

to betray me. Yet I must love you still," she continued, weeping; "your very misfortunes endear you to me. Forget this momentary weakness—we will meet again tomorrow as *friends*."

Mastering her feelings with a strong effort, she bade me good evening, with a melancholy smile; and slowly walked from the spot, leaving me overwhelmed with confusion and remorse. I felt that I had acted like a vain puppy—that I had wantonly sported with the affections of one of the loveliest and best of human beings. Between Catharine and me, no words of love had been exchanged—she might be the love of another, even the wife of another, for aught I knew to the contrary—and I had sacrificed the peace and happiness of the generous, confiding Margaret, to an idol, which might only exist in my own heated imagination. Bitterly I cursed my folly; but repentance came too late.

Too much agitated with self reproach, to return to the Hall, I turned down the avenue of oaks that led towards the hunting lodge. The river lay before me, gleaming in the setting sun, and I thought I perceived a human figure, in a crouching attitude, seated upon the foot of the rustic bridge, from which the wretched Alice had attempted suicide. Willing to divert my thoughts from the unpleasant train into which they had fallen, I struck off the path, and soon reached the object that had excited my attention. Wrapped in an old grey mantle, with a silk handkerchief tied over her head, her chin resting on her long bony hands, I beheld the revolting person of Dinah North. Her grizzled locks had partly escaped from their bandage, and fell in tangled masses round her sharp haggard features. Her keen, deep-seated eye, was fixed with a vacant and glassy expression upon the waters that tumbled at her feet, and she muttered to herself strange unintelligible sounds.

She did not perceive my approach, until I purposely placed myself between her and the river. Without manifesting any surprise, she slowly raised her witch-like countenance, and surveyed me with a grim and sullen stare.

"You, too, are a Moncton, and like the rest, fair and false. Your dark eyes all fire—your heart as cold as ice—proud as Lucifer—inexorable as death, and close as hell. I wish you no good, but evil, and so pass on."

"Miserable woman," I said, "your hatred is more to be coveted than your friendship—to incur the first augurs some good; to possess the last, would render us worthy of your curse."

"Ha! ha!" returned the grim fiend, laughing ironically; "your knowledge of the world has given you a bitter spirit; I wish you joy of the acquisition—time will increase its acrimony—you were born to overcome the malignity of fortune."

"And you," I replied, fixing my eyes firmly on

her hideous countenance; "for what end were you born?"

"To be the curse of others."

She paused, and there flashed from her cold eye a light, which made the blood curdle in my veins, as she tauntingly continued:

"I have been of use in my generation—I have won many souls, but not for Heaven—I have served my master well, and shall doubtless receive my reward."

"This is madness," I exclaimed, "but without excuse, it is the madness of wickedness."

"It is a quality I possess, in common with my kind," said Dinah; "the world is made up of madmen and fools. It is better to be among the first, than the latter class—to rule than be ruled—by these two parties the whole earth is divided.—"Knowledge is power," I read that sentence when a girl—it never left my mind, and I acted upon it through life."

"It must have been the knowledge of evil," returned I.

"You have guessed right—by it the devils lost heaven, but they gained hell. By it tyrants rule, and mean men become rich—virtue is overcome, and vice triumphs."

"And what have you gained by it?"

"Much—it has given me an influence I never could otherwise have possessed. By it I have swayed the destinies of others, that fortune had apparently placed beyond my reach. It has given me power over thee and thine. At this moment, Geoffrey Moncton, the key of your destiny is in my keeping."

"And your life in mine," I said, bending upon her a searching glance; "vain boaster, the hour is at hand, which shall make even a hardened wretch like you own, that truly there is a reward for the righteous—a God that judges in the earth. I ask you not for the secret, which I believe you possess—the power that watches over the innocent, will restore to me that, of which wretches like you, would fain deprive me."

"You will be disappointed," returned the hag; "your wisest policy would be to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness—to flatter from your uncle, Robert Moncton, the wealth his dastardly son shall never possess."

"This advice," I replied, "comes well from the sordid creature, who for the base lucre of gain, sold the peace, and perhaps the eternal happiness, of her unfortunate grand-child."

The countenance of the old woman fell—she fixed upon me a wild, eager gaze:

"Alice Mornington—tell me, Geoffrey Moncton, what has become of Alice Mornington?"

"Upon one condition," I replied, advancing close up to her, and grasping her arm; "tell me, what has become of Philip Mornington?"