



## A MINISTERING ANGEL.

A STORY OF A FAMOUS SINGER.

When Parepa was in London she was everywhere the people's idol. The great opera houses in all our cities and towns were thronged. There were none to criticize or carp. Her young, rich, grand voice was beyond compare. Its glorious tones are remembered with an enthusiasm like that which greeted her when she sang.

Her company played in London during the Easter holidays ten years ago, and I, as an old friend, claimed some of her leisure hours. We were friends in Italy, and Easter Sunday was to be spent with me.

At eleven in the morning she sang at one of the large churches. I waited for her, and at last we two were alone in my snug little room. At noon the sky was overcast and gray. Down came the snow, whitening the streets and roofs. The wind swept icy breaths from the water as it came up the river and rushed past the city spires and over tall buildings, whirling around us the snow and storm. We had hurried home, shut and fastened our blinds, drawn close the curtains, and piled coal higher on the glowing grate. We had taken off our wraps and now sat close to the cheery fire for a whole afternoon's pleasant enjoyment.

Parepa said: "Mary, this is perfect rest! We shall be quite alone for four hours."

"Yes, four long hours," I replied. "No rehearsals, no engagements. Nobody knows where you are. If the whole company died they couldn't tell you know!"

Parepa laughed merrily at this idea.

"Dinner shall be served in this room, and I won't allow even the servant to look at you!" I said.

She clasped her dimpled hands together like a child in enjoyment, and then sprang up to roll the little centre-table near the grate.

"This is a better fire than we have at home," she said. "Do you remember the scolding that day when I took you to our museum, and you made great fun of our 'pot of coals'?"

"Yes, and how absurd your Italian fires are! I almost perished."

Parepa leaned her head back against the chair, and said in a low voice:

"Mary, that was a good Sunday in Venice, when my faithful old Luiga rowed us round to St. Mark's to early Mass and—"

"Oh! how lovely it was," I interrupted. "It seemed like a dream—how we slipped through the little canal under the Bridge of Sighs, then walked through the courtyard of the Doge's palace into the great solemn shadows of St. Mark's. I shall never forget the odor of the incense and the robes of priests, and the slow intonings. Such crowds of people, all kneeling!"

Parepa looked intently into my eyes, and softly laughed in her queer little Italian way. "And," she went on, "then you took me to your church where your priest read a song out of a book, and the men and women were very sober-looking and sung so slow. Why, I can sing that little song now. I have never forgotten it."

Parepa folded her hands exactly like the Scotch Presbyterian folk of the small English church in Venice on the Grand Canal, and sang slowly one verse of our old hymn, "When all Thy mercies, oh my God," to the old tune of "Canaan."

"How everybody stared at you when you joined in and sang," I said.

The snow had now turned into sleet; a great chill fell over the whole city. We looked out of our windows, peeping through the shutters, and pitying the people as they rushed past.

A sharp rattle at my door. John thrust in a note.

"My dear friend! Can you come? Annie has gone. She said you would be sure to come to her funeral. She spoke of you to the last. She will be buried at four."

I laid the poor little blotted note into Parepa's hand. How it stormed! We looked into each other's faces helplessly.

I said: "Dear, I must go, but you sit by the fire and rest. I'll be at home in two hours, and poor Annie she has gone!"

"Tell me about it, Mary, for I am going with you," she answered.

She threw on her heavy cloak, wound her long white woollen scarf closely about her throat, drew on her woollen gloves, and we set out together in the storm.

Annie's mother was a dressmaker, who sewed for me and my friends. She was left a widow when her one little girl was five years old. Her husband was drowned off the coast, and out of the binding pain and loss and anguish had grown a sort of idolatry for the delicate, beautiful child, whose brown eyes looked like the young husband's.

For fifteen years this mother had loved and worked for Annie, her whole being going out to bless her one child. I had grown fond of them; and in small ways, with books and flowers, outings and simple pleasures, I had made myself dear to them.

The end of the delicate girl's life had not seemed so near, though her doom had been hovering about her for years. I had thought it all over as I took the Easter lilies from my window-shelf and wrapped them in thick papers and hid them out of the storm under my cloak. I knew there would be no other flowers in their wretched room. How endless was the way to that East End house! At last we reached the place.

In the street stood the hearse, known only to the poor. We climbed flight after flight of narrow dark stairs to the small upper rooms. In the middle of the floor stood a stained coffin, lined with stiff, rattling cambric and cheap gauze, resting on uncovered trestles of wood.

We each took the mother's hand and stood a moment with her, silent. All hope had gone out of her face. She shed no tears, but as I held her cold hand I felt a shudder go over her, but she neither spoke nor sobbed.

The driving storm had made us late, and the plain, hard-working people sat stiffly against the walls. Some one gave us chairs and we sat close to the mother. I whispered to the mother and asked:

"Why did you wait so long to send for me? All this would have been so different."

With a kind of a stare she looked at me.

