage by my presence, so I am going home. Will you come, or are you going to remain and be a witness to more of this wretched performance?"

Without a word of reply and with a shrug of her shoulders, Mrs. Fitzgerald turned her attention to the stage, and after bowing good-night to the couple we left the theater. Mata was so excited about the unpleasant ending of the little party that I refrained from speaking, and we rode home in silence. When our wraps were put away, Mata came and sat beside me and nestled her head down on my shoulder. Putting my arm round her waist, I kissed her trembling lips and said, soothingly:

"There, there, dearest; don't feel so bad about this little thing. You cannot change the customs of the whole world."

"Little thing!" she repeated, sadly. "This shameless display of nakedness which seems to have become so common as not to create the least surprise? No, my husband; it is not a *'little thing;'* it is a crying shame. And the first work I purpose doing will be to form a society and invite all the women in the city who have any modesty left to join me in opposing this *great wrong* by setting up an opposing current of thought against this dreadful exposure of the female body."

I shook my head. "You will meet with poor success, I fear," I replied, discouragingly. "However, I am quite ready to assist in this crusade whenever you determine to begin."

"To-morrow I shall send cards of invitation to all the ladies

I have met and request them to bring their friends—because I have something very important to communicate."

"That will bring every one, my darling," I said, smilingly. "The house will be filled to overflowing, and there will not be standing room in the grounds for all your guests."

"Why do you think so?" she innocently asked.

"Because your invitation will imply that you have a secret to tell; therefore, your listeners will walk over one another to secure positions where they can hear it. If you will permit me to suggest an amendment to the resolution, I would say that it would be better to confine your invitations to such ladies as you *know* for the first meeting, and then, after you are quite sure of success, the others can be invited to join with you."

After a few moments of consideration, Mata concluded that my plan was the better one and decided to try it.

At an early hour the next morning Mr. Fitzgerald called at my office in high dudgeon. He declared that both himself and his wife had been grievously insulted on the previous evening, and believed I had aided and abetted my wife in her outburst of abuse to them. He said an apology was the only thing that would save me from a sound thrashing and my wife from the everlasting displeasure of the Fitzgerald family and their circle of intimate friends.

I replied that no apology would be offered; that I fully indorsed the position my wife had taken, and moreover she considered the invitation to attend so indecent a display an insult to *her*. The man actually gasped for breath as he replied:

"Indecent display of what, sir? Don't you know that all the élite of the city were there? What do you mean by trying to set my wife a pattern of propriety by holding yours up for a model? Thunder and lightning, man! I've a good notion to knock you down for your impudence!"

"Try it!" said I, fully aroused by his words. "Knock me down if you can! You may not be successful. I think it

a great pity that we should come to blows over a matter of this kind. We have been good friends, and I understand that your intentions were good when you extended the invitation to us; but you don't seem to consider the difference between my wife's training and that of Mrs. Fitzgerald. Now, don't get excited; wait till I have finished, if you please," I said, as he began shaking his fist in close proximity to my nose. "There is as much difference between the two women as if they were from different planets. Your wife was educated at a fashionable boarding-school and has always been accustomed to seeing women strip their bosoms and arms for the admiration of men. My wife was brought up from infancy by her grandfather, who was a recluse and taught her to aspire to godliness rather than to cultivate her vanity. At his death she was put into a convent school, where she had been most rigidly guarded from all contact with the fashionable world. There she devoted her whole time to study, and had never attended a ball, reception, or theater till she came to my home as my wife. It is perfectly natural and proper that she should be shocked, when you consider the training she has had; and it is no wonder that she is disgusted with what she sees in her intercourse with fashionable society. I do not desire to insult either you or Mrs. Fitzgerald, but shall stand by my wife in the position she has taken and shall defend myself against any attack you wish to make."

As my friend listened to my explanation his muscles relaxed; his clenched fist assumed a less threatening aspect, and by the time I had finished speaking he was almost restored to good humor.

"Well, sir, I was a little excited and perhaps did pounce upon you rather fiercely; but, you see, my wife is almost insane over the insult given her by Mrs. Bennet last evening. She didn't sleep a wink, nor did she allow me to, but had hysterics all night, and I had to call a doctor at daylight to give her something to quiet her nerves. She's a very excitable woman

anyway, and when she gets into one of her tantrums it's awful for me."

"What was said that should excite her so?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know. I didn't hear half that was said; but my wife kept repeating something about 'your daughters, brought up among such orgies, witnessing their father and mother going into ecstasies over such vulgar scenes, will naturally believe it the correct thing to do and will not know the meaning of the word *modesty;*' so I think it was that shot that hit her the hardest."

"Would you like to see your daughters attired as those actresses were last night," said I, "dancing those vuigar dances and exposing themselves to such remarks as are always made about such actions?"

"*Certainly not!* Who said that my daughters would ever do such things?"

"How do you know they never will, since both you and their mother encourage other men's daughters in doing it?" I asked.

"Whose daughters did I ever encourage in a thing of that kind?" Mr. Fitzgerald inquired, with a look of astonishment spread over his face.

"Why, every woman on that stage was the daughter of somebody, was she not? And when you go and witness their performances, rave over them, call them *'divine and magnificent creatures,'* send them floral testimonials of your appreciation of their efforts, and applaud with all your power, are you not encouraging them? The stage would not be what it is to-day if it were not for the encouragement it receives from society. If an actress can conceive some new exposure, and gives it as her specialty, society will rush to see the new dance or whatever it may be. These women are human, if they *are* actresses, and many of the sons of our prominent men become infatuated with and marry them. You have a son; how would you like to see him married to that high kicker we saw last

night? Would you like to introduce her into your family circle and let her appear with your daughters?"

"You are talking very foolishly, sir; very foolishly. Of course, I wouldn't allow the boy to marry her. Marrying and admiring are very different things."

"If a man really admires anything he is pretty sure to try to get possession of it. But why is not any one of those actresses as fit to be your son's wife as were any of the ladies who sat and applauded their actions?"

"Because they *are* not!" testily replied my friend.

" 'Because' does not answer the question. The ladies in fashionable society expose their naked bosoms, shoulders, and arms to the gaze of the gentlemen with whom *they* associate; they drink wine, play poker for money, flirt with other women's husbands, and many of them bet on horse races and use profane language when they are angry, just as the actresses do. Where shall we draw the line between the two classes?"

"Why, sir, I—well—you know the ladies are protected by their husbands and fathers," stammered Mr. Fitzgerald.

"Certainly, and the actresses are protected by the same gentlemen. Who furnishes the money to pay the enormous bills they contract to supply themselves with the elegant costumes, magnificent jewels, and all the trappings they wear? Surely their salaries are not sufficient! Who pays for the wine suppers and flowers, and who sends the notes declaring eternal devotion to them? Do not the actresses have the same refined (?) company that the ladies of society do?"

"By the gods! I never saw it in that light before!" exclaimed my friend.

"And you have come to knock me down because my wife told your wife some unvarnished truths last night! She raved all night because she was told some things she ought to have known years ago! It is indeed a fact that most people will bear, with great fortitude, a false accusation, but the truth will enrage them beyond control."

My friend looked very humble as he rose to go.

"Doctor, I am ashamed of myself," said he, as he reached out his hand. "I hope you are not offended with me for my—that is to say, my brusqueness, this morning. I shall see that some changes are made in our social program for the coming season, and Marie will get something besides morphine to quiet her hysterics when I get home."

I heartily shook the hand he offered and declared my regard for him undiminished. We parted good friends, and the incident was never alluded to by either of us again.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WOMAN'S DRESS REFORM.

The same evening I found Mata quite excited about the new society. It was to be called the "Woman's Dress Reform," and she had spent a good portion of the day in planning a set of resolutions which all the ladies were to sign,—after her little speech had been made,—and then the badges were to be designed and ordered at once. She had arranged for everything, except the disappointment that I knew was coming. But I could not discourage the poor child when she seemed so confident of success, and, since it had never occurred to her innocent soul that women loved the things she thought so terrible, there was no way to convince her of the truth but to let her have the experience necessary to teach the lesson.

She had meditated upon the subject and had concluded that the cause of the evil was thoughtlessness; therefore, she considered it her duty to assume the responsibility of helping her sisters into the right line of thinking. So the invitations had been sent out that morning, and the ladies were to meet the next afternoon.

Wishing to be a silent and unsuspected witness at the gathering, I made arrangements to come home early the following day, and Mata entered with childish delight into the plan of hiding me among the draperies in a bow window behind a sofa.

Two o'clock was the hour appointed for the guests to arrive, but many of the ladies were so eager to learn about the promised secret that they came early, and the parlor was well filled long before that time. Mata greeted them with charming courtesy and waited till half-past two before making her

little speech, in order that the dilatory ones would not be uninformed concerning her plans. The eagerness of some of the visitors was great, as was indicated by the conversation of two of the most fashionable ladies present, who sat upon the sofa behind which I was hidden. They whispered and talked in an undertone about this funny idea of Mrs. Bennet's, wondered what she had to tell, and finally decided that it must be something about the doctor.

When Mata arose and politely asked the ladies to give her their attention, the murmur of voices ceased and all eyes were turned toward her. Plunging at once into the subject so near her heart, she said:

"Ladies, I have invited you here this afternoon to lay before you for consideration a plan for reforming the present style of evening dresses—which is as shocking to you as it is to me, I have no doubt. Last night, for the first time in my life, I attended a theater, and the exposure of limbs and bosoms there was something terrible. Many of you were present and were equally shocked, I expect. Now, if the ladies in the best social circles will set the example of modest dressing and frown upon all women who make an improper display of their persons, the professional women will soon follow their example and change their mode of dress.

"You must realize that we are responsible for our influence; and you, ladies, are much more responsible than those who fill the more humble positions in life, because you are looked to as models of propriety and fashion by those who stand socially below you. Every woman exerts some kind of influence, either good or bad; therefore, it seems to me, we should be very careful what we do.

"The first point I wish to touch upon is your own families. If you dress in an immodest manner you are not only setting a bad example to your social inferiors, but you are assisting in demoralizing your own daughters. Your sons, seeing their mothers and sisters unblushingly enter a ballroom in a half-

naked condition, naturally do not see the harm of visiting places where women make merchandise of the same kind of exposures. Your husbands, seeing you improperly dressed, become possessed of the mistaken idea that all women are alike, and they soon learn to find as much pleasure in the society of our unwise and unfortunate sisters as they do in your own. I could call your attention to many other evils arising from the great mistake women are making in their present mode of dressing; but I am sure it is unnecessary, for you can see as well as I the necessity for this reform. I have here a few resolutions, and after reading them to you the opportunity will be given to everybody to sign them, and then we will plan our badges and begin to set these wrongs right."

Mata then read as follows:

"Rules for Woman's Dress Reform.

"We, the undersigned, resolve to abolish all manner of immodest dressing, and to regard with disfavor all women who persist in it.

"There shall be no sleeveless gowns worn by any member of this society.

"All corsages shall be high in the neck and large enough at the waist to allow the wearer to put on her own rubbers and pick up her own handkerchief.

"Crinolines shall be abolished, and all gowns be made as light as possible by an entire absence of heavy canvas linings.

"Long trains shall be discarded, and no dress shall 'sweep' more than three inches, thereby avoiding discomfort to the wearer and also to those who dance or walk with her.

"Princess gowns shall be preferred, but shall not be made obligatory, for members; and only those who can do so will be expected to wear them."

"Now, ladies," said Mata, "here are the rules we are to adopt, and you may sign them at once; here are pen and ink."

Not a woman stirred. Mata waited for several moments, and then asked: "What do you think of this plan, ladies? Will some one speak on the subject?"

Another silence. Presently I heard a repressed titter in a corner of the room. Soon the ladies began to whisper and the murmur of voices became general, but no one rose to speak.

I could not resist the temptation to peep between the curtains. Mata was still waiting, with a flush upon her cheeks and an expression in her eyes that indicated a feeling of indignation and surprise. Five minutes more passed, and still no one offered an opinion. Mata tapped upon the table and exclaimed: "Ladies! Will you please express yourselves in some way?"

Not a word of reply did she receive, and at last, turning to old Mrs. Dalrymple, she asked for her views on the subject. The lady slowly rose from her chair, and, after regaining her breath, said:

"Of course, I understand that our hostess means well by trying to organize such a society; but I don't see how it is possible or practicable, because we have always been accustomed to wearing our dresses as we do, since we were first introduced into society. Such a plan would cause us no end of trouble, our gowns being all made in that fashion, and we should require new waists to our skirts—and the materials in many cases we could not match. I don't see anything objectionable in the low-cut corsages; they are pretty and modest enough. If a woman has bones and blemishes it is all very well to hide them under a high-necked and long-sleeved dress; but if she has a pretty bosom and arms I can't see the harm in showing them. Those things are a girl's stock in trade. That's how they get their husbands. Doesn't a man desire to know what he is marrying—whether flesh and blood or cotton and bones? I am expressing my own opinion, but believe it is also the opinion of every guest present; but perhaps we had better take a vote upon it."

Mata's face was a study, and after Mrs. Dalrymple sat down she proposed that a vote should be taken. With smiles and nods the ladies indicated a willingness to vote, and Mata said: "All who agree with Mrs. Dalrymple will please make it manifest by saying 'aye.'"

There was a perfect chorus of "ayes."

"Those contrary will please say 'no,' " said Mata.

A poor little old maid over in a corner had the courage to say "no," very faintly. The situation was ridiculous, and many of the ladies smiled; others giggled outright. My wife was completely nonplused, and I pitied her deeply in this disappointment. Recovering her composure in a few moments, however, she once more called the company to order and addressed them:

"Ladies, I am very sorry to see you take this view of so serious a matter. I hoped you would all sign these resolutions, for in this manner we could form the nucleus of a grand reform in society—which is very needful; but if you will not join me I shall sign it myself, if I have to be the sole member."

Taking the pen, Mata signed her whole name with as much seriousness as if the document were the Declaration of Independence—and indeed it *was* a declaration against the tyrannical yoke of fashion, which grinds and presses its subjects sometimes to the verge of madness and ruin. Then she looked over at the elderly maiden who had voted with her and held out the pen. The little woman stepped bravely forward and wrote her name below my wife's. Mata thanked and told her how heartily she appreciated the courage she had shown in taking this step, and expressed a wish to know her better.

The two ladies who sat on the sofa before me then began whispering, and Mrs. Chapmon said:

"The little fool! She has no figure anyhow, and it doesn't matter whether she wears a low-necked dress or not."

"But how about Mrs. Bennet?" asked Mrs. Merritt, her companion.

"Well, she seems to have a figure, but nobody knows whether it is all made up or not. Maybe her neck and arms are not white; perhaps she has blemishes or something—you can't tell. But you may depend upon one thing: if she was all right she would be perfectly willing to show herself."

Mata rang for coffee and had refreshments served just

at that moment, and afterward she entertained the company with music. While drinking their coffee the ladies again began criticizing and saying spiteful things about my wife. Mrs. Chapmon said to her companion, while she crumbled her cake:

"Do you know, my dear, I believe Mrs. Bennet's yellow hair has been bleached to that peculiar shade? If you will observe, her eyebrows and lashes are dark, and her eyes are of that strange shade of pansy-purple one seldom sees. I have heard that belladonna dropped into the eyes in small quantities will give an ordinary blue eye that color and add extra brightness to it. I don't know that Mrs. Bennet does that, you know; but I'm perfectly certain her hair has been tampered with, because it is so unnatural and not at all in correspondence with her eyebrows and eyelashes."

"Yes," said her companion, "I've thought of it myself, and have looked to see if there were any streaks. I couldn't find any, but I presume, if it were undone, they could be found."

"I think her complexion too clear to be natural," said Mrs. Chapmon. "I know she does not use powder, for I have looked closely to see; but I expect it is due to those arsenic wafers that so many silly girls are taking."

"Do you suppose the doctor knows what a fraud she may be perpetrating upon him?" asked the other lady.

"Oh, no, probably not; he is so desperately in love with her—and then he is so much older than she that it is an easy matter to fool him."

"What is the matter with the doctor, anyway?" asked Mrs. Merritt.

"Oh, he's queer and always was; he has the strangest ideas about virtue and propriety—a regular old Betty! I never saw a man like him. Do you know, I once heard him say he thought virtue was as admirable in a man as in a woman? The very idea! Did you ever hear of such foolishness? And when he had that row with Arabella Smythe! Oh, didn't you know about that?"

"No; do tell me about it," her companion said, eagerly.

"Well, some time I will, but not now. It was the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of. He was heard to say that he should consider himself everlastingly disgraced if found guilty of marrying a woman just for money, and a whole lot more rubbish that I can't remember—and that everybody laughed at. Do you know, my dear, there were lots of men in town who would have been proud to have Arabella Smythe fall in love with them; but he behaved like a ninny and did all sorts of things. I'll tell you all about it some time, if you'll remind me."

