



INTRODUCTORY.

It must have been either the clock on the mantel-shelf, chiming the hour of nine, or an unusually boisterous gust of wind whistling on its way down the street and shaking the window curtains in its passage; or, perhaps, the sudden collapse of the fire glowing on the hearth, which caused the Philosopher to start suddenly from the reverie into which he had fallen. Whatever it was, when *DIOGENES* looked round, he became aware of the presence of a stranger, who was standing in a pensive attitude near his chair. Astonishment being a feeling with which the Cynic has long since ceased to be acquainted,—the experience of 2,000 odd years having taught him that there are indeed more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in even his philosophy,—he merely wiped the glasses of his spectacles, and, adjusting them firmly on his nose, directed his piercing but benevolent gaze upon the unexpected guest.

The Cynic saw before him an aged man, of venerable aspect, clad in a flowing robe of mystic character, and upon whose silvered head the snows of many, apparently, severe winters had descended.

DIOGENES arose and, with his most courtly bow, bade his visitor welcome to his hearth.

The stranger bent low in acknowledgement, and, pulling from his wallet a paste-board of portentous size: "Allow me," said he, "to present you with my card:—"

DOCTOR MERLIN,
Professor of Hegerdemain and Diablerie
IN GENERAL,

LATE ASTROLOGER AT THE COURT OF ARTHUR, KING OF BRITAIN.

N. B.—Patronized by all the (then) Crowned
Heads of Europe.

"Pray, Doctor, be seated, and permit me to express my high appreciation of the honor you do me."

The Doctor seated himself opposite the Philosopher, who also resumed his chair, and the following dialogue passed between them:—

DIO:—"Before asking the cause of your visit allow me, Doctor, to recommend that Claret to your notice. If you are a smoker, I think you will find those Regalias not amiss."