"I can't remember why I didn't send," she said, her hand to her head, and added, "I seemed to die, too, and forget, till they brought a coffin. Then I knew it all."

The undertaker came and bustled about. He looked at myself and Parepa, as if to say, "It's time to go." The wretched funeral service was over.

Without a word Parepa rose and walked to the head of the coffin. She laid her white scarf on an empty chair, threw her cloak back from her shoulders, where it fell in long, soft black lines from her noble figure like the drapery of mourning. She laid her soft, fair hand on the cold forehead, passed it tenderly over the wasted, delicate face, looked down at the dead girl a moment, and moved my fingers from the stained box to the thin fingers, then lifted up her head, and with illumined eyes sang the glorious melody—

"Angels, ever bright and fair,  
Take, oh, take her to thy care."

Her magnificent voice rose and fell in its richness and power and pity and beauty. She looked above the dingy room

and the tired faces of the men and women, the hard hands and the struggling hearts. She threw back her head and sang till the choir of paradise must have paused to listen to the music of that day.

She passed her hand caressingly over the girl's soft dark hair, and sang on—and on—"Take, oh, take her to thy care."

The mother's face grew rapt and white. I held her hands and watched her eyes. Suddenly she threw my hands off and knelt at Parepa's feet, close to the wooden trestles. She looked her fingers together, tears and sobs breaking forth. She prayed aloud that God would bless the angel singing for Annie. A patient smile settled about her lips, the light came back into her poor dulled eyes, and she kissed her daughter's face with a love beyond all interpretation of human speech. I led her back to her seat as the last glorious notes of Parepa's voice rose triumphant over all earthly pain and sorrow.

And I thought that no queen ever went to her grave with a greater ceremony than this young daughter of poverty and toil, committed to the care of the angels.

The following week thousands listened to Parepa's matchless voice. Applause rose to the skies, and Parepa's own face was gloriously swept with emotion. I joined in the enthusiasm; but above the glitter and shimmering of jewels and dress, and the heavy odor of flowers, the sea of smiling faces, and the murmur of voices, I could only behold by the dim light of a tenement window the singer's uplifted face, the wondering countenances of the poor onlookers, and the mother's wide, startled, tearful eyes. I could only hear above the sleet on the roof, and on the storm outside, Parepa's voice singing up to the heaven—

"Take, oh, take her to thy care."

## MINNIE MAY'S DEPARTMENT.

MY DEAR NIECES,—

I read some little time ago something which interested me profoundly—the life of Mrs. Thos. Carlyle. The book is not a new one—neither is its author among the literary lions of the day; but no criticism of the author's style occurs to you as you lay down the book. Matter, not manner, is uppermost in your mind; you see nothing, hear nothing, but those brave, cheerful, pathetic little letters of her whose martyrdom ended just thirty years ago.

The pity of it. It does not lessen our sorrow to know that her martyrdom was entered upon knowingly, willingly, so her biographers tell us. In your heart of hearts you doubt that paragraph which informs you that at the time of her marriage, bravely as she faced the future, she did not expect other happiness than was to be won by a life of self-sacrifice, nor ask other reward than the appreciation and confidence of the man of genius whom she had resolved to serve. Having these, she had been well content to bear his irritability and moroseness, to stand between him and poverty's daily worries, to accept menial duties to which she was unaccustomed, and to lose the friends whose society he would not tolerate.

It seems scarcely creditable that a girl—young, rich, beautiful, and clever—would have knowingly entered upon such a thorny path. Girls have been known to take just such foolish steps when madly in love; but for Mrs. Carlyle there was no such excuse. The man to whom her heart's best affection had been given, and who returned it with all the warmth of a noble nature, was separated from her by a bond which death only could annul, and Carlyle was fully cognizant of that fact.

Yet, if such were her expectations of married life, they were not disappointed; they had full and bitter fruition.

Concentrated selfishness was the keynote of Carlyle's domestic life. He abhorred society; therefore his wife must have none of it. He detested business—had neither the ability nor desire to master it: that fell to his wife's portion. He preferred a country life, consequently there followed years of isolation in a dilapidated country mansion, in the middle of a moor—years to which the unhappy woman could never return, even in thought, without a feeling of inexpressible horror.