"I don't believe he's any better than other men; they're all alike, my dear—*all* alike! But he just wants to pose as a model of virtue, that's all."

I was greatly amused at the opinions these two ladies entertained about my wife and myself, and realized that the old saying was indeed true—"eaves-droppers never hear any good of themselves." Just then Mata came over to the sofa and asked the ladies to have some refreshments. They declined, but thanked her very sweetly for her thoughtful kindness, praised the coffee, and declared the cake delicious. After she had turned away Mrs. Chapmon said:

"This coffee is vile. If I hadn't a cook who could do better than this I would send her about her business."

"I know it," said Mrs. Merritt, "and the cake is horrid. I do believe it was shortened with stale butter or lard—it has such a queer taste."

Some of the ladies now began saying good-by, and Mrs. Chapmon said:

"Well, I suppose the thing is over, because all the rest are leaving; so we must go too. Now, when you shake hands with her at the door, look closely at her frizzes and see if they are false, while I examine her back hair and see if it is streaked. I am determined to know."

The two ladies approached my wife with the sweetest smiles

upon their faces, and from my corner I watched their maneuvers. While one held Mata's hand, patting and smoothing it in the most caressing manner, she told her how much she had enjoyed the afternoon—how rested and refreshed she felt since taking that cup of excellent coffee and how dearly she loved to hear her sing. Her companion meanwhile stood behind my wife and was scrutinizing her hair to the best of her ability through her eye-glasses. Finally, raising her hand to adjust an imaginary hair-pin, she exclaimed: "Pardon me, Mrs. Bennet; this pin is loose; allow me to fasten it;" and, while the unsuspecting child bowed her head for the woman to arrange the pin, I saw her deliberately pull the curls and puffs apart to look for streaks in my darling's beautiful hair. Then, giving it a tender little pat, she turned to Mata and said:

"My dear Mrs. Bennet, I hope you do not feel hurt because I did not sign your resolutions. You see, in principle I agree with you exactly, but my husband is so exacting that he would be very much offended if I were to make such a change in my mode of dress. He is a man who admires a finely developed woman, and he always says that a woman who *can* wear a low-cut dress and doesn't is a prude. I do it to please him, and for nothing else—as a woman should always do. Your ideas are excellent, but, as you have been educated in a convent, where the rules are so strict, these things seem a little worse to you than they do to us, who have been brought up so differently. After you have mingled in society for a few years you will conform to the prevailing style, as the rest of us do, and will not mind it at all."

CHAPTER XVIII.

PASSING AWAY.

At last our guests were gone, and I emerged from my

hiding place. Mata looked so grave and disappointed that I waited for her to speak.

"Did you hear it all?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"What shall I do?"

"Keep yourself pure. Let your example be perfect, and let those follow it who will. You cannot reform evildoers against their wills. These women will not be brought to your way of thinking so long as it is directly contrary to *their own inclinations.* They love to display what they believe to be their charms; and they quarrel among themselves about who has the most to display. They have neither spiritual nor intellectual attractions to exhibit, and these physical ones are all they possess. It would be a great pity to deprive them of this one little happiness."

Then I repeated the conversation I had heard between the two women who occupied the sofa. Mata's eyes opened wide with surprise when I told how one held her hand and engaged her attention while the other examined her back hair for streaks. For a moment she looked as if about to cry, but when the ridiculous side of the affair appeared to her she joined with me in laughing at it.

During the winter many invitations to balls and receptions were sent to us. A few were accepted, but many declined. Mata was never popular among the fashionables because she was so outspoken and honest, and the ladies soon learned better than to criticize or speak disparagingly of an absent one when she was present. Among the poor she was worshiped as an angel of mercy. Her daily round of calls she never failed to make, nor did she ever hesitate to enter a sick-room because the disease was believed to be contagious. No hovel was too humble or too dirty for her to visit, and many poor families had occasion to bless her tender sympathy and generous help.

From the first of our married life Mata insisted upon having

one-half of the fortune given us by her grandfather set apart for her own use, thus having control of her own private purse. She loved the rooms that had been built for the Guru, and spent many hours alone in the sacred apartment looking at and handling the different articles so dear to her because he had touched them; and I would often find her reclining upon the couch where he died, seemingly in deep meditation. She never doubted his return; she spoke freely upon the subject to me, and was constantly making plans for the future—when he should be with us again. Silently I listened, because it was not in my heart to speak discouragingly concerning the paramount desire of her soul; but my doubts were very strong and my reason was offended with the thought. The servants shunned that part of the house, fearing to pass the door. We never knew their reason for this unless it were because we had always kept the rooms locked, and the key was never out of our possession.

When spring came Mata often took an old Greek text or Sanskrit writing to the observatory and spent hours in reading. As the summer advanced she enjoyed sitting in the flower garden and summer houses, or driving in her phæton to Lakewood or Greenhurst, as the fancy seized her; and so the time passed till the second year of our married life began, and the frosts of autumn were turning the leaves of the trees to the varied and beautiful tints that characterize their work.

Like two children, without a shadow to darken our lives, we spent our days together, driving over the hills surrounding the lake and through the valleys below the city. Ah, they are never to be forgotten; and when the dark hours came they were a bright spot that in memory I lived over and over again.

But the weather grew colder, and soon the roughness of the road made the drives uncomfortable and unpleasant for her; so she turned her attention to the many little duties making demands upon her at home. When the thirtieth of November came it was another stormy day, such as the corresponding date

seven years before had been, and, hastening through my calls, I was glad to get home just as the first flakes of snow began falling.

Mata was not visible when I entered our cozy sitting-room, and, when I found her huddled up in a little heap on the couch in her own chamber, she said she had not been well all day and refused to go down to dinner. Early in the evening she grew so much worse that another doctor and a nurse had to be sent for, and before midnight her life seemed hanging in the balance. When the clock struck the hour of twelve the wail of an infant heralded the news that I was a father. The child was born just seven years to the hour from the time the old Guru died, and with the wailing of the infant the old man's words came back to me:

"The body of the first child born of your union shall be my earthly temple when I come again."

I admitted to myself that it was a strange coincidence that this child should be born on the seventh anniversary of his death—to the very day and hour. But I concluded that it was *only* a coincidence, and since my wife needed all my attention I gave the little one to the nurse without giving it more than a cursory glance.

Mata's condition frightened me. She was sinking so rapidly that I summoned my colleague, and together we used every known means to revive her. She rallied sufficiently to whisper my name, and to signify a desire to be left alone with me. The doctor and nurse left the room, and then, looking up at me with those lovely eyes of hers, she whispered: "I am going to leave you, dearest; but the child will live, and you must call her Mata, after me."

With my heart bursting with grief, I cried: "Oh, my darling, stay with me! What shall I do without you? You are my life—my soul! I cannot live when you are gone!"

"No, dearest; I cannot stay," she replied, faintly. "I must go. I have been your real, true wife for two years, and am

thankful for that happiness, but my life work is done. Our child will live, and as she grows in size and beauty she will fill, as best she can, my place in your home. I do not understand how it is, but she and my Guru are one and the same. He said it would be so, and he never told a falsehood."

"Oh, Mata," I moaned, "do not leave me! Stay, and we shall be so happy with our child."

"It is not to be, though I would gladly have it so," she whispered, faintly.

Holding that precious form in my arms, I watched her breathing growing shorter and her pulse fainter; and, as those snowy lids drooped slowly over the glorious eyes, I fully realized that she was leaving me and bowed my head upon hers as I moaned in agony. Then in my frenzy I tried to hold her closer and closer to my heart; but slowly the lifeless hands relaxed their clasp from my neck, her head fell backward from my shoulder, and I saw that her breath had ceased, her pulse had stopped—her soul was gone.

Suddenly everything around me turned as black as night. Staggering to my feet, and realizing the awful truth that my Mata was dead—gone from me forever—I wrung my hands and prayed to be permitted to go with her. In the darkness I felt my way toward the window, hoping that I could open it, and that in the fresh air she would revive. Then something in my brain snapped; there was a report like a pistol shot, and I could see again. The room was flooded with a golden light more radiant than anything I had ever dreamed of, and looking up I saw above the dead form of my darling a group of beings robed in garments that shone like the sun at midday. Motionless and entranced, I gazed at the wondrous scene. Among the radiant beings was my sainted mother. She waved her hands and smiled, and these words came floating down to me: "Only a few more years, my son, and then your earth work will be done."

My darling wife was with them, and her long golden hair

fell in a shower of curling ringlets below her waist. Her robes were like the tints of the rainbow illuminated by a heavenly light. Reaching out my arms toward her, I cried: "Oh, let me come! Let me come!" She smiled and said: "Only for a little time, dearest, and then we shall come for you. Be faithful! Be faithful!"

As the vision began to fade they sang these words:

"Close by the river on the flower-strewn strand,
Watching and waiting your dear ones stand;
While you are weeping in darkness and gloom,
We are welcoming them to their home.
Fear not the darkness surrounding the tomb,
For beyond it is smiling, eternal bloom."

As these words fell from the lips of that heavenly choir, every syllable burned itself into my brain and was written there in letters of fire—to last so long as should the throbbing, aching brain itself. The glorious beings floated away, and the music grew fainter as their forms receded from sight—until they were gone, and I was left alone with my wife's lifeless form, which now I could see lying on the bed.

I was pacing the floor and wringing my hands helplessly when the doctor returned to ask if he could be of any assistance. He declared it was an unusual case and said there was no reason for her death. But, with or without a reason, the fact remained that she was gone—and I was almost mad with grief. Bidding him attend to everything and leave me to myself, I retired to the library and after locking the door threw myself face downward upon the floor. Then I began thinking what a dreary waste my future would be without my darling, and believed I could not bear it. Rising, I took from a drawer my revolver and examined it carefully. It was in good condition and every chamber was loaded. Placing its muzzle to my temple I was about to send a leaden bullet upon its mission when it was wrenched from my hand and hurled across the room. At the same moment I became conscious of a presence standing behind me. Whirling angrily around I was about to

seize the man who had dared to interfere with my intentions; but no one was visible. Then an unfamiliar voice said:

"Coward! How dare you rush unbidden into a world you know nothing of? You would not be permitted to enter the angelic presence of your wife, for such souls as she do not dwell with suicides. There is a helpless little one in yonder room who has been intrusted to your care. Since you have assumed these paternal duties you must fulfil them."

"But my heart aches so," I moaned.

"The sorrow is natural and sincere, but you must learn to sacrifice yourself for the good and happiness of others."

My thoughts reverted to the death scene of Guru, and I remembered with what calmness Mata assisted me in placing his old body in the casket; and, although a look of deep sadness had rested on her face, she did not make me miserable with her sorrow—and yet he was her only friend. Then these words were whispered in my ear:

"Hers was a pure, passionless, undying love, such as soul feels for soul, regardless of sex or other earthly relation."

"Yes, there is a difference between her love and mine that I do not understand; but mine is the best that I know how to give—and it was always true to her upon whom it was lavished."

CHAPTER XIX.

LITTLE MATA.

Suddenly an intense desire came over me to see my child, and I went to the nursery. The nurse sat dozing in her chair beside the swinging basket in which the little one was lying. Turning back the silken cover, I looked at the human mite that had caused me—as I believed—all this misery. It was sleeping, and its beauty was something rare. Its little head was perfectly shaped, and what seemed most strange to me was the fact that it was thickly covered with rings of yellow hair of the same shade as that of its dead mother. In all my professional experience I had never seen anything like this. Its lashes were long and dark, and in every feature it seemed indeed a miniature Mata.

"But this is a female body," I mused; "how could Guru use it for his own? And yet he promised that he would."

It was a mystery too deep for my poor dizzy brain to solve, and I abandoned the task. With my finger I touched the baby's cheek. She stirred and opened her eyes. In the dim light I could not see their color, but I knew they were large and dark and prayed that they would be like my lost darling's. Suddenly a wave of loving protection streamed from my bursting heart toward this helpless little one, who was no larger than a doll; and somehow when that new feeling was born the old resentful one died, and I realized my true position.

"Yes," I said, "your coming has cost your mother her life; but you are *ours,* and I shall protect you. For your sake I will take up this tangled thread of life and go on winding the ball to the weary end. Sometimes the tangled snarl seems impossible to undo; again it is dragged in the mire and is trodden

upon by the feet of the passers-by—but I will wind, wind, wind it to the end. Oh, God! How can I, and why?"

* * * *

At last dawn was breaking, and, as I stood at the window in the library and watched the fiery orb of day appear, it seemed a monstrous, unwinking eye, gazing with unpitying indifference upon the world's happiness and misery. And as if a voice were whispering in my ear, these words came to my mind:

"He—as well as you—is governed by the great Law which men call God. That Law is Consciousness Universal. It rules all things, from the largest planet swinging in boundless space to the tiny atom too small to be visible to your eyes. By It nothing is ever forgotten; nothing is ever overlooked. For—

> "It thinks, and suns spring into shape;
> It wills, and worlds disintegrate;
> It loves, and souls are born.
> And death is only Its wise way
> Of changing budded lives to blossoms—
> Of turning night to day."

The words seemed to calm the wild rebellion in my heart, and I bowed my head in reverence and in recognition of this truth.

At eight o'clock the doctor, who had remained all night at the house, sent a servant with the request for an interview, and I went down to the parlor to meet him. He offered to relieve me of all responsibility of the funeral by securing the services of an undertaker and also by directing the burial ceremonies.

"Buried!" I exclaimed, with a shudder. "Oh, I *cannot* have her buried!"

"But what will you do?" he asked.

The thought of putting that precious form into the ground to be consumed by worms was horrible. No; it must be cremated, and the ashes put into an urn and placed beside her

grandfather's in the sacred apartments. I declared that the body should be taken to Buffalo for cremation, and that the funeral services at my house would be omitted.

"What will the people think?" my friend inquired, in surprise. "Your wife was highly respected and deeply loved. You occupy a prominent position in society. Have you no regard for public opinion?"

"Not the least," I replied. "Public opinion in this case is of no consequence to me. If you will respect my wishes in the matter you may assist me. Otherwise some one else will."

"Oh, of course your wishes shall be obeyed," said he; "but it seems rather odd that you do not want the services of a minister or a choir. I never heard of such a thing before. Music is so consoling to one's feelings at such a time, you know."

I groaned. The thought of earthly music "consoling" me after the vision I had seen and the music I had heard, and for the sake of public opinion to be compelled to listen to the screeching of human voices wailing dirges over the body of her who was at that moment an angel of light! It would be unendurable, and I did not believe public opinion deserved such a sacrifice from me. But I said that notwithstanding the oddity of it we would dispense with both minister and choir, and he would kindly make all necessary arrangements without disturbing me again till it was time to leave the city.

Bowing, he withdrew, and I went to the room where my darling's form had been prepared for its last resting-place. They had dressed her in a soft silken gown that was very familiar to me, since she had worn it on the last day of her life. She was lying on the couch in her room, and the pillows and shawls were arranged in such a manner as to make it appear that she was sleeping. The curtains were drawn, and a shaded lamp cast a subdued light over the room.

All that day and night I knelt or sat beside that couch, thinking over the events that had made up our lives for the last

seven years, and I could not remember ever seeing a frown nor the shadow of one on her face.

"What has her work been?" I asked aloud; and the answer came back clear and distinct:

"To teach you purity of thought, purity of life, and unbounded charity for your fellow-beings."

"Yes," I replied; "I am a better man than I should have been without her."

After his surprise at my strange request had subsided, my friend managed very well indeed. He purposely misled the newspapers as to the hour that we would leave the city for Buffalo, and so there were no curious people at the station to witness our departure. No delay or accident occurred in the journey, and after the cremation I returned home with the feeling that a door in my heart had been closed and locked forever.

A few days afterward the ashes were sent to me. I procured a solid silver urn for them and placed them beside those of old Guru—in the sacred apartments where we had spent so many happy hours together.

CHAPTER XX.

CLAIRVOYANCE.

As the months and years rolled by I lived a routine life. While watching the growth of my child, I did, with the regularity of the sun, my daily duties.

Little Mata's disposition was not at all like her mother's, although in many ways she resembled her. She was positive and determined, and when but a toddling child seemed to have advanced ideas of justice—that the rights of herself and others *must* be respected. Instinctively she knew a falsehood from a truth, and would point her tiny finger at a story-teller while a

look of disgust, most comical to see upon so small a face, would indicate her feelings. I was the only person in the house whom she would obey; and, though seeming to entertain the greatest respect for me and for my opinions, she would never allow me to kiss her lips. Neither would she kiss me. On very rare occasions, as a reward for some special favor bestowed upon her by me, I was permitted to kiss her forehead or cheek. The others were never allowed even that small privilege.

