

comfortable inn all night. In the passage, I was respectfully accosted by an old man, of pleasing demeanour, and with somewhat of a foreign aspect. He enquired if he had not the honour of speaking to Sir Alexander Moncton? I replied that I was the person—that he had the advantage of me, as I believed him to be a perfect stranger. He appeared rather embarrassed, said that he did not wonder at my not recollecting him, as it was only in a subordinate situation I had ever seen him—that he felt his conduct had been such that he did not feel surprised at being forgotten. I now looked hard at my man—a conviction of having seen him often before, suddenly flashed across my mind—but it was an image connected with bygone years—years of folly and dissipation.

“‘Surely,’ I replied, ‘you are not William Walters, who for such a long time enjoyed the friendship and confidence of that consummate scoundrel, Robert Moncton?’

“‘The same.’

“‘Well, Mr. Walters,’ said I; ‘if such be the case, I have no wish to resume any acquaintance with you.’

“‘The old man sighed, and for a moment turned sorrowfully away.

“‘You are right,’ he replied, ‘and though I have deeply repented of my former crimes, and what is of more importance, feel that God has accepted my repentance, I cannot blame you Sir Alexander, for not wishing to hold any intercourse with me, whom you know to have been so vile—yet, for the sake of your nephew, Geoffrey Moncton, listen to me patiently—I have that to tell you, which most nearly concerns both him and you, and to this end, I have left a comfortable home in the United States, and was on my way to Moncton Park, to settle the moral debt which has lain so long upon my conscience.’

“‘Forcibly struck by the solemnity of the old man’s manner, and feeling my curiosity deeply excited, I asked him to dine with me, and we forthwith adjourned to my apartments. After dinner, Mr. Walters related to me the following circumstances, which cannot fail in being highly satisfactory to us both.

“‘My acquaintance with Robert Moncton,’ commenced the narrator; ‘began at school—I was the only son of a rich banker—my father was generous to a fault, and allowed me more pocket money than any of my young companions could boast of receiving from their parents. My father had risen from the lower walks of life, and was ostentatiously proud of his wealth—mother I had none, having lost that tenderest of all human ties in early childhood. Robert Moncton was a handsome, gentlemanly looking boy—he possessed an easy, specious manner, which imposed upon the ignorant and unsuspecting, and his love for money overcame every

moral scruple as to the manner in which it could be acquired. He saw that I was frank and vain, and he determined to profit by my weakness. I did not want for natural capacity, but I was a sad idler—Robert was shrewd and persevering, and I paid him handsomely for writing my exercises and doing my sums. We became great friends, and I loved him with more sincerity than he deserved.

“‘As I advanced towards manhood, my father met with great losses in trade, and finally became a bankrupt. The old gentleman did not long survive his reverse of fortune, and just after having made a most imprudent marriage, I found myself without any profession, flung penniless upon the world. Robert Moncton had just commenced practice at his old office in Hatton Garden—he came forward in my hour of distress, and very kindly offered his assistance. This was thankfully accepted, and he gave me a seat in his office, as engrossing clerk—this place I filled for fourteen years, until I was the father of twelve children. I am ashamed to own to you, Sir Alexander, that all Robert Moncton’s dirty transactions passed through my hands. I was his creature, the confidant of his worst hours, and he paid me very liberally for my assistance. But there were moments in my worthless life, when better feelings prevailed; when I loathed the degrading trammels which bound me, and on the bosom of my kind and affectionate wife, I bitterly lamented my fallen state.

“‘About this period, his brother Edward died, and Robert was appointed guardian to his orphan child. The unnatural joy he displayed on this occasion, bad as I had become, filled me with horror. The death of the poor lady immediately followed, and I accompanied this heartless wretch to the funeral. The sight of the lovely orphan child, who acted the part of chief mourner in this sad drama, cut me to the heart. I was a father myself—a fond father—and I longed to adopt the poor friendless innocent for my own. Geoffrey had not been many days under the care of his hard-hearted uncle, when Robert opened to me his plans for setting aside his nephew’s claims to the estates and title of Moncton, in case you should die without leaving a male heir. Inexpressibly shocked as I was at such an act of daring villainy, I dissembled my indignation, and determined to befriend, if possible, the friendless child.

“‘Walters,’ he said to me carelessly, one day; ‘you have long had a craze to settle with your family in America. You have been a good and faithful servant to me, and I am anxious to prove to you, that I am not insensible to your merit. We are old friends, we understand each other,’ he continued, grasping my hand; ‘neither you nor I, Bill, are over troubled with nice scruples. But to the point—if you will take a journey to —, and destroy the register of Edward’s marriage, by tearing the leaf