Further, the delicate appetite of this man of genius could not tolerate the dishes manufactured by any "help," nor could his too sensitive nerves endure their methods of managing their duties. Hence, his wife must, perforce, become a respectable, unpaid upper servant, and perform duties which no servant, indeed, would attempt. Her account of one night's experience, undertaken to satisfy a childish caprice, is one of the most pathetic things ever written:

"The bread from Dumfries not agreeing with my husband, it was plainly my duty as a Christian wife to bake at home. So I sent for a copy of Cobbet's 'Cottage Economy,' and fell to work. But, knowing nothing of the process of the fermentation or the heat of oven, it came to pass that my bread was put in the oven at the time that myself ought to have been in bed; and I remained the only person not asleep in a house in the middle of a desert. One o'clock struck, then two, and three, and still I was sitting there, my whole body aching with weariness, my heart aching with a sense of forlornness and degradation. That I, who had been so petted at home, whose comfort had been studied by everybody in the house, who had never been required to do anything but cultivate my mind, should have to pass the night in watching a loaf of bread—which mightn't turn out bread at all—such thoughts maddened me, till I laid down my head on the table and sobbed aloud. It was then that the idea of Benvenuto Cellini sitting up all night, watching his Perseus in the furnace came to me, and I asked myself, 'After all, in the sight of the Upper Powers, what is the difference between a statue of Perseus and a loaf of bread, so that each be the thing one's hand has found to do?' The man's determined will, his energy, his patience were the really admirable things of which his statue of Perseus was the mere chance expression. If he had

been a woman, living at Craigenputtock, sixteen miles from a baker, and he a bad one, all these qualities would have come out more fully in a good loaf of bread."

Brave sentiments these, though called forth by an occurrence less trying than hundreds of others which she passes by in silence, but which her biographer tells to the world, whose sympathy, alas! comes too late to soothe the heart that yearned in vain for one crumb of comfort—of appreciation from the creature to whom she had sacrificed her preferences, her comfort, her ambition, and, finally, her life.

Well might her husband say, "In her bright [?] existence she had more sorrows than are common; but also a soft invincibility, a clearness of discernment, and a noble loyalty of heart which are rare. For forty years she was the true and ever-loving helpmeet of her husband, and by act and word unweariedly forwarded him, as none else could, in all of worth that he did or attempted. She died at London, 21st April, 1866, suddenly snatched away from him, and the light of his life as if gone out."

"More sorrows than are common!" Aye, verily, glad we are to believe that such experiences as hers are rare, even among the wives of men of genius; but, perhaps, the fact that such things do happen, even rarely, has as much to do in deterring women of a certain class from matrimony as "Higher Education" or "The Increased Attractions of Business or Professional Life."

MINNIE MAY.

## A Headache Explained.

A correspondent writes to the editor of an evening contemporary: "Sir,—I am a quiet young man, and not at all given to dissipation. Still, I was out at the play last night, and then I went to my club, and I've got a bad headache this morning. If you allow me to explain the headache, you will at the same time communicate a warning to other young men who may stay out late. I am staying temporarily with a great-aunt in Eaton Square. She is a kind old lady, and very fond of me; and, though I am aware that she has never quite realized that I have grown up, yet, when I told her last night that I was going out for the evening, she determined that I might be trusted with the latch-key. So I told the servants they needn't sit up for me; and found myself at my great-aunt's door about two o'clock a.m. Well, I got out my latch-key and put it into the keyhole, and turned it and pushed open the door. Would it be believed? The servants had left everything unfastened except the chain, so that the door would open only as far as that would allow it. Now, I have been reading a good deal lately, and I remembered to have come across the notion that, if one can get one's head through anywhere, one can get through altogether—it was with reference to somebody's escape from prison, I think. So, as I did not wish to disturb the household, I resolved to try if I couldn't get through in the space allowed by the chain. I got my head through all right, but I couldn't get any farther. And, when I tried to pull my head back again, I couldn't do that either. So there I was. I couldn't shut the door without getting my head out, and my head couldn't be got out without shutting the door and taking the chain down. And I couldn't reach the bell. By-and-by the policeman came round, and, catching sight of me by the light of his lantern, perhaps not unnaturally took upon himself to inquire what was my business there. I explained as well as I could from where my head was; but he did not believe me at first, and took hold of what there was left of me outside and tried to pull me out altogether. The proceeding caused me some pain; so, to allay his suspicions, I begged him to ring the bell and call up some of the servants to prove my identity. When the footman had appeared with a candle and testified to as much as he could see of me, the policeman was satisfied, and the only question that remained was how to extricate me. The only way seemed to be to fetch a blacksmith to cut the chain; but it was only just close to three in the morning; and, though the blacksmiths are, as a rule, early risers, yet it was hardly to be expected that one could be found to execute a job at that hour. The footman went downstairs and got an old file, and set to work to see what he could do with that. But it was a very weak file, and he managed it very badly, and kept squeezing my head between the door and the doorpost. By four o'clock he had got about a quarter of the way through one side of a link of that chain, the policeman looking in every now and then on his way up and down to see how we were getting on. When his time was up, he handed his interest in me over to another policeman, and, wishing me good morning, went home placidly to bed. Soon afterwards, milkmen and such-like folk began to come about; and there was very soon quite a considerable gathering, and some of them made rude remarks. As the file penetrated farther and farther through the chain the door wobbled more and hurt me more. However, my final liberation took place between five and half-past this morning. The door opened with a jerk as the last shred of the chain gave way before the file, and I fell into the footman's arms. The crowd gave a slight cheer; we shut the door from inside, and I went up to bed."