As soon as she could walk, the child declined to sit upon my knee; she selected an ottoman for her seat, and insisted upon having it carried wherever she desired to be. When I was in the library reading or writing she would come in and signify her desire to be lifted into a large revolving chair, and would sit for half an hour with her little hands clasped together and with a grave, thoughtful look upon her sweet baby face. At such times I used to look at her and try to fit the promise of the Guru to the circumstances. It was impossible, I believed, and decided that a mistake had been made somewhere—that the promise in this case would not be fulfilled.

When Mata reached the age of three years I secured the services of a middle-aged widow to act as nurse, governess, and housekeeper. She was recommended as a refined, educated, Christian woman, who had suffered reverses of fortune at the death of her husband and had been left at the age of fifty dependent upon her own exertions for a living. The little one, however, was not pleased by the coaxing smiles and sweet "small talk" of the new nurse, and from the first moment of her appearance assumed an independence of manner toward her that was most surprising to us all. She never would obey her unless she chose, and seemed strongly averse to having her near.

Matters went on in this way till Mata had passed her seventh birthday, and then I observed a marked change in her. She never cared for the companionship of other children, but would go to the observatory or roof, and would be found by the

nurse curled up in a great chair, seemingly lost in meditation. Her favorite time for these meditative moods was at sunset, and if she was not discovered and brought down would remain in her hiding place till the moon and stars appeared. One evening the nurse came to me and reported the alarming fact that the child was missing again, saying:

"I presume she is on the roof moon-gazing as usual. I don't know what on earth to do with her, she is *so queer*—not a bit like other children—and she frightens me half to death sometimes. You will excuse me for saying it, but I believe she is possessed by some evil spirit."

"Why do you think so?" I asked, in astonishment.

"Oh, she does and says such strange things," replied the woman. "I've tried to make her go to church and Sunday-school with me, but she won't do it; then I tried to frighten her by declaring she would go to the bad place, but she looked me squarely in the eyes and asked: 'What place can be worse than this? I think this is as bad a place as I can ever get into.' Now, what do you think of that?" the woman asked, excitedly.

I bit my lip to repress a smile, and thought the child certainly did possess great penetration of mind to have made such a discovery at so early an age. I quite indorsed her opinion, but, knowing the good woman so well, believed it unwise to express similar views.

"Yes, that was an odd remark for a child to make, I must admit," I said, encouragingly; "what else has she done?"

"This afternoon I told her she must learn a page in her catechism and repeat it to me when I returned from down-town. I shut her into the nursery and left her for two hours. When I came back the book was lying on the floor in the corner and she was swinging in the garden. When I called her and placed her before me to recite, she clasped her hands behind her back and looked stubbornly down at the floor. 'Who was the first man?' I asked. She replied: 'I believe the

scientists have not yet decided that question.' Yes, sir; those were her exact words. The idea of a child only eight years old speaking like that! Why, I actually dropped the book—I did indeed, sir! Then I took hold of her shoulder to give her a good shaking when she drew back and remarked: 'Hands off, if you please!' Now, what do you think of that? It's no laughing matter!" she exclaimed, as she saw me smile.

"I picked up the book," continued the woman, "and asked the next question, 'How long since the world was made?' and without the shadow of a smile she replied: 'That is another scientific problem which I believe is not satisfactorily solved, and quite beyond either your ability or mine to answer. If you will allow me to make a suggestion, madam, I would say it is better for us to study something we can understand.' I could not speak, but sat staring at her in helpless wonderment. Such language! Such an expression! Such dignity! Why, she behaved like a philosopher, and I am positively afraid of her!

"Last night she was on the roof again and when I found her she was staring stupidly before her; she was not looking at anything in particular, and did not seem to know that I was near till I spoke. Then she roused herself and asked: 'Well, what do you want now?' I told her that it was not nice nor proper for little girls to be up on the roof of the house all alone, and that she might fall off. She turned up her nose at me and looked disgusted as she replied: 'Your remarks are positively insipid, madam; I hope I know better than to walk off the edge of that roof.' There, sir; now, *what do you think of that?*"

Before I could reply, she continued: "She's up there again to-night, and I dare not go after her. I wish you would see what can be done, for I'm really tired trying to do anything with her."

It was evident that the nurse was really worried about Mata, and I too was considerably surprised at the rapid de-

velopment of ideas she had presented. For several weeks I had been very busy preparing a manuscript for publication in a medical journal, and had not seen so much of the little one as formerly. The nurse's report constrained me to interview the rebellious little human mite who had aroused such consternation in the good woman's heart, and I hurried to the roof with that intention.

It was a beautiful evening. The air was warm and the moon shone so brightly that reading would have been possible by its light. The child was sitting quietly in a little chair and did not seem aware of my presence till I laid my hand on her shoulder. Then she looked up at me, and, without manifesting the least embarrassment at being found disobedient to the commands of her nurse, she asked: "What do you want of me?"

I replied that we had missed her and I had come to look for her. She made no reply, and then I asked what made her come up there to play.

"I am not playing," she remarked; "I am thinking, and the reason I come up here to think is because it is quiet and the others do not disturb me."

She reminded me of her mother the first time I saw her, and, sitting down upon the roof beside her chair, I said: "Yes, that is true; one can think better when others are not by. But of what were you thinking?"

"I don't mind telling you," she said, gravely, "because you have sense; but I will not tell nurse because she is so simple. I was thinking that almost everything we see in this world is a sham. And the only real things that last are the sun, moon, and stars."

Her remark surprised me, and after a moment I asked: "What has happened to cause you to form such an opinion?"

"Well, everybody in this house—except you—tells lies. They say things they don't believe, but try to make others believe them. That is a sham, isn't it?"

I was obliged to admit that it was.

"Nurse tries to make me study that old catechism, and I hate it. It is not true, and I don't think she believes it herself."

"How do you know it is not true?" I asked.

She looked at me with a mixed expression of amusement and disgust on her face as she asked: "Did you ever read it?"

I hesitated. I never had, but thought perhaps it would not be best to admit the fact to the child; but she waited for my answer, and I had to say: "Well, no; I don't remember that I ever did."

She seemed satisfied with my answer, and continued: "Nurse says Adam was the first man. I don't believe it. She says this world was made out of nothing in six days. I don't believe that either. She says the first woman in the world was Adam's wife, and her name was Eve; that she was made out of one of Adam's ribs, and, because she ate some kind of fruit she found on a tree in the garden where she lived, God, who had taken all the trouble to make her and the fruit and everything in the world, drove her and her husband out of the garden; and that her doing so small a thing as that was the cause of all the wickedness that is now in the world. I think that is the most unreasonable falsehood of the whole lot. If people are going to tell falsehoods why don't they tell reasonable ones, so there will be some chance for belief? She gets all those stories out of that old catechism which she expects me to study. I won't do it, because it is a waste of time to study something that is not true. Isn't it?" she asked, looking up at me.

It was no longer a marvel to me that the nurse was scared half out of her wits by the strange remarks of this child. I was quite startled myself, and could only look at the little woman who sat so demurely making such strong objections to the ancient teachings of the wise theologians. I did not reply to her question, and she repeated it: "Isn't it a waste of time to study something that is not true?"

"Certainly," I replied; "but how do you know they are not true?"

Shaking her head, she said: "You might not understand if I were to tell you; but something tells me so. Nurse tells lies about other things, and why should she not tell lies about that?"

"What else has nurse told you lies about?" I asked.

"Oh, she hides my things away in the bureau drawer or puts them into her pocket and then tells me she doesn't know where they are. I know better because I can see where she puts them," the child gravely replied.

"Do you mean to say that you can see her when she puts them away?" I asked.

"Not always; sometimes she takes them when I am gone. But when I look for them, and see through her dress into the pocket, I know what I see, don't I?" she demanded.

"Can you tell me what I have in this pocket?" I asked, placing my hand over the left breast-pocket of my coat.

"There is a bundle of letters tied with a bit of blue ribbon," said she, "and a locket with a picture and a lock of yellow hair in it. The picture is of a woman I have seen somewhere before this; but I don't just remember where. The lock of hair must have been cut from her head, because it is just like hers."

Little Mata had told me the contents of my pocket and had described the only picture that had ever been taken of her mother. She had never seen the things, because I had always carried them next my heart and had never shown them to any one. I was astonished; but she did not seem to think it at all wonderful to know what was under my coat, and continued:

"I am fond of books; but I like to study something worth the trouble, and should like to go into the rooms down there—those that you always keep locked. There are books in those cases that I should like to read."

I was almost thrown into a panic by the child's words. She did not notice my excitement, however, and continued:

"You need not be afraid to let me go into those rooms. I shall not harm anything; but sometimes I want to lie on that couch—with the twisted serpents under my head. I want to put my hands on the table that is made of the pretty colored stones. Why won't you let me go in?" she asked, wistfully.

"My child, I did not know that you had desired it so much," said I. "It is late now, however, and you had better go to bed. Some other time we will go in together."

Rising from her chair, she remarked: "Very well; since you have promised me, I can wait." She preceded me down the stairs, and bade me good-night at the nursery door.

I saw no more of my daughter that evening. I went to my room, but not to sleep. The manner in which the child had expressed a knowledge of the articles of furniture in the sacred apartments, and had seen and described things hidden from the observation of ordinary mortals, puzzled me. I had heard of clairvoyancy, as practised by people calling themselves "spirit mediums," but had laughed at their absurd claims. Could it be possible that my own child was clairvoyant? No; there was something wrong with her mind! I would have a council of doctors and get their opinion. All night I tossed and worried. The thought that little Mata—all that I had left—was going mad at so early an age was horrible. At last I had a plan. I would humor her, would have her with me at meal-time, and would give more attention to her hereafter, and thus try to learn from what source these vagaries proceeded.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MUSIC TEACHER.

Next morning I called the nurse and told her that here-

after Mata should have more liberty; that she was no longer to be considered a baby, but must be washed and dressed and be allowed to take her meals with me instead of in the nursery. The woman was surprised, but remarked that she was glad to have me take her in hand, and hoped my discipline would prove beneficial in removing some of her peculiarities.

The following morning, while I was waiting for breakfast to be served, Mata appeared with her hair brushed, curled, and tied with a new ribbon and walked to the chair opposite mine. She took her seat as composedly as if this were not the first time she had taken breakfast with me, touched the bell, and when the servant appeared ordered the meal served at once. The dignity of the little maiden was so perfectly natural that in spite of my apprehensions regarding her mental balance I was greatly amused. I decided to allow her to preside at table, since she seemed to think she had been invited for that purpose. The maid who waited upon us was amazed when my daughter, with a grave look, poured the coffee, asked me how much sugar and cream I would like, supplied the amount I asked for, and then gave it to the gaping girl with the request that she should place it beside my plate. The whole procedure was so funny that I had to smile; and the servant, after the first shock of surprise was over, wore a broad grin to the end of the meal.

Mata did not seem to observe my amusement, but asked the maid what she was laughing at. The girl replied that she was pleased to see so tiny a lady do the honors so nicely. The child remarked: "I could have done them long ago had I been permitted."

For several months I watched the child closely, and, although she was constantly doing strange things, there did not appear to be any real signs of insanity about her, and I decided that the peculiarities were inherited from her grandfather, the Guru. At the age of nine she expressed a desire

to study music. A good instructor was found, and soon I observed that she was making rapid progress. After a year of study her teacher informed me that she could play the most difficult classical compositions with an ability exceeding many of greater age and experience. He said:

"There is something quite remarkable about Miss Mata; her practise seems more of a review than a first course. I do not understand her at all. She will insist upon taking something that I fear is entirely too difficult; but when she plays it for me she will sit with her eyes half closed and perform the composition—it almost seems, from memory—and then will emphatically declare she never saw it before. What do you think about it?"

"Oh, she learns everything quickly," I replied, carelessly, "and then remembers well. It is a pleasure to me to know she is getting on."

"Another thing that seems peculiar," said the teacher, "is this: She will place the music before her and open it, and then without turning a page will execute the whole piece. She actually seems to see through the paper and read the music on the other side. I have neglected purposely to turn it, sometimes, just to see what she would do; if by accident she struck the wrong note she would make the correction as readily as if the page from which she was playing was before her. She certainly does possess great talent, and I have tried to induce her to perform at my monthly musicales, but she has always declined. Young girls are usually delighted and encouraged by being placed before an audience; but your daughter does not seem to care for public approval. She studies because she herself enjoys it."

"I am just as well satisfied as I should be if she were aspiring to public honors, and am thankful to know she is so sensible," I replied.

"But you should be *proud* of her accomplishments, and her beauty! Ah, sir, her beauty! I should want her to be shown

off to the very best possible advantage on all occasions!" said the teacher, excitedly.

"What does all that showing off amount to?" I asked.

"Amount to? Amount to?" he repeated. "Why, it amounts to a great deal."

"Well, what?"

"She will be famous! Famous, some day, sir!"

"Well, what then?"

"What then?" the man repeated, in surprise. "Why, isn't it a great thing to be famous and have the admiration of the whole world?"

"Does it make a woman good and pure to have the foolish flattery of the world? Look at the great stars who have gained the approval of the public. How many of them have exchanged their virtue for the glittering bauble of fame? How many can you find to-day in this great world who have passed through the ordeal of winning notoriety and have retained the purity of their souls and bodies?" I asked.

"Oh, of course," admitted the professor, "I know many who have stepped aside; but perhaps your daughter wouldn't do it."

"Maybe she wouldn't, and then again maybe she would. I have observed, however, that when a woman starts out after glory she soon reaches the place where she is confronted by temptation: a place where she must choose which she will accept—the highroad to earthly position, which leads apparently to the mountain-tops of worldly honor, or the other one that leads to the meadows and gardens of humility and virtue. She stands and looks. Beyond are jewels, elegant gowns, grand residences, castles, and sometimes coronets. All these things are held temptingly out to her along the path her longing eyes are gazing upon. But, when she lifts her foot to step toward it, the dark portals of an entrance-way rise between her and the coveted treasures; and the deceitful, sensual face of a tempter looks out from his hiding-place there and says: 'You can

reach all that through me. I can give them to you. You may be famous and have wealth. Your position in the world may be the greatest—but first you must pay my price.' The woman says: 'Yes, and what is your price?' The tempter says: 'Love—you must love *me*. You must give *me* that one jewel that is shining so brightly on your bosom.' The woman looks at the jewel and says: 'That, sir, is my virtue. I cannot give that away.' 'Very well,' replies the tempter; 'you must choose to-day whether you will keep that one little gem and deny yourself all those I will give you in its place, or refuse these I have to offer and wear that one.'

"She stops to consider, and raises her eyes to look at the pathway she longs to tread. There are women who have passed before her and they are robed in elegant garments; some are attended by devoted escorts and are wearing coronets. She points to them and asks: 'How did those women gain their positions?' The tempter answers: 'They all passed through this entrance—and paid the price.' 'Does the world know?' asks the aspirant. The tempter smiles blandly and softly replies: 'Not always. Never, if the woman is shrewd. It is the result of her own carelessness if she is exposed. *You, my dear, are too wise to betray yourself;* you will receive all these beautiful things, and among so many other jewels this little one will never be missed. Will you come?'

"Still the aspirant hesitates. Turning her eyes, she looks at the other path leading to the right and away from the castles and worldly riches. It is a plain, level, ordinary sort of road; there is an occasional shade tree with a rustic seat beneath it, and sometimes a traveler, modestly attired and with the single jewel shining upon her bosom, but with an expression of peace upon her face that does not rest upon the faces of those in the other pathway. If the woman is wise she will take the right-hand path, even though it does not lead to fame. If she is foolish she will pay the price and enter the other, which appears so beautiful at first, but leads to a terrible precipice

concealed from view on the other side of the mountain. The precipice is named 'dishonor,' and at the bottom are arranged jagged rocks called 'abandonment,' and she who makes the plunge and falls upon the rocks below is dashed to pieces. Sometimes you may see a weary one returning with bleeding feet and broken heart. At the gateway she falls upon her knees and begs to be allowed to pass the tempter and enter the peaceful path. But his hard, cruel face grows still harder, and he says: 'Give back the worldly wealth, the fame, the jewels that I gave to you.' 'Gladly, sir, gladly!' she says, 'if you will return my one jewel to me.' The fiend laughs in devilish glee as he replies: 'That is impossible. Your jewel is gone. I could not give it if I would, *and I would not if I could.*' 'May I pass without it?' the weary one asks. 'Yes, you may pass. But you are stripped of everything. Even your name is gone.'

"The weary one bows her head, folds her hands across her breast, and passes through the entrance-way. She follows slowly along the new pathway, but it is *known that her jewel is gone,* and she feels that with it went *almost the right to live.* Those who pass her by sometimes draw aside lest they become contaminated by her touch. She is forsaken, forlorn, and prays for death to release her from the shame. Professor, what do you think of the picture? I prefer that my daughter shall do without the fame."

The man looked bored, and replied: "You are morbid, Doctor; your liver must be deranged. I hope you will be better when I see you again. Good morning!" And he bowed himself out of the house.

"Is it true?" I asked myself, "that no one else can see the value of virtue as I do? Am I a fool—an old daddy? Is the world blind—or am I?"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE THIRTIETH OF NOVEMBER.

As time passed, my professional duties seemed to press more and more heavily upon me, and I began to realize the need of rest with an entire change of scene and surroundings; so I made arrangements to visit the northern Pacific coast for a short time, hoping to recover my failing strength in its invigorating atmosphere. During my absence of six months, Mata wrote me every week and kept me informed concerning the things in which she believed me interested. But when the frosts of autumn began to make all travelers think of their homes and firesides, I returned, greatly improved in health, to take up my duties for the coming winter.

The thirtieth of November had come. It was the fourteenth anniversary of the death of my dear wife, whose image was still enthroned in my heart and worshiped as devoutly as on that saddest of all the days of my life when we were forced apart—she to pass on to a higher sphere of existence and I to continue life's journey without her sunny presence to cheer my loneliness.

On the evening of this anniversary I was sitting before the fire in my study, intending to "watch out" the hours of the night as I had done every year on the corresponding date since her death. I had been reading the precious letters she had written me from school, and was looking at her picture while I wound the curl of golden hair around my fingers, kissing and caressing it as in the old days when the lovely head it adorned rested upon my bosom. I had supposed that all the other members of the household had retired; but as the clock struck eleven I was both surprised and annoyed to hear a knock

upon the door. Wondering who desired admission at that hour, I opened it to find my child, with the strangest look I had ever seen upon her face, waiting to enter. The sight of her unusual appearance startled me, and I pulled her into the room.

"What has happened? Are you ill?" I asked, putting my finger on her pulse.

"Nothing has happened—yet," she replied; "but it is coming—at midnight—and you must come with me."

Her pulse indicated a condition of intense excitement, and I considered her delirious.

"What is the matter?" I asked, excitedly.

"I am feeling strangely and want your company in the observatory."

She had assumed the language, dignity, and appearance of a person much advanced in years, and her strange behavior alarmed me.

"It is cold and dark," said I, "and I do not understand your reason for wishing to go up there at this hour."

The pupils of her eyes had become dilated till they were a jetty black, and a strange light was shining in them as she said:

"This is the thirtieth day of November! It was twenty-one years ago to-night that an event occurred that changed your whole life. Do you remember it?"

"Yes, I remember," said I, perplexed.

"Then come with me!" she commanded. And without further objection I followed her as she slowly led the way to the upper corridor of the house.

There was no moon that night; the stars were obscured by heavy clouds and the darkness was so intense that I had to feel my way up the stairway to the observatory, where she preceded me. When the last step was reached the feeling came over me that we were not alone, but that some invisible presence was there. Then a dim light appeared, showing the

form of the child standing in the center of the room in a listening attitude. Presently the faint tinkle of a bell sounded in the distance. It came nearer and nearer till it seemed to be directly over her head. At the same time the light, which had been so faint at first, grew gradually brighter as the sound of the bell increased till the whole observatory was ablaze with it; and the child stood motionless in the midst of that unearthly halo. The scene was sublime. As I gazed, entranced, a clock in a distant steeple struck the hour of midnight. As the sound of the last stroke died away, Mata began speaking with a voice that was unnatural to herself but that reminded me of the peculiar tones of the old Guru. She said:

"Do you remember the work you did for me twenty-one years ago to-night?"

"Yes," I replied.

"You have fulfilled your promise to the last word, and I have returned to-night to fulfil mine. From this hour I shall use this body for functioning here."

"But this is a female body!"

"You should know that all souls are sexless, and that it is only for the purpose of the reproduction of physical bodies that the differentiation is made. It is as I desired it to be, and I will now take possession of my apartments."

I held out the key of the door opening into the rooms from the corridor below, but with a wave of her hand she refused it, saying: "I will use the secret stairway."

"The panels are locked and the man who built them did not teach me how to open them," said I.

Without replying she stepped to the panel at the right and placed her finger upon what I supposed was a knot in the wood, when the door slid noiselessly back and disclosed a dark passageway. She entered and beckoned me to follow. When I had stepped through the opening the panel went back into its former place without assistance, and the click of the spring as it fastened itself warned me of the fact that we were

prisoners. I am ashamed to say that, notwithstanding all that had just occurred, when I heard the click of that lock a great doubt that we should ever be released came into my mind; and the impression that this was some kind of an illusion, and it was only Mata, my own child, who was my companion, obstinately presented itself to me. But silently I followed her to the bottom of the stairs, knowing the place was perfectly air-tight and fully realizing the impossibility of being able to get assistance at that hour of the night. I knew that we could not live very long in that atmosphere, which had already become impure, and a sensation of pleasurable anticipation filled my soul at the prospect of meeting my angel wife within perhaps a few hours. But my hopes were not to be realized then, for suddenly I felt a current of pure fresh air upon my face. Then I knew that Mata had found the secret spring and had opened the door leading into the sacred apartments.

Still surrounded by that strange blue light, the child stepped forward into the center of the room; then she turned and motioned to me to stop, and I paused just inside the door. She stooped, and with her tiny finger made the motion of drawing upon the carpet a circle round herself. As her little white hand passed over the green velvet carpet a bright line of phosphorescent light followed it, and in a moment she was surrounded by a circle of fire.

There stood my daughter, only a half-grown girl, in her white *robe de chambre,* just as she had risen from her bed: her golden hair falling in a mass of tangled curls half way to her feet, her hands clasped together and raised above her head, and her body swaying from side to side while she uttered words incomprehensible to me—but which seemed to produce wonderful effects.

I tried to speak, but was perfectly dumb. Then I attempted to make a motion to attract her attention, but could not move. An indefinable power seemed to hold me, and I could only watch and listen.

Soon there appeared in the room, outside of the fiery circle, what seemed to be millions of sparks. They floated and scintillated and increased in numbers till the apartment was filled with them. They had the appearance of tiny fiery eyes, winking in the most sinister manner at me; and, although they caused the room to blaze with light, no perceptible heat was produced by them.

Suddenly the child changed her commanding attitude to one of supplication. Kneeling, with clasped hands upon her breast, as if in prayer, she murmured a chant while swaying her body in rhythmic harmony with the music. But soon the scene changed. The tiny lights began to disappear, and in a few moments the room outside the magic circle was filled with darkness—only around my child's bowed form remained the blue halo. Then there was a faint sound of melody in the distance; increasing in volume, it seemed to emanate from the other end of the room. The child bowed lower and lower till her forehead rested upon the floor. And now upon the opposite wall a golden light appeared—identical with that which had shone round the band of glorious beings who had taken my wife away fourteen years ago that very hour; and, as I looked at the picture before me, it seemed as if two large gates had swung apart and I was gazing into the land of souls.

Through that open gateway I saw the Promised Land. Its grass was like soft, green velvet; a stream of water danced and rippled like liquid silver between its flowery banks; groves of tall, stately trees cast a restful shade over the beautiful beings who were moving or sitting among them; and on the hillsides were noble structures composed of something that looked like illuminated marble, and surrounding them were shrubberies, vines, and flowers. Winding walks, summer-houses, and fountains were visible through the rifts in the foliage, and over everything, from some undiscoverable source, the golden light was falling and transforming the whole scene into an enchanted vision. Presently two figures approached,

and as they came nearer to the gateway I recognized them as my darling wife and mother. My heart throbbed so violently at sight of them that I felt a choking sensation in my throat, and, forgetting the mortal body that chained me to this wretched world, I reached out my arms in an attempt to grasp them with my hands. But my feet were rooted to the spot where I stood, and I could only beg them to sever the chains holding me to earth.

"Oh, let me come! Let me come! I am so lonely!" I cried.

They both smiled, and distinctly I heard the words: "Not yet, not yet."

My wife pointed to a pure white structure upon the hillside. It was surrounded by a lovely garden with beautiful trees, and a path led straight from the open gateway, where those two radiant beings stood, up to that exquisite spot. It seemed as if I could step through the gates and enter that land as easily as I can pass from one room in my house into the next.

Presently my darling's voice said: "Yonder is our home; and as you stand waiting you may raise your eyes and see the vine-clad hills and valleys that belong to you and me."

"How long—oh, *how* long—must I wait?" I moaned.

Her answer came back in tones as sweet and musical as those of a silver bell: "Upon the seventh anniversary of this night, at this hour, we shall come for you."

My mother said: "Be patient, my son; it is not long."

I bowed my head in disappointment, and when I raised my eyes again the vision was fading. Then my overstrung nerves gave way and I fell to the floor in a swoon. When consciousness returned, a pillow had been placed under my head and my child was pouring a liquid into my mouth.

"You are better now," she said, "but do not try to rise; take some of this;" and she poured something from an odd-looking bottle into a spoon and gave it to me. The effect of

this mixture was electrifying. In a few moments my blood began coursing through my veins, and a new strength seemed to seize my limbs. Springing to my feet and looking about me, I saw that we were still in the same room. The vision, however, had disappeared; the circle of fire had vanished, but the strange blue light was still illuminating the room. Turning toward my child, I said:

"Mata, am I mad?"

"No, sir; why do you ask such a question?" she replied.

"Did I dream all this?"

"No; but you have been permitted to witness to-night something very rarely shown to men. You have been faithful to your promises and this has been your reward."

"Who are you? You do not seem the same as yesterday."

"In a certain sense you are right; this is the same body that you saw yesterday, over which I then had only a partial control. To-night I am in full possession and shall henceforth use it so long as it serves me well. I am he who was known in my last life as Crapo De Anno, whom you first knew as *the old Guru.* According to my promise, I have returned, and shall wear this time the name and personality of *Mata Bennet,* your daughter. I shall continue my studies and work and shall come and go as it pleases me best. You have never assumed authority over my personality in the past, and of course you will not in the future. Many questions will be asked about the strange behavior of your daughter, and you will be so kind as to refer all inquirers to me. You will discharge the governess at once, since she has been a source of affliction to me from my earliest acquaintance with her. And now, as it is late, perhaps you will be glad to retire."

Bowing humbly before this childish form, which had suddenly assumed the dignity of a queen, I silently withdrew; and the first gray streaks of dawn were visible in the east when I entered my own room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GOVERNESS.

My toilet was just completed when a sharp and repeated knocking upon my door announced an anxious caller. When I opened it, there stood the nurse in a condition of great excitement. She breathlessly informed me that Mata had disappeared and could not be found, in either the house or the grounds, and said she believed she had run away. I replied that my daughter's whereabouts were known to me, and that I would like an interview with herself in the library as soon as she could make it convenient to see me. Then I went down to breakfast, and to my surprise found Mata awaiting me as composedly as if nothing unusual had happened. She bade me good-morning and took her seat at the table with a pleasant remark about the punctuality of the Bennet family; but I had not sufficiently recovered my self-possession to answer her in the same strain—and the meal was finished in silence.

After breakfast the governess met me in the library and I undertook to explain to her that my daughter had now reached her fourteenth birthday, and whatever education she would require in the future could be got at school—therefore, we would no longer need her services. The woman was surprised and indignant, because she had expected to be a permanency in the family, and replied:

"Of course, sir, you have been very generous and kind to me, and I appreciate it; but I feel that before leaving there are some things you ought to know. What I am going to say is about Miss Mata, and will probably startle you; but since she has no mother it is your duty to attend to her yourself. My advice would be to place her in a good convent school, where she will be under regular and severe discipline, and at the same time be surrounded by holy influences—be-

cause I do really believe she is possessed of the devil. Excuse me for speaking so plainly about your child, but it is really a serious matter."

"What reason have you for making that statement?" I asked.

"Now, sir, I see that you are offended, and I am really sorry," she said, apologetically.

"No," I replied, "I am not offended; but, since you have made so fearful a charge against my daughter, you should be willing to give your reasons for it. I am asking for information."

"In the first place, there is not a lock on a door in this house that will hold her against her will. She has been fastened into the nursery times without number and told that she could not be released till her lessons were learned—and perhaps the first person I would meet in the garden would be her. When I asked her how she managed to get out, she would look at me, with an expression in her eyes that would make me shiver, and reply: 'Walked out, of course; how do you suppose I got out?' At first I believed some of the servants had caballed with her and had given her a key; but when I accused her of receiving assistance she laughed and declared she did not need anybody's help: when she was ready to come out she came. She does not know one line of her catechism and will not study it. I have tried every way that I know how to make her do it, but she won't!"

"Suppose she doesn't learn the catechism," said I; "is there anything wrong about that? How does she get on with her other lessons?"

"Wrong?" the woman exclaimed. "Whoever heard of a person's being brought up to the age of fourteen without knowing one line of the catechism? It's the foundation of everything else, and of all religious principles. What earthly good is there in her studying arithmetic, grammar, or geography if she has not first mastered the catechism?" Then she

thoughtfully continued: "Yes, she is good in everything else. Her knowledge of geography is something wonderful; one would almost believe she had visited every place on the map by the way she describes and talks about distant parts. Rome, Constantinople, Calcutta, Jerusalem, Naples, St. Peter burg, Paris, and other places seem as familiar to her as if she had lived in all of them; and she talks about the Amazon River as if she had been on it yesterday. There are countries that never were on the map that she declares have existed but are now sunken in the ocean. She sticks to it that there was once a country called Atlantis, and another Lemuria, and another that I can't remember, and they were all destroyed by flood or fire. She had the boldness to tell me that, at the time of the flood, when Noah and his family were the only people left alive in the world, it was only the sinking of the continent Atlantis, or Lemuria,—I don't remember which,—and that there were millions of people left in other parts of the world. You see, she goes right contrary to the teachings of the blessed Bible, and is bound for perdition."

"Let us drop the Bible and the catechism," I suggested. "What are her faults? Does she tell falsehoods, or steal, or use bad language?"

"It's remarkable about that, sir," the nurse replied. "She despises the catechism, but would die before she would tell a lie or take a thing that did not belong to her. She is not afraid of anything or anybody, and I believe if Satan himself were to appear before her she would bid him good-morning and ask what he wanted. Another thing that frightens me is that nothing can be hidden from her. One day I took a queer-looking stick that she had been carving into the shape of a snake. She had been spending time on that when she ought to have been learning her lessons. I was provoked, and when she was in the garden swinging where I could see her plainly from the window I hid the stick in my trunk and locked the door of my room. The moment I touched the nasty thing she

stopped swinging and came straight to me. I pretended to be reading, but she walked over to my chair and asked: 'What have you done with my wand?' I denied all knowledge of it, but she pointed her finger at me and said: 'Don't you dare lie to me, you walking catechism! You *do* know where that wand is, because you just put it away.' I was always afraid of her when she had that strange gleam in her eyes. I dared not admit that I had hidden it, but declared that it had not been seen for a week. She kept looking at me without winking or moving, till flames of fire shot from her eyes. My teeth chattered and I began trembling so with nervousness that I could not speak. Presently she said:

" 'That wand is in the bottom of your trunk—locked in your room. The knife that I made it with is in the top drawer of your bureau. The string of beads from which I took its eyes is tied up in a white linen handkerchief and is in your pocket. The paint I used to color it with is on the top shelf of your closet, back in the corner under a heap of old *Christian Advocates;* and the key to your room is under the edge of the carpet behind the easy-chair—over there. You are at liberty to hide your own things, but if you don't let mine alone there will be trouble. You are thinking this very moment that I am a limb of the devil, and you are wishing the doctor were here so you could tell him his daughter is a witch. But I will tell you that, although I do not waste my time studying the nonsense you call "fundamental principles of religion," I don't steal other people's property and then lie about it as you do!'

"She made me fetch everything that belonged to her, and when I gave her the string of beads she coolly remarked: 'Now, please don't try any more tricks with me, because I shall catch you at it every time.' I was ill in bed for the remainder of the day, and it was all caused by the terrible shock she gave me."

The nurse looked as if she expected I would be horrified at her story, but I smiled and remarked that it seemed to me

there was nothing wrong or impish in the child's demanding a restoration of her property.

"But," she persisted, "think of her knowing where every article was and telling me what I was thinking about!"

"True," I replied; "but you regard all such power as belonging to Satan. You have not accused her of committing a wrong against yourself or anybody else. You believe she would die before telling a lie or committing a theft. It seems to me that Satan has never been credited with such integrity as that before?"

The woman shook her head as she replied: "It is a mystery that makes my head ache when I think about it. I am sure it's the devil's work, because who else could do it?"

"Perhaps God had something to do with it," I suggested.

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed the woman, as a look of horror overspread her simple old face. "It is blasphemous to connect such doings with Deity! Really, I *do* hope you will never say that again!"

"Well, what else has Mata done?"

"When you were away on your vacation last summer the gardener fell ill and we needed some one in his place. She hired a poor nigger who came here begging. The man was a wretched-looking object and I told her not to do it. His clothes were in rags and he seemed half starved. He said he was an escaped slave, and had run away from his master because his wife and children had been sold down the river, and when he had begged to go with them they had whipped him half to death. There were some scars on his arms and shoulders where he had been cut with something—it might have been a whip; but you never can tell, you know: those niggers will lie so there is no dependence to be placed on what they say. Miss Mata looked at him as if she were reading his heart; but he raised his eyes and returned her look as honestly as if he were really telling the truth. She ordered the cook to set the kitchen table with some bread and meat, and to make

fresh coffee and put the sugar and cream where he could get all he wanted. Then she started for your room. I mistrusted what she was up to and asked what she was going to do.

" 'Give the man something to cover his nakedness,' she replied.

" 'Now, Miss Mata, I shall not allow you to give that man a thing while your father is gone,' I said. 'How do you know he isn't a thief, and hasn't come to rob and maybe kill us all?"

"She paid no attention to me, but kept hunting for a suit of clothes for him. In spite of all I could do or say she gave him a complete outfit, from hat to shoes—and he fell on his knees, kissing the hem of her dress while the tears rolled down his dirty black cheeks. She asked him if he knew how to work at gardening. He said that he had done that kind of work for his old master. So she sent him to the barn with the things, told him to take a bath, change his clothes, and go to work till the gardener should get well.

"I cried and scolded, but it did no good. The man stayed a week, and then became ill with small-pox. I was frightened almost to death and was going to have him taken to the pest-house; but Mata wouldn't hear of it and declared she would take care of him herself. Again I cried and went into hysterics; but she was just as determined as she knew how to be, and nothing that I said made the least difference. She put on an old dress that was partly outgrown, and told me to bring whatever she should call for to the doorsill of the barn and leave it there. The only way I could communicate with her was through the speaking-tube, and I stood at this end and begged her to come to the house; but she wouldn't even answer me. I kept shrieking till she called back that I was making so much noise the sick man couldn't sleep, and ordered me to keep quiet.

" 'But, Miss Mata,' I screamed, 'if you don't leave that man to take care of himself I will appeal to the authorities and

compel you to. Your father will be crazy when he hears about what you are doing.'

"She answered back: 'I *shall not* leave this sick man to die, to please you or any one else! If you send for the authorities, as you threaten, I will discharge you without a reference. This man's heart is whiter than yours, if his skin *is* black!'

"I could do nothing with her. She called for whatever she wanted and told us if we didn't bring it she would come after it and bring us the disease in her clothes. We dared not disobey, because we knew she would fulfil her threat. For three weeks she nursed that nigger and slept on a pile of hay covered with blankets—so he could have the bed. When he got well she fumigated the place and had him bury all the bedclothing and everything that could be infected with the disease, and kept him till the gardener got over his rheumatism. When he went away she gave him a reference (with your name signed to it) and some money, and we have never seen him since."

"Was she sick afterward?" I asked.

"Not for a moment," the woman replied. "None of us were; and that is another reason why I believe the devil is in league with her."

"We take different views of this matter," I said. "I should think the child was fulfilling the commandments of the Bible by comforting and nursing the sick man; and her escaping the contagion is to me a sure sign that she was protected by a power other than an evil one."

But the woman shook her head. "No, sir, you are mistaken; I know better. You are wrong, and I am right. *I know I am right,*" she repeated, excitedly. "If she were good she would love the catechism and Sunday-school and would not be able to see hidden things. The devil *must* let his agents do some good, that he may deceive people regarding his actions; and while he is making us believe in him he is setting all kinds of traps to lead us astray. No; the child has got beyond my control, and I am glad to be rid of the responsi-

bility of her losing her soul. You will have more trouble with her than you imagine, and you should have one thing firmly fixed in your mind. It does not matter how good she *seems* to be—how charitable or how kind: her good works will not amount to one feather-weight in the Judgment Day unless she believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only Son of God, and that *He* died to save her. The greatest sinner in the world —one who has murdered and committed every other crime that a wicked person can do—will go to heaven, if he believes in Jesus Christ, before a person who has lived an apparently good life but has not believed in Him. It is faith, not works, that saves people."

"Madam," I exclaimed, "you will excuse me if I differ with you. Have you read the passage of Scripture that says 'faith without works is dead?' "

"Yes, but do you remember where Jesus and the thief were crucified together? When the thief expressed faith by asking Him to remember him when He came into the kingdom He replied: 'This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.' So you see the thief who had never done any good went to heaven with the Lord Jesus through his faith alone. You are mistaken, Doctor; the works are well enough but the faith is of more importance, because without it no man can be saved. I am sorry for you and Miss Mata—you are both so spiritually blind; but I have done the best I could. I have prayed for her every night and morning, but she still remains the same."

"It must be that your faith does not amount to much," I said, "because Jesus told his disciples that, if they 'had faith as a grain of mustard seed,' mountains could be removed and cast into the sea."

"You do not understand the Bible at all, sir," the woman replied, coldly; "you are an unbeliever yourself, and I don't wonder Miss Mata is so bad. Had I known before this morning you were so wicked I never would have stayed and worked so hard to save your child. I have no doubt that you have

been putting her up to it all. There is but one way, and that is a strait and narrow path. Any one who attempts to climb by any other road is a thief and a robber. I am right. I am always right. I was converted when but fifteen years old, was born again at that time, and have never fallen from grace. I am sanctified—I am above either the desire or the power to sin; and anybody who does not agree with me is wrong, *and that is all there is about it!*" And the nurse drew down the corners of her mouth with a scornful expression and swept from the room.

I smiled. The idea of my assuming the management of a being who had the power to produce light in the midst of darkness, and could cause the gates of heaven to swing apart for me to look beyond, was certainly absurd.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PLAGUE.

As time passed, there seemed no particular change in my daughter save in physical development. In figure, hair, and features she reminded me of her mother: her complexion was a radiant pink and white, and she possessed a magnetic presence that was irresistible when she chose to make it so. The servants seemed to have great respect for Mata—mingled with a sufficient amount of fear to keep them well in subordination; and the work of the household was accomplished with the same regularity that had prevailed when the nurse was with us. I had no reason to complain, therefore, of my daughter's management.

My own life was nothing but a treadmill, with the same duties over and over again till it seemed as if I were becoming like a timepiece in regularity—so many minutes for this kind of work and so many hours for that. For six years this sort of thing had been going on, with nothing to break the monotony of my life, when one morning, as we sat at breakfast, Mata remarked:

"You are aware, I suppose, that this is the twentieth anniversary of the birth of my body."

"Yes," I said, "I am fully aware of the fact."

"After to-day I shall assist you in your professional work."

"You?" I asked, in surprise. "I did not know you understood medicine. How can you assist me?"

"A terrible epidemic will sweep over this city. You and all the other practising physicians will be entirely unable to cope with it, and I shall take a place in the medical ranks as an assistant."

"But the laws of the land will not allow you to practise medicine without the proper credentials."

"Do not be alarmed about my credentials. In less than two days the plague will be upon us, and there will not be time to procure them, even if I wanted to—and I do not."

"What form will the epidemic assume?"

"You will believe it to be the black diphtheria. It will be incurable by your method of treatment; but I have a remedy that will give instantaneous relief if it is taken before mortification begins. I shall accompany you to the office and be prepared to meet the coming trouble."

Knowing that she would not make this statement unless it were true, I became considerably excited, and on reaching my office found that many "calls" had been left during the night. Hurrying from patient to patient I found that nearly all were suffering with the same symptoms—pain in the throat, throbbing temples, and raging fever. All day and until late at night I drove from house to house, and reached home at midnight to find Mata waiting up for me. When I told her of the increase of sickness and described the symptoms, she said:

"Yes, and it will be much worse to-morrow. However, I shall be ready in the morning."

The next day my daughter accompanied me to the office, where we found my assistant manifesting symptoms of the dread disease. Taking from her bag a bottle filled with a golden liquid, Mata permitted two drops of the mixture to fall into a gobletful of pure cold water, and in an instant the preparation assumed the color of blood. Giving the young man a teaspoonful of the medicine, she told him to continue taking it once in thirty minutes till he should feel better. Then she called me into the private office, and, taking two large bottles of the liquid from her bag, proceeded to give me directions for using it:

"For every patient you will prepare this mixture as you saw me prepare it for the young man. In severe cases it must

be taken once in fifteen minutes; but for the early stages of the disease a teaspoonful once in half an hour will be quite enough. You will not use other remedies, but will trust entirely to this. Now, if you will give me your team and driver and order another for yourself, I will attend to the patients on the south side while you visit those on the north side of the city. At noon we will meet at this office and arrange for the rest of the day."

Although I had witnessed wonderful manifestations of her wisdom and power, yet I hesitated. My lower nature was still so strong within me, she had so suddenly assumed control of the matter, and it was so entirely unexpected, that my miserable doubts—which had always assailed me whenever anything arose out of the general course of events—caused me mentally to ask, "And if this remedy should fail, what then?"

As quickly as if the question had been asked aloud, Mata replied: "I have not the time now to explain; but you should know that I would not assume this responsibility, and put all other remedies aside, had I not a thorough knowledge of the efficacy of this preparation. I will, however, if you desire it, explain further when we return home—which will not be to-night, because neither of us will rest or sleep for three days to come."

I was half convinced that she understood the state of affairs better than I, and since she had foretold the coming of the disease it seemed very probable that she had prepared for it. So I took the bottle and started out upon my round of visits. Such suffering as I witnessed during the next few days I had not supposed to be endurable. Entire families—servants and all—were stricken with the terrible malady. The whole city was affected; business places were closed, and, excepting drug stores, physicians' offices, and undertaking establishments, there was nothing open to the public. For several days I met funeral processions on almost every street, and the only signs of active life to be seen were the hurrying doctors and wild-eyed, pallid-faced sufferers hastening to physicians for relief.

Mata was as self-possessed as if she had always been accustomed to the work. We met at noon and compared lists, to guard against neglecting anybody.

At the end of the second day I began to feel depressed. I attributed this to hard driving and sleeplessness, but Mata quickly detected my condition and insisted upon my taking a few doses of the remedy. All my doubts regarding its efficacy were instantly dispelled the moment I tasted it, for a feeling of exhilaration thrilled through my veins and immediately relieved the fatigue that had been pressing upon me.

Other physicians seemed powerless to aid their patients, and it soon became whispered about that Doctor Bennet and his daughter were the only practitioners in the city who had the least control over the disease. As a consequence, my office became crowded with people, who wildly begged for medicine for themselves or to take to their friends. Mata proposed that one of us should remain at the office to give out the medicine, while the other should visit the sufferers too ill to come or send for it. She prepared a large quantity of the mixture, which she bottled and labeled. Writing the directions for its use, she gave a bottle to each person with a promise to refill it when needed. Her manner was so methodical and her self-possession so perfect that men who came into her presence in a frenzy of fear left her with courage and determination to conquer the disease.

Toward the end of the third day I began to fear that the remedy would fail us in quantity, and asked her what we should do under such circumstances, but she replied: "There is plenty at home, and no anxiety need be felt as to its giving out;" so we continued for nine days to fight death in almost every home in the city. At the end of the tenth day there were signs of an abatement in the ravages of the disease, and on the twelfth day we were permitted to go home and sleep all night—a boon that I appreciated, since I was almost prostrated with fatigue. When all traces of the scourge had disappeared, I

took to my bed and was unable to rise for three days. But Mata, tireless in her efforts, took my place at the office and attended to all my patients—and to myself as well. When able to leave my room, I found a budget of letters awaiting my attention. They had been brought during my illness, but Mata had forbidden that they be given to me till I should be able to bear their contents. From her remark I knew she understood their purport, although none had been opened. The first one was from a brother physician, and read as follows:

"Jamestown, Dec. 12th, 1860.

"DR. BENNET:

"*Dear Sir*—Perhaps you can inform me whom you have installed in your office? This person is visiting patients, writing prescriptions, and giving medicine to suit herself. She is supposed to be your daughter, but on account of her having no diploma this work must be stopped at once. The matter is being investigated. Yours, etc.,

"M. P. CINDER."

"Here is a great ado about nothing," I mused. "Investigate Mata's credentials! Just as I expected!" I opened the next letter. It was from another physician, and read:

"Jamestown, N. Y., Dec. 10th, 1860.

"DR. BENNET:

"*Dear Sir*—Your daughter will be prosecuted at once. She is illegally practising medicine, and you may be prepared for her arrest at any moment. Yours, etc., T. H. BUTTON, M.D."

Six of the letters were from as many physicians, and all declared hostility toward Mata. The cause was obvious, since we had not lost a patient during the epidemic and all who had persisted in taking the treatment of these doctors had died.

Calling a servant, I sent for my daughter, and when she appeared I showed her the letters and asked her opinion and advice.

"We shall do nothing but await results," she said, quietly.

"But they will arrest you!" I exclaimed.

"Let them," she replied.

"What will you do?" I inquired.

"When the emergency arises I will show you. It is never well to anticipate an annoyance. There is a great deal of good to be gained sometimes in the simple act of waiting. Perhaps you do not know that many calamities are precipitated that would be avoided if we did not rush around with such haste to escape from them."

While we were speaking the bell rang and a servant announced "a gentleman to see Miss Bennet." My fears told me that it was concerning the threatened prosecution the man had called, and so I took the liberty of following her to the parlor. There I found an officer of the law, who, because clothed in authority a little above that of the street-laborer, was sternly reading a warrant for my daughter's arrest. Mata stood before him seemingly indifferent to his display of pompousness, and when he had finished she bowed respectfully and replied: "I shall accompany you at once." But I was completely upset, and, losing my temper, I threatened to horsewhip the man for his impudence in treating my daughter as a criminal.

After a good deal of confusion and considerable delay at the stable, my carriage was brought round and I accompanied Mata and the policeman to the office of the magistrate. Appearing before that functionary, in answer to the charge of practising medicine without a license, she pleaded guilty and asked for a continuance of the case in order that she could become better prepared to explain her position. Her request was granted, and I signed her bail bond with a hand trembling so violently that an hour afterward I would not have recognized the signature as my own.

That evening Mata invited me to her apartments, and it was with great pleasure that I again entered the rooms I had not seen since the night of her never-to-be-forgotten fourteenth birthday. Many additions to the furnishings of the apartment had been made since then, which gave it the appearance of a boudoir; and Mata looked very sweet and womanly in her yellow silken robe, which fell in pretty soft folds from neck to

feet and trailed behind her on the carpet. The sleeves were long and full and reached to the hem of her gown, and the whole garment was bordered with a broad band of embroidery of peculiar design in blue. She had unbound her hair, and it hung almost to her feet in a curling, waving mass—greatly adding to the lovely picture she made when, after offering me a seat, she threw herself half reclining upon the couch and declared a willingness to talk upon any subject that would interest me most.

I had never realized till then how widely apart were our respective states of consciousness: she living under the same roof with me and the rest of the household, yet as distinctly different from us as are the people upon separate globes. Outside the door of her own apartments she was the stately, unapproachable Miss Bennet. Behind that magic door she was a beautiful, courteous woman, with a store of knowledge that would do credit to a philosopher.

I began the conversation by asking if she were fully aware of the gravity of her position.

She replied:

"Yes, and before undertaking the work I knew what the results would be, because the medical fraternity is only a part of the undeveloped portion of humanity, which contests, even to the point of destroying, anything and everything it does not understand. The doctors know that were it not for the remedy I used during the epidemic the city would be nothing but a scene of desolation to-day. It saved their own lives as well as those of the people at large. Not enough men would have been left to bury the dead had it not been for the golden liquid. They who are preparing to prosecute me sent their servants to me—and I gave the medicine to them as freely as to any of the others. They have tried to analyze the mixture and have failed; hence their unwillingness that it should be used by any one else. I am sorry to be obliged to use the unpleasant measures that will be necessary before this trouble is over; but I

shall *not* stop healing the sick. My work must go on, just as if these men were quite willing that it should."

"They will put you in prison," I said.

"No, they cannot," she replied, quietly.

"You do not understand the law," said I. "They certainly will imprison you."

"We shall see. I shall secure a suite of rooms for the reception of my patients—independent of your own, because I will not implicate you in the trouble that is coming. No regular fee will be charged, but a box will be placed in my reception-room and a request will be made that such patients as are able and willing shall contribute what they can spare toward the maintenance of the hospital that is soon to be opened to receive the sick who shall be in need of such a place. This hospital will be for the accommodation of all who are ill. Entirely unsectarian as it will be, religious beliefs will not be questioned before an applicant is received. The rooms in my institution will not be too clean nor the beds too nice to admit *any* sufferer; and, with the aid of such nurses as will be needed, I shall attend to the patients myself."

"But you will not be permitted to do this without the proper certificate from the State Board of Health," I insisted.

"Wait and see," she calmly remarked.

"Could you pass the required examination?"

"I could, but will not bother with it. There is at present great need of helpers from both sexes to work for the good of the race. Humanity has reached a stage of selfishness and greed that will result in its ruin if certain conditions are not changed for the better. Such scourges as we have just passed through will become frequent till many cities are destroyed. These epidemics will take different forms—sometimes they will appear as smallpox, and again as spotted fever, or diphtheria—all originally produced by the impurity of the thoughts of men."

CHAPTER XXV.

OCCULT PHILOSOPHY.

"People wonder what causes the riots and uprisings of labor against capital; also the suicides, murders, and fiendish assaults and robberies that disgrace our civilization," continued Mata. "They do not know that *everything* that occurs is the direct result of a mental condition. Some believe the financial depressions and failures of our time are directly caused by the mismanagement of the Republican Administration. Others think the licensed selling of intoxicants is the source of all evil and that 'prohibition' would save the world. Many declare that destruction of certain great monopolies would immediately scatter broadcast the vast amount of gold being accumulated in a few centers and making the rich richer and the poor poorer. But the real secret—the cause underlying all these effects—has not been discovered; nor will it be, till the people have learned the power of their own thoughts.

"You may not believe me when I say there never was an accident. Every event of our lives is the direct result of a cause or causes that may have been for a shorter or longer time in operation. Here is a truth known to but few at the present time. Above this is the plane of thought, and, although invisible to you in your present development, it is more real than the one you now perceive. On that plane exists everything sent forth from the mind of an intelligent being at any time. Those thoughts are as much alive for good or ill as the physical brains whence they emanate, and which they outlive. Thought is the real creator. Nothing on this material plane was ever formed until a mind had thought of it; therefore, the plane next above this is the creative one.

"If you will consider this matter seriously you will see that evil thoughts produce evil effects. Since men and women are constantly thinking of their individual supremacy and aggran-

dizement, regardless of the rights, comforts, or even the necessities of others, how can you expect that these wretched disasters will not continue to come upon them? There are people in this city to-day who, in their blind selfishness, would be glad to see the whole country depopulated if they could be left alive to enjoy the remaining wealth. Such ones have no love or sympathy for their fellow-beings, and each and every one is thinking the thoughts that are bringing upon us these scourges. While one man is desiring the downfall of his neighbor, the latter is wishing the same thing for *him*—the result being that both shall be destroyed. Deluded creatures that they are—precipitating upon their own heads the catastrophes that they secretly hope may befall their fellows! Men think their thoughts are hidden, and, so long as they are able to keep their evil *deeds* concealed, they feel secure in their wickedness; but they do not see the storms that are gathering as the result of those thoughts.

"As the beauty or imperfections of your physical body are reflected by the mirror, so are the material things of this world but reflections from the thought plane. Man in his stupidity and blindness does not look beyond these reflections to see what has produced them, but, like the ugly dwarf in the fairy tale,—who sees for the first time the grinning, gesticulating copy of himself in a mirror,—smashes the glass, in his idiocy hoping to kill the other man who he believes is his enemy.

"But when men cease oppressing and begin to help one another; when the rich man learns that the poor man is his brother, and realizes that the great ocean of life supplies each with vitality without money or price; when the rich man discovers his dependence upon his poorer brother, and that stealing from him means stealing from himself: then has he begun to learn the rudimentary lessons that shall dispel the clouds hanging over his head."

"But is there no escape from this—by seeking, for instance, forgiveness of God through Christ?" I asked.

She smiled as she replied:

"There is no escape from consequences, whether pleasant or unpleasant. It is an utter impossibility for one to assume responsibility for the sins of another. Such a scheme to escape justice is cowardly, and was never invented by Deity; it was planned by man himself, who in his selfishness and cowardice hoped in this way to escape what he knew he richly deserved. The doctrine to which you allude is that of the vicarious atonement, which is doing more harm than good, because it fosters the selfishness of the animal man by holding out the false hope that even at the last moment of a wicked life the sinner may escape the full results of his bad deeds and receive something he has not earned and does not deserve."

"What do you think about everlasting punishment?" I asked.

"If I were to strip my body and go out and lie in the snow, would the illness following it be a punishment? Would it not be a result naturally following the cause—imprudence or ignorance? Would I ask or expect a superior being to interfere and save me from the suffering I had brought upon myself?"

"Then you entirely reject the doctrine of eternal damnation?"

"Since a man can learn only by experience, would it not be an injustice to compel him to suffer forever in a spiritual condition for the sins he may have ignorantly committed during twenty years or so upon earth? It is true, ignorance of the law does not release us from its discipline. The lessons are ours to profit by *if we choose*. The wise ones refrain from a repetition of the offenses from which they have once suffered; but the foolish blunder on with their eyes wide open, and at last are overtaken and overwhelmed by an avalanche of destruction that sweeps them off the earth."

"Then what happens?" I asked.

"These deluded beings remain in the land of souls for a number of years, only to be forced back to earth again and into

new bodies, that they may learn the lessons they failed to learn before."

"Are all men subject to this law?"

"Not one can escape it. Can you not see that this is the only way justice can be done? To correct his mistakes, man must return to the plane upon which they were made, and each individual must come back and restore to his fellows whatever he may have robbed them of at a previous time."

"The man who built the stairway believed as you do. Will you tell me something about him?" I asked.

"There is not much to tell, because I am bound by a promise of secrecy; but I may say this—he belongs to the brotherhood of which I am a member, and he promised to do this work for me a hundred years ago.

"You consider that a strange statement," Mata said, "and are inclined to doubt it; but that man was my Guru in my last life and to him I owe much that can only be repaid by handing on to others what he gave to me. I had been forty years in my last personality when I met him, and it was during the time I was studying with him that he promised to do this work."

"He did not look as old as you did when I first saw you, and yet he must be very much older."

"I believe it is something like two hundred years that he has used his present personality. You do not understand how this can be; but it is possible for men to use invisible forces to regenerate their physical bodies and prolong their use for many years more than the average age of individuals of the present race. I could have used my personality much longer than I did had my studies been begun earlier in life. Before commencing to study along this line I had lived the life of a nobleman, and in my early youth had formed habits that had injured my body to a certain extent. I married quite young, and, although my marriage was not a love match and was arranged by our respective families, yet I was not unhappy. Lady De Anno died at the age of thirty and left me with two children, a

son and daughter, who married and bore children. Mata was the grandchild of my son; therefore, I was her great-grandfather. There is much about my life that I could tell, but I do not think it best to do so. After my wife passed from this plane of consciousness I was suddenly seized with an intense desire to travel, and visited almost every inhabited portion of the globe. In the beginning I did not know what I was searching for, but wanted something,—a new experience,—and after ten years of wandering met the gentleman of whom we were speaking. The moment I saw his face I knew my search was ended—the object was found. Settling myself in a habitation not far from his home, for many years I was under his direction and tutelage, learning many things that cannot be given to the world till mankind is fitted to receive them.

"When Mata was born the people of her country were suffering from a great scourge. Cholera swept over Italy and her family were all stricken and died, leaving her, when but a few months old, in the care of hirelings. Realizing that my body was growing old and that I must have a new one, I arranged the matter with my Guru to go and get the babe, take her to America, settle in a quiet home, and rear the child. You know how you found us and what has happened since."

"Will you tell me why you selected me for the husband of your grandchild?" I asked.

"While traveling in America, before meeting my Guru, I was thrown from a horse and had my leg broken. Your great-grandfather, an honest New England farmer, took me into his house and cared for me till I was well. Being with the family for several months caused me to become attached to all its members. Your grandfather was then young and unmarried, and was a fine specimen of manhood. The kindnesses received from your ancestors at that time were never forgotten, and upon returning to this country with Mata I took great pains to look up that family of Bennets and traced you out by following the thread from father to son. Unobserved by you, I studied

your character, learned the date of your birth, cast your horoscope, and found that you and Mata were suited to each other. Your family as far back as I could trace it was free from dishonor; you were struggling to gain a foothold in life and I knew that you deserved and needed assistance—so I sent for you and gave into your hands the management of my affairs. I knew a body born of Mata, with you for its father, could not inherit bad blood; and for that reason I desired to possess it.

"Your doubts of me and of my ability to keep my promise were perfectly honest, since you had been reared in the belief common to most Americans. You obeyed my directions, however, and that was more than many a young man would have done. When this personality was born, you remembered the promise I had made; but with your limited knowledge you were unable to understand how the soul of an old man could assume the female personality—so you looked with grave apprehensions upon the peculiar mental development of your child."

"Why did you assume the female personality for this life? Would you not have done better with a male one?"

"Since the earliest history, women have been oppressed and ill treated by the male portion of humanity. In many countries woman is not so well cared for as the dumb brutes, and is often compelled to bear burdens for which her strength is entirely inadequate. Men oppress her because it has been the custom to do so. Woman submits because she does not know how to throw off the yoke; moreover, she considers it her duty. In *this* country, which boasts of its freedom and bravery, woman is subjected to many indignities, although her condition is better here than in many other regions. But even here she is not allowed an equal standing with man in social, political, or parental privileges. She may own property and buy or sell as she pleases, but is obliged to pay such taxes as may be decreed by laws in the making of which she has no voice. If she com-

mit a crime she must suffer the penalty the law prescribes, but she has no voice or part in either legislation or execution.

"In social matters woman's condition is very peculiar. In polite society she is respected so long as she retains her virtue. But all virtuous women are considered legitimate prey for libertines and scoundrels of the male sex; and if a woman can be induced to step aside from the path of rectitude she is forever disgraced, and will be trodden upon by men and women alike. While the man who led her astray continues to hold his position in society as securely as before, she is despised, and his friends often laugh and admire the 'heroism' displayed in accomplishing the downfall of one weak woman. Other women smile upon him and seek to entangle him in the meshes of the matrimonial net; and if one of them succeed in catching the prize, she is envied by the unsuccessful ones.

"In the maternal relation the woman is again subject to injustice. If the father of her children be *not* her husband, then she is allowed full control of them; but if he be her lawful protector he has the power to rob her of every child that she has borne and place it where she cannot even see it. All this and much more is heaped upon woman in the 'land of the free and the home of the brave,' and I hope, through being one, to be better able to assist them out of many of their trying positions."

"Will you tell me how you produce the strange light with which this room is illuminated? It seems to me something quite supernatural," I said.

"Let me correct your erroneous impression at once. There is nothing in all the universe that can be correctly characterized as 'supernatural.' All results that you see are produced by the operation of natural law, under the direction of consciousness —or of consciousnesses. Light, heat, color, sound, and every material thing are produced by rates of vibration peculiar to *them.* By a thorough understanding of the law and of the conditions of its manifestation, the individual *will* can create

(or cause to disintegrate upon the plane of effects) whatever *it* desires. I desire a blue light in this apartment at this time, and I am able to produce it, in either a subdued or refulgent quantity, by my power to control the rates of vibration of the atoms in the atmosphere contained within the four walls."

"Could you teach me to do this?" I asked, eagerly.

Mata smiled pleasantly. "You could be taught," she said, "but not in the course of an evening; and there are other matters demanding our attention at present."

"Will you tell me something about the wonderful remedy you provided for the cure of the dreadful disease we have had to battle with for the last few days?"

"The remedy is simply the extract of an herb that grows in the East. The knowledge of its medicinal properties was taught me by my Guru a good many years ago. In individual cases I never depend upon medicine as a cure for disease, because the power of *mind* is more effective than any medicine. But—like the brazen serpent of old, with Moses and the children of Israel—in a case of epidemic like that we have just passed through some *material* thing had to be given because of the ignorance and fear of the people affected. They must have something to look at, taste, or feel; otherwise their fears would have killed where the epidemic did not. I gave the golden liquid highly magnetized and specially prepared for this crisis, and it proved to be the brazen serpent upon which all who looked could be saved. But while their thoughts were concentrated upon the material medicine, and *its* power to cure, I was quietly putting into operation an invisible force that restored harmony in their bodies and souls.

"As a natural consequence of the expenditure of so tremendous an amount of occult force upon material things or forms, a great reaction must and will come to the person putting that force into operation. The legal proceedings are the first indication of the reaction; but before the matter is finally settled you will probably be a witness to such acts of brutality

on the part of those upon whom this force acted most strongly as to surprise you. However, I am fully prepared to meet every emergency and to defend myself against this reaction at every point; so you need have no fears for my safety. But had I ignorantly used this force, and were I unable to control the reaction proceeding from the use of it, I should be entirely overwhelmed at this time, and—as many another has done before me—lose my life or liberty in return for my efforts to help my fellow-men."

When she ceased speaking I rose to go, and bidding her good-night I sought my bed. Vainly did I try to sleep; so I rose and dressed, replenished the fire, and sat down before it to ponder the story this strange being had told me. Recalling the principal events in my own life, I could see how—while I believed I was following the dictates of my own will—that great Law was shaping my life; and the question arose in my mind if it were not my duty to give to the world the heterodox knowledge that had in so peculiar a manner come to me. I decided to write the story of my life—and so this narrative was begun.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE DEFENSIVE.

The next morning Mata was ready to select the rooms for her offices. After consulting with me she engaged a suite that pleased her, and the remainder of the week was occupied with the fittings and furnishings. When they were ready, I went to inspect them. There was a reception-room supplied with a few easy-chairs, and a table covered with books and magazines. Beyond that was a private treating-room containing a Turkish couch, an invalid's chair, a writing-desk, an office chair, and the box that was to receive the contributions. The floors were covered with matting, and, with an occasional rug here and

there to relieve the monotony of the coloring, had a very comfortable appearance.

"Simply and plainly arranged, but you will not be permitted to use them long," I said.

She smiled, but did not reply. The next day a notice in the *Daily Journal* read:

"A CARD TO THE PUBLIC.

"Those who may remember the benefit received from the treatment given by Dr. Bennet and his daughter, during the recent epidemic, will be glad to know that Miss Bennet will continue to treat all diseases at her office, No. 574 North Main Street, Jamestown, N. Y. Office hours, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m."

In the course of the next few days many questions were asked me concerning my daughter—where she had studied medicine, etc. To each inquirer I gave the same answer—that her studies began at the age of fourteen, and now she was well informed and perfectly competent to handle any case. Callers were soon coming from all quarters of the city, and with a dignity that aroused great comment she treated both men and women. Many fashionable persons who believed this to be some kind of a fad were shocked and humiliated by the straightforward manner in which she told them of the excesses that had produced their diseases. She not only relieved their physical ailments but gave them a correct history of their conduct, showing them their true characters and reading their secret thoughts so accurately that many left her presence with the knowledge that to one person at least their festering sores of iniquity were uncovered. Many begged that their secrets be kept and promised to reform from that moment; but she never agreed to any kind of concealment, and quoted from the Scriptures: "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known." For many, one visit was enough, and nothing could have induced them to reenter her presence. Others came again and again, and continued to express interest in her knowledge and skill.

When the time came to appear at court, Mata admitted that she had no certificate to prove her ability to heal the sick, but said she had studied medicine for many years and was competent to prescribe remedies for any disease known to the medical fraternity. Concerning the medicine we had used during the epidemic, she said it was prepared for the occasion. She declined to name its ingredients, but declared that the beneficial results ought to be sufficient proof of its efficacy. Much to the surprise of the prosecution, she pleaded her own case, using good logic and expressing herself in a manner that indicated accurate knowledge of the technicalities of medical jurisprudence as well as *materia medica.* But, notwithstanding her eloquence and wisdom, the case was decided against her, and she was sentenced to pay a fine of two thousand dollars or be imprisoned in the penitentiary for five years. When Mata was asked what she would do, she declined to pay the fine, saying that of the two penalties she would prefer the imprisonment.

I was greatly surprised at her decision, and, while I wondered what her object was in making such a choice, the next case was called. Immediately she rose from her seat, adjusted her wraps, and, passing under the very noses of the officers and lawyers, coolly walked out of the court-room. The confusion that followed her departure was ludicrous. "Arrest that woman!" shouted the opposing lawyer. "The prisoner has escaped!" yelled half a dozen voices in chorus. The officer who had made the arrest rubbed his eyes and scratched his head as if just waking from a dream; and when his scattered wits reassembled in his cranium he rushed in hot pursuit of his former prisoner.

Following the crowd, I saw Mata walking leisurely up the street and the officer running at top speed to overtake her. Suddenly, as he attempted to seize her, his outstretched arm dropped helplessly at his side, and with eyes bulging from his head he stood motionless in his tracks, while she passed on as

if nothing had occurred. Soon a crowd gathered round the man, who stood gaping after Mata's receding form.

"What's the matter with you?" asked a gentleman who had been one of the principal instigators of the movement.

"Why didn't you arrest that woman, you blockhead?" asked another of her enemies.

"What are you waiting for?" inquired a third.

"She'll get away!" exclaimed another.

"Arrest the devil!" exclaimed the officer, ruefully. "Didn't I try to arrest her?"

"Well, why didn't you succeed?" inquired several voices at once.

"I don't think I'll ever swing my club again," he dolefully remarked, as he gently rubbed his right arm with his left hand. "I believe my arm is paralyzed for good and all."

"Paralyzed!" shouted the crowd.

"How did it happen?" the first gentleman inquired, as he stepped nearer to the officer. I, curious as the others, crowded close to the fellow, who had rolled up his coat-sleeve to look at the disabled arm. It was as cold as that of a corpse; the hand and fingers were stiff and had the appearance of being frozen. The limb seemed perfectly bloodless.

"Does it pain you?" I asked.

"It's numb!" he replied. Then, looking fiercely at me, he said: "I believe you're the father of that she-devil, and I'd like to know what's the matter with her!"

Thinking it time for me to withdraw, I went to Mata's office and found her seated in a low chair, seemingly in deep meditation. After a while she looked up and said: "Well?"

"You have created quite a sensation in town this morning," said I. "The officer who attempted your arrest declares his arm is paralyzed."

"No lasting harm has been done to him," she said; "he will recover the use of it in an hour or two."

"What did you do to him?" I asked.

"Simply prevented him from touching me," she replied. "I have appeared in court to answer to the charges brought against me and have explained that although the required certificate was not in my possession I am competent to practise medicine. These men fear to have me enter the medical ranks lest I take some of their glory as well as their gold. I knew this would come, and am prepared to meet it. I do not wish to rob them, but I do desire to relieve the sufferers they fail to help. I shall neither pay the fine they impose nor submit to imprisonment to please them."

At that moment the bell in the reception-room rang, and, as I expected, the caller proved to be another officer who had come to arrest Mata. Walking into his august presence as calmly as if he were a patient, she asked what he wanted. The man was greatly excited. He was a burly, broad-shouldered, muscular fellow, and towered like a giant above the slender, girlish form of his prospective prisoner. In his hands was a pair of hand-cuffs, with which he evidently intended manacling his prey. Mata quietly waited for him to make known his business, and, after wheezing and gasping for breath for a while, he bawled out: "I've come t' 'rest ye; and you'll find ye can't come none o' yer tomfoolery on me like ye did on the other feller!"

The expression in Mata's eyes denoted danger to somebody, but she did not utter a word. It was evident that he expected to frighten her into subjection by his threatening aspect and defiant roar. After delivering his little speech he strode forward, seized her roughly by both arms, and gave her a violent jerk toward him—treating her as if she were a child whom he was about to chastise. As quickly as if struck by lightning, the man lay sprawling in the farthest corner of the room, although Mata had not made a visible motion nor spoken an audible word.

For a few moments the officer lay unconscious, and then, opening his eyes and raising his head, he looked round seem-

ingly unable to remember just what had happened. When his gaze rested upon me his anger seemed to rise again, and, struggling to his feet, he muttered: "Resist an officer of the law, will ye? I'll 'rest you too!" Picking up the hand-cuffs, he snapped them on my wrists, and then, flourishing his club threateningly over my head, he roared: "I've a mind to pound ye to jelly fer that, ye old cuss!" The man believed I had knocked him down, and, since I offered no objections, he produced another pair of manacles from his pocket, and, shaking them under my nose, shouted: "D'ye see them bracelets? I've got the old bird an' now I'll have the young un;" and, turning toward Mata with the ferociousness of a mad bear, he grabbed her more roughly than at first. Then I heard a report like the crack of a rifle, and the burly officer was again knocked head foremost into the corner. The crash was so fearful that I believed the man was killed. He lay perfectly motionless, with his eyes wide open and his face as white as that of a corpse.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ANGEL OR DEMON?

Mata was standing quietly with her hands clasped before her, her head thrown back, and a look in her eyes that I had never before seen. That she was fully aroused in her own defense and did not need anybody's assistance was evident. After about ten minutes the officer raised his head, then lifted his hands and examined them. He worked the joints of his fingers, wrists, and elbows as if trying to determine whether they were broken or not. Then he drew up his legs and straightened them out as if fearing they were paralyzed. Deciding that the different members of his body were still under his control, he slowly regained an upright position. Then he looked at the ceiling, peeped under the table, and in a dazed sort of way asked: "Who struck me?"

"I did not see anybody strike you," I replied, smilingly.

"Wall, somebody did," he said vaguely; "an' they struck a blow that 'ud 'a' felled a ox."

"Where did they hit you?" I asked.

After passing his hands down his body and legs and over his head and chest, seemingly unable to locate the particular spot where the injury had been received, he replied: "I feel as if I'd been t'rashed till every bone in my body's pulverized." Then, suddenly remembering his errand, which had been entirely forgotten during the previous knock-down, he shouted, while gathering strength for another spring: "I'll have that she-devil this time or die!"

Raising her right hand and pointing her finger at him, Mata said: *"Stop!"*

The fellow could not lift his foot from the floor, but stood staring helplessly at her.

"There are a few words I wish to say to you," she said, in a strange tone of voice. "You believe some one struck you. If you do not want the same thing repeated with redoubled force, you had better stay just where you are and listen to me. You came here to arrest me in compliance with orders received from your official superiors. I do not wish to do you harm; therefore, I shall explain something you do not understand. You erroneously supposed that Doctor Bennet knocked you down the first time. You hand-cuffed him, so that he could not do it again. When you tried a second time to secure me, you met with the same difficulty as at first, although you must know now that he was not the cause of it. You and all the people in this city are unable to lay a hand on me unless I choose to allow it. I shall not submit to arrest, because I have done nothing to deserve it. Your brother officer made a similar attempt and failed, but he did not assume so much authority; he behaved more like a gentleman, and therefore escaped the experience that you have had."

Then, turning toward me, she said: "Doctor Bennet, will you please step this way?" I walked across the room and stood before the helpless officer.

"Do you think those hand-cuffs are strong enough to hold that man a prisoner?" she asked the astonished man.

"Yes," he growled; "there ain't a man as can break 'em when they're locked."

"Are they locked?" she asked, pleasantly.

"So good he'll never git loose," he answered, surlily.

Looking again at me, she said: "Hold out your hands, Doctor."

I did as she requested. Stepping back a pace or two, she pointed her finger for a moment at the irons, when suddenly they fell from my wrists and lay a mass of melted steel at my feet.

The officer opened his mouth and eyes to their widest extent and began crossing himself, while he called upon all the

saints he could think of to protect him from this "demon in human shape."

Mata carelessly remarked: "You may go as soon as you please, but if you attempt to repeat this performance you will be very sorry."

The man stooped, picked up the melted irons, and without stopping to get his hat, which had fallen from his head when he was first knocked down, turned and ran from the room as if he expected His Satanic Majesty would overtake him at every step.

The whole affair had been so ludicrous that I sat down and laughed. Mata smiled, but made no remarks. Soon there was a mob at the door. The vanquished officer had shown the melted manacles and had told his story; he had expressed the opinion that there was a giant concealed somewhere who had struck him from behind, and a dozen or more knights of the star and club had formed into line and marched to the door with the intention of getting the prisoner at once. When they filed into the room and had drawn themselves up in two lines their countenances evinced more brutal determination than it had ever been my privilege to see. The leader towered head and shoulders above the girlish-looking woman he had come to arrest, but Mata came forward and faced them without a tremor. Then the leader assumed the duty of spokesman and said: "We've come in de name o' de law t' 'rest ye fer two 'fences—first fer pract'sin' med'cine widout de proper aut'ority, an' secont fer r'sistin' a of'cer."

Mata smiled and replied that it seemed strange it should require twelve stalwart policemen to take into custody one little woman.

Here some of the men looked a little ashamed, but the speaker replied: "We shouldn't a needed s' many if ye hadn't a giant hid som'ers what lays out ev'rybody what comes after ye."

"I shall not submit to arrest if the whole city comes after

me," was Mata's rejoinder; then, stooping quickly, she drew with her finger upon the floor, between herself and the men, a line of as bright a blue as could be made with a piece of crayon. "Now, you must step over that line to reach me," she said; "I am waiting upon this side of it."

The man who had done the talking hesitated, while he looked sharply and suspiciously at the line.

"What are ye waitin' fer?" inquired one of the men. "Go an' git 'er."

"Go an' git 'er yerself," replied the leader. But, his authority and dignity being at stake, he himself strode forward with great apparent boldness. When he reached the blue line he stopped so suddenly as almost to precipitate his bulky body over it.

"What's de matter?" shouted the first speaker; "why don't ye git 'er?"

Vainly the officer tried to step over the line—his feet seemed rooted to the floor. He swore and pulled, first one foot and then the other; but they could not be moved. The other men stepped forward, but all had the same difficulty—not a man could cross the line.

After giving them plenty of time to make the attempt, Mata said: "Gentlemen, you are at liberty to pass out the door at any moment, but you will find it difficult to advance any further in this direction."

But the men were not inclined to accept her suggestion to depart without further effort to capture her; so they consulted for several minutes. At last all decided she was a witch and must be shot; and the leader shook his club at Mata and declared he had the authority to take her dead or alive. If, he declared, she did not yield to arrest he would kill her. I began to feel that the affair had begun to assume a serious aspect, and said that if this were intended for a joke it was time to stop.

"Mind your business!" angrily replied the spokesman, as he examined his revolver.

"This is my business, and I command you to retire from this house!" I said, excitedly.

"She's a d—— witch an' oughter be shot, an' we shan't leave de house widout 'er!" declared the man, coarsely.

"But what has she done to deserve the treatment you would not be justified in giving to a dog?" I indignantly inquired.

Nobody replied to my question, because all were getting ready to take a shot at Mata, and were replacing some of the old cartridges in their revolvers with fresh ones. I looked at Mata and caught a reassuring look as she made a motion for me to keep silent. In spite of her calmness I feared that these brutes would kill her in their ignorant wrath.

At that moment an officer pointed his weapon at her and said: "D'ye see that gun? Wall, I'm goin' t' count t'ree, an' if ye don't come out o' that corner an' s'render I'll shoot ye dead jes' where ye stan'. You'll be a dead witch'n less'an five minits." And he grimaced at the man on the right.

The other men all grinned their approval of the fellow's bravery and intelligence and pointed their weapons at Mata. I could not move my tongue to utter a protest against the outrage that seemed about to be perpetrated in my presence. Looking at Mata I observed that her smiling, careless appearance had entirely changed. The pallor of death was on her face, and the rigidity of her body suggested the thought that she was dead. Slowly the hair began to stand erect on my scalp, and my heart actually stopped beating when the officer said: "One!" In a few seconds he said: "Two!" Another interval of time, and then he gave the last word: "Three!"

"Bang!" went the weapon; "Bang! Bang!" A moment of silence, and then—"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

The officer had emptied the six chambers of his revolver; yet Mata stood before him apparently as undisturbed as a marble statue, while six flattened bullets lay on the floor at her feet. After a few moments of perfect silence she re-

marked: "Perhaps a few more of you gentlemen would like to shoot at this mark?"

"Good God!" shouted the astonished officer; "dat ain't a witch nor a woman, boys; it's de devil! Look at dem bullets. Flatter nor pancakes! I'm goin'; I never 'greed t' bring de devil wid me when I come." And the man made a rush for the door and tumbled out of it with all his brother officers at his heels.

That was the last we saw of them. When they were gone, and I realized that Mata was alive and unharmed, my strength gave way and I dropped into the nearest chair with my heart throbbing as if it would smother me.

Mata shut the door after the men, and then, drawing a chair near to mine, said: "I did not like to make such a display of power as this, but necessity compelled me to. I could not allow those men to arrest me, and thought it better to have the trouble over with at once."

"Shall I remain with you the rest of the day?" I asked.

"No; it is better that you should go on with your duties," she replied. "I thank you for trying to protect me from the vengeance of those officers; but you saw that no amount of persuasion or reasoning made the least difference with them. Like all other ferocious animals that thirst for blood, they wanted to kill somebody, and it was no fault of theirs that they did not take my life. Had they been men with *human* souls I should have taken a very different course with them; but, since they possessed only the *animal* nature, they had to be treated as animals."

"Do you not think those men had souls the same as other men?" I asked, in surprise.

"The man who attempted to take my life has lost his human soul, and is only in possession of his lower animal nature. It is possible for a human body to be utterly devoid of an immortal spiritual soul and still live and associate with human beings."

"What produces such a condition?"

"Persistent depravity during previous lives till the higher self (or divine spark) has left the lower animal nature to continue on toward destruction. You know that a man cannot stand, either morally or spiritually, in one place. He must advance or retreat along the path of development. If he choose to advance, however slowly, his higher nature, or conscious spirit,—whatever you please to call the higher intelligence,—will never desert him. He may stumble and fall many times; but, so long as he has even a faint aspiration toward a better life, the immortal spark will continue to lead and enlighten him. When, however, he shuts his eyes and heart against all good and delights in evil doing; when his heart thrills with pleasure at sight of the suffering of his fellow-beings; when he has a devilish glee in leading astray those who are pure and good; when fiendish torture of the lower animals causes him to thrill with satisfaction: then he has lost the higher light and will live for perhaps a few years as a thorn in the flesh of those with whom he associates. But his days are numbered, and his fate will be utter annihilation—which means the death that has no waking."

"Are there many such?"

"I am sorry to say that you meet them almost every day of your life. You may not be conscious of their condition because you are unable to see the color of their auras, or astral bodies; but the feeling of horror you will experience if compelled to come into close contact with them may always be taken as an indication of their evil natures."

"Will you explain how you were able to withstand those bullets?"

"In all the universe there is no such thing as 'dead matter.' Everything, whether visible or invisible to the physical eye, is in constant motion. Some kinds or classes of atoms vibrate more rapidly than others, and are therefore pregnable to forms of a slower rate. When the atoms composing my body

have their normal rate of vibration, the organism is pregnable to bullets. But, by understanding the law and by having the power of control, I can lower or raise the vibration of my atoms as I choose. Had I raised them much beyond their normal rate, the bullets would have passed through my body and perhaps have injured some one in the next room; but by lowering them my body became impregnable to the bullets, and they were flattened against it. Those men were frightened because of their ignorance and attributed to me 'supernatural' power, when it was nothing but the result of concentration of mind acting in perfect harmony with the law of vibration."

Fully realizing that any assistance I would be able to render would be valueless to her, I rose to go. Mata remarked that for the present she believed the trouble over with, but would remain at her post for a few days longer; and she asked me to call whenever I could make it convenient. This I promised to do, and then, bidding her good-by, I started for my office.

On the other side of the street I was accosted by one of the thwarted policemen. "Say!" he exclaimed; "they say you're her father, an' seen the hull performance."

I bowed.

"Wall, what d'ye think about it?" he demanded.

I replied that I thought it an injustice to attempt to arrest Miss Bennet, because she had done nothing to warrant it.

"Oh, ye're goin' to stick up fer her, air ye? Guess I'll take ye in too." And the man laid his hand heavily on my arm.

"Since you cannot arrest me without a warrant, unless I am breaking the peace, I think you had better allow me to pass," I replied, indignantly.

"What d'ye think she'd do if I was to take ye?" he asked, uneasily.

"Try it and see," I replied.

"Wall, ye can go on; but git a move on ye!" he said, threateningly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"THE DEVIL."

I had just reached my office and was thinking of the wonderful power the strange being possessed when a newsboy thrust his head into the door and yelled: "Extra *Evening Journal!* All about de devil dat has come to town! Paper, sir; paper?"

I bought a paper, and to my disgust saw in flaming red letters on the first page the startling headline: *"Is It The Devil?"*—which served as a caption to the following thrilling article:

"A most alarming state of affairs has come when Satan is allowed to walk abroad in the form of a beautiful young lady, supposed to be the only daughter of one of our leading physicians.

"Let us say, before going further, that we sympathize with the father of this creature. He is a gentleman, middle-aged and highly respected; he has been a practising physician in this city for twenty years or more, and we have no wish to censure him for anything his evil daughter does. This is another case of the strange and unaccountable weakness that good men's children will sometimes manifest.

"The woman bears the strange name of Mata Bennet. The last name is her father's, and is well enough; but the first one suggests the peculiar feeling that it was brought from a heathen country—is far fetched, as it were. The young woman has always been a strange creature. She was never known to enter the doors of a church, and when very young manifested a great aversion to such good books as the Catechism and Bible.

"In those days she was a source of great trial to the good Christian woman who served her in the double capacity of nurse and governess. When she reached the age of fourteen she became utterly unmanageable, and the worthy woman had to resign her position with sorrow, leaving the father of this child in tears and despair.

"We are told by the lady herself that the scene was a sad one. When she informed the father of her intention to leave he begged her to remain, telling her that he was positively afraid of the child when she had one of

her diabolical moods, and declared that he feared she would kill him some time when he was asleep. But the good woman was true to her religion, and, feeling that she had done all she was able to do for the child and could not bear the trial any longer, she left the house. The father has been partially successful in keeping the bad behavior of his daughter concealed since the governess left them, but the servants whisper that there have been queer doings on the top floor of the Bennet mansion, where this strange creature has her apartments. Every servant in the house is afraid of her, and is only induced to remain by the enormous wages the doctor pays. But the present circumstances claim our attention and we will say no more about the past.

"Suddenly, within the last month, this whole city has been stricken by a horrible and unknown disease, from which many hundred people died. There is no doubt in the minds of those who survived the scourge that the dreadful sickness was brought upon us by the devilish power of this woman. That we have good reason for our suspicions is proved by the fact that, when the people were dying like sheep from this complaint, she appeared on the scene with some kind of a sulphurous mixture (that none of our physicians were able to analyze) and distributed it among all who applied to her—thereby assuming the position of a second *Moses.* The remedy was a success, of course. Backed by her own diabolical will, great numbers were saved. Then this devil in human form secured a suite of rooms and advertised herself as a physician. She was asked to show her certificate, which, of course, she couldn't do, because she hadn't one. Then the physicians of our city, desiring to save the people from her wicked power, had her arrested.

"She was taken by surprise in her own house and was brought to answer to the charge, of which she was undeniably guilty. She admitted the crime of illegally practising medicine and boldly acknowledged that she had no papers to show as proof of her ability, but believed the skill with which she had handled the previous epidemic sufficient to satisfy everybody. She declined to furnish anything further, and, under the very eyes of the lawyers, spectators, and officers with which the court-room was crowded, she escaped.

"An officer was sent in hot pursuit, and soon overtook the fleeing woman; but when he attempted to seize her she suddenly became surrounded with fire, and the man was stricken with paralysis, from which he will probably never recover. She escaped, and succeeded in reaching the den of iniquity that, for politeness' sake, she calls her office. Here her poor father followed, hoping to persuade her to behave herself in a more decorous manner; but the following events show that his entreaties were of no avail—for, while he was begging to be allowed to pay the fine and so settle the trouble, an officer, the bravest and most muscular man on the force, went to rearrest her.

"The treatment the man received at her hands was worthy of the

woman. She overcame him with sulphurous fumes, which she caused to issue through a trap door in the floor; and while he lay helpless before her she beat him with a red-hot poker till he was barely left alive. The hand-cuffs with which he expected to secure her were the strongest that the city owns, but they will never be used again—they are now nothing but a shapeless mass of melted steel. The officer states that while he held them in his hands, ready to clasp them on her wrists, she pointed her finger at them and instantly they became so hot he could not hold them. He dropped them, of course—the man could not be expected to stand and hold a pair of red-hot hand-cuffs—and they melted into their present shape while they lay at his feet. Any one who may doubt our word in this matter can see the melted manacles, free of charge, at our office, where they will be on exhibition for the next ten days.

"Since it had been demonstrated that one man could not manage the arrest alone, the authorities sent twelve of the bravest and best men on the force. The story that these men tell is appalling. When they came out of her den, with blanched faces and bulging eyes, they did present a pitiable appearance. They were not burned as the other officers were, but they had been paralyzed, and, while they stood perfectly helpless in the presence of that terrible creature, she stooped and with her finger wrote flaming words of fire upon the floor. Then she danced before them, swinging her arms and scattering sparks of fire among them, while the same sulphurous fumes that had nearly killed the other officer overcame the doctor, her father, who sat helpless in his chair.

"They say—and we have no reason to doubt the words of those brave men—that at the time the sparks were flying around their heads the smoke poured from the creature's nose and mouth, and they could plainly hear a rumbling noise as if an earthquake were coming; at the same moment the whole building shook as if it would collapse. One of the men tried to shoot the woman while she was careening around the room. He and the other officers have since taken their most solemn oaths that the bullets that struck her were flattened the moment they touched her body, and made no more impression than if they had been made of tissue-paper; and they declare she laughed in devilish glee at every shot.

"The men were soon obliged to seek fresh air and further instructions—so the creature is still at large. She has frightened the officers so badly that there is not a man upon the force—and we have the finest set of officers in Chautauqua—who dares to face her again in that awful place.

"Citizens! What are you going to do? Allow that woman to live and bring a repetition of the past scourge upon us that will perhaps depopulate the whole city? In her diabolism she is fully capable of doing so dreadful a thing, and would no doubt take a fiendish delight in it, since her temper is now aroused to the highest pitch. Should there be any further developments we shall, in the line of our duty, issue extra editions announcing *the truth* for the benefit of our readers."

It is perhaps needless to say that the city was thrown into the most intense excitement by the indefatigable efforts of the reporters, who threw aside all pretenses of veracity and wrote the most ridiculous falsehoods their minds could invent. Many of the more timid of the populace were so frightened by the stories that they dared not venture beyond their own gates, lest they should encounter the dreadful creature described by the newspapers. The wood-cuts made and sworn to as exact copies of her face would have delighted the heart of a Fiji Islander; and since she had never had a picture taken, and the papers could get nothing to copy from but the highly inflamed imaginations of the reporters, the "portraits" were the most ridiculous things I ever have seen.

Business men stopped on their way to the banks or places of business, and, while casting apprehensive glances over their shoulders, talked in low tones about "the witch." All seemed of the same opinion—that Mata was a new nineteenth-century improvement on the old one, who lived at En-dor and arranged a little private conversation between Saul and Samuel.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RAILWAY ACCIDENT.

For three weeks after the attempted arrest, not a patient sought my professional services, and I observed that my friends cast pitying glances at me when I chanced to meet them. But all things that have a beginning have also an end, and after a few weeks the people became tired of this single topic of conversation. The reporters ran out of "ideas," and a drought struck the newspapers. The physicians, believing they had ruined Mata's prospects as a practitioner, rested the prosecution for an indefinite length of time—since

they could not find an officer who dared lay hands on her. Other occurrences attracted the attention of the people, and after a while business resumed its normal condition.

When everything was quiet, Mata began making plans to open her hospital, and, having found a place that suited her, requested me to buy it for her. When everything was ready for the reception of patients, she inserted a notice in the city papers announcing the fact that the hospital was ready to accommodate the public and would care for any whom the other hospital did not wish to receive. The announcement aroused a great deal of comment, and public opinion was so strong against her that two months had passed before a single application was made for admission. Then there occurred a terrible railroad wreck within the city limits, and a hundred victims were without a place to receive treatment. Since many of the sufferers were strangers, and had never heard the tales about the founder of the institution, they were glad to avail themselves of the accommodations offered, and the doors were thrown open to all in need.

Mata took up her abode at the hospital and attended her patients with untiring devotion. She bathed and bandaged injured limbs, sewed up gaping wounds, set broken bones with astonishing skill, and maintained throughout a wonderful self-possession and apparent interest in every inmate that seemed to banish all nervousness. When each patient was ready to leave and call for his bill, he was told that no hard and fast charges had been made; but he was at liberty to donate whatever he felt able toward the maintenance of the institution.

After a few months the people of the city were forced to believe that Mata was doing a good work, and as time passed and they came into closer acquaintance with her they ceased to watch and comment upon her conduct, and the suspicions of those who had been her enemies were in a measure abated.

One morning I had called at the hospital and was with

Mata in the reception-room when some ladies were announced. They were six of the most prominent persons in the city, and came for an interview with my daughter. Mata received them graciously, and after making them comfortable asked what service she could render them. Here a haughty dame put up her lorgnette and stared superciliously at her. After having duly impressed her with the importance of herself and her friends—as she believed—she cleared her throat and began her remarks as follows:

"Miss Bennet, we have called upon you to-day to see if we cannot come to some sort of an understanding concerning your position among us. You are the daughter of one of our leading physicians, and as such should conform to the rules regulating polite society. You are at present a sort of social outcast; your reputation is very unsavory because of the recent strange proceedings with the policemen, but we have investigated the matter, and so far have been unable to discover anything really criminal in your conduct—and for your father's sake as well as your own you should be guided by those whose judgment is better than yours. I am speaking for your own future welfare."

Here the woman paused for breath, and as Mata offered no reply a look of satisfaction settled upon her face, and she continued:

"Yes, we have looked into this matter and have been unable to discover anything in your conduct that may not be overlooked. So we came to-day to offer you an opportunity to attend Sunday-school and church. Of course, you must not expect to be received among us at first with great friendliness, because you have gained, by your recent behavior with the police officers, a disagreeable notoriety that may take years for you to live down; but I and these other ladies have decided to break the conservativeness of our set and to invite you to attend *our* church and Sunday-school. We shall make it a point to recognize you when we meet, hoping that other

ladies will follow our example; and in this manner the feeling that at present exists against you may be gradually overcome."

Another pause followed, during which Mata remained silent, and after a while the lady continued:

"You must realize that your disregard for the church and its teachings is a great wrong. You have, it seems, plenty of means, or you could not support this institution without charging a regular fee. Now, think how much more good you could do in the world if you would use your money toward maintaining a church and a few missionaries to send to heathen lands to spread the gospel of Christ to the poor, benighted wretches who never heard of our blessed Lord and Saviour! If you neglect your duty when it is pointed out to you, as I am doing to-day, you will regret it when it is too late. Why don't you speak, Miss Bennet? Don't you know that I—Mrs. Doctor Cinder—am talking to you?"

Mata bowed, and replied:

"Certainly, Madam, I have been listening most attentively to your words, and intended to reply as soon as the opportunity was presented. I thank you and the other ladies present for the kindly interest you are manifesting in my behalf, and also in behalf of the 'means' I am supposed to possess. From your words I infer that you are looking forward to my financial value as a member of your church with more solicitude than to the work of saving my soul. I understand that you are quite ready to use my money at once toward helping on the work of maintaining your missionaries, while my own growth among you will be naturally slow—something that will require years before I shall gain an equal footing with your members. You admit that, although I have committed no real crime, yet I am ostracized on account of my refusal to submit to imprisonment to satisfy the selfishness of the regular physicians of this city. You ladies are to be commended for your interest in the 'wretches,' as you call our brothers, who do not worship at your altars, and I believe you are doing great good

to your *missionaries* by sending them to foreign lands—because it gives them an excellent opportunity to learn the *real truth.* Many of them will become broadened out of their narrow views, and the condition of bigoted ignorance with which they went away may in many cases be entirely removed by their contact with the 'heathen.'

"I believe, however, that Jesus said we had the poor always with us, and whoever gave even a cup of cold water in His name gave it to Him. However much I should like to help educate your missionaries, still I feel that some one should attend to our *own* sufferers while those abroad are being looked after; and since you are succeeding so admirably with the foreign work I will continue in my humble way with the work that needs doing at our doors. Our city needed this hospital because the other institution will not take patients unable to pay for treatment, as has been several times demonstrated since it was opened. This house is fully able to receive *all* who need its protection. I do not weaken my forces by scattering them over so much ground, but rather concentrate my finances and energies upon this one work, and in that manner I am able to assist those whom you do not.

"I have great respect for all the good your church is really doing, but do not think I am really needed among you, since you have so many sisters who are in good standing now and do not require years of growth before receiving the recognition of good-fellowship. Believing that I know just how deep your sincerity is in offering this invitation to me, and while thanking you for it, I ask permission to refuse for the reasons I have just given. If you will permit me, I will extend an invitation to you to send to this house any one whom you, with or without a reason, do not care to receive at your institution."

A long silence followed Mata's remarks, during which all the ladies fanned themselves violently, while their flushed faces and snapping eyes indicated the intense excitement they

were laboring under. Mata was as smiling as if this were the pleasantest kind of an interview, and, seeming to care only for the comfort of her guests, asked me to open another window, as the ladies seemed distressed by the heat. As I went to do her bidding I remarked that the day was exceedingly warm for September.

Presently another lady took up the subject, and excitedly asked: "Miss Bennet, are we to understand that you are wishing to cast reflections on our institution because we do not receive the sick who are too poor to pay for treatment? Are we to understand that you think us uncharitable because we send missionaries to the heathen? Do you expect us to receive into our church in full membership a woman who has become notorious? Do you know that your recent disgraceful conduct with the policemen has been published in all the sensational papers in the country? You must be very stupid to suppose for a moment that we would *dare* accept such a person among *us* until we were perfectly sure that she had abandoned her evil practises and had become fully reformed!"

Mata calmly replied:

"I do not cast reflections upon anybody for anything she may or may not do, because it is not my business to judge another's actions. You are doing a good work to receive even paying patients in your institution, and should receive the credit you deserve for it; but those whom you refuse to take must have a place afforded them or suffer for the want of care. I have provided this house primarily for such persons, not wishing to reflect in the least on your good work. I do not think it uncharitable to send missionaries to foreign lands, but some one must undertake the work at home that is being overlooked by those working abroad. There are many in our own city who need the gospel of Christ as much as those across the sea. I do not expect, have not asked, and do not desire you to receive me into your church, either in good

standing or in any other way. You are laboring under a misapprehension, for I have neither sought you out nor made an application for membership. As I understand the matter, you are here to solicit money from me to assist you in the work you have undertaken. In return for the favor I may bestow upon you as a contribution you offer me the opportunity to become a probationary member—an errand girl—a silent partner in the house of the Lord. If I do my duties well in this humble position—in short, if I behave myself with proper decorum during my probation—you hold out the encouragement that some time, *perhaps,* I may be recognized as a Christian among you. Believing that I understand the exact amount of fraternal sympathy and anxiety you feel for me, I beg leave to decline, because I think you are asking entirely too much for the title you are offering for sale."

The women rose with blazing eyes and scarlet faces, while I turned my back to hide the laugh I could not control. At the door Mrs. Cinder turned to Mata and said:

"Very well, Miss Bennet; we feel that our full duty has been discharged. All that Christian women can do for an outcast we have done. This is probably the last call you will ever have from the Lord. I suppose you are not too ignorant to know that there is such a thing as sinning away one's 'day of grace,' and when that is done there will be no more hope for your soul. But we wash our hands of you from this time forth——"

"As Pontius Pilate did of Jesus?" interrupted Mata. "Well, Madam, since Jesus bore it perhaps I may."

"Who said anything about Pontius Pilate?" the old lady demanded, surprised by Mata's question.

"I did," replied Mata. "I was just saying that perhaps I can bear it if you *do* wash your hands of me, since I never saw you till this morning and have lived all this time without your sustaining hands."

"You are an *impertinent, saucy thing!*" exclaimed the

wrathy old lady. "I never saw your equal in my life! Why, nobody ever *dared* speak to me in such a manner before!"

"No?" asked Mata, smilingly. "Although I was not aware of being impolite to you, still if my manner has been unpleasant it cannot be helped. *I meant just what I said.*"

"Yes, young lady; you have insulted me, and must take the consequences!" declared Mrs. Cinder.

"I am always ready to accept the things that come from causes I myself have generated," said Mata. "I never look to another to bear them for me, and that is another reason why I do not need the consolation your faith offers—that of having some Great Soul carry my sins because I am too lazy and selfish to bear them for myself."

"And now I am fully convinced that you are guilty of all the things you have been accused of," retorted the woman. "I had doubted your guilt, but the flippant manner in which you ridicule one of our most sacred articles of faith shows me without further evidence that you are totally depraved." And with a horrified look on her face she marched with all the dignity at her command to the carriage that stood waiting to receive her ample form.

Mata closed the door and then smilingly remarked: "How tenaciously some people will hold to a dogma, believing it a God-given inspiration! Because I differed with those ladies in opinion they are offended beyond reconciliation!"

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

It is the morning of the thirtieth of November. Just twenty-one years ago to-night my darling left me to face alone the dreary years of a darkened and desolate life. It is

true, our child has helped me to bear the burden, and I have tried to be faithful to the duties assigned me; but to-night my probation will be ended, and when the hour of midnight comes I shall be released.

For the benefit of those who are seeking to know the truth concerning man's relationship to Divine Law, these pages have been written. For such as are satisfied with their ignorance and do not seek enlightenment the foregoing chapters will possess no interest. But I offer them to my fellowmen as the result of twenty-eight years' experience and observation, in the hope that some may be benefited by the story. And now, good-night; and may the peace that passeth understanding be with you now and forevermore!

(*The End.*)

* * *

NOTE.—The facts upon which "Mata the Magician" is founded came to my knowledge under somewhat peculiar circumstances. Excepting the dates, names, and localities, which have been changed, the story may be taken as a narrative of facts arranged in the form of a romance.

THE AUTHOR.

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