

her own. "It is in mercy that God hides the future from our sight. The knowledge of what even an hour might bring forth, might destroy reason, when contemplated from a distance; whilst the All-Merciful gives the afflicted strength, in the hour of need, to bear the burden, which, in His good Providence, he sees fit to lay upon them."

"Aye, but if He has doomed us to destruction, made us vessels of wrath! How can the thing created struggle with the Creator? If He wills not to perdition, I must perish."

Mildred shuddered. Again the wild glance of that large dark eye startled her. Could her friend be perfectly sane? She knew little of theology, still less of differing creeds and doctrines; but could this be true. Could any one in their sober senses, believe such a libel against the truth and majesty of God? She sighed deeply, and her silence appeared a tacit assent to her friend's terrible belief.

"Ah! I see you both condemn me!" continued Charlotte. "It is cruel though, for how can I help myself? I am bound with a chain which I cannot loosen. I am called upon to act without being given the power to perform; yet I feel that I am an accountable creature. Oh! I am placed as a mark against myself, and strive in vain with the evil which lures me to destruction."

"If you find yourself so weak, so insufficient to guide yourself, Charlotte," said her brother, not a little startled and shocked at the nature of her belief; "it becomes more necessary for you to submit to the advice of others."

"I have done so," returned she, dejectedly; "but the temptation still remains."

"To marry Lewis Chatworth, against your father's consent," said William, laughing. "Many wilful girls and boys are troubled with the same temptations."

"And why should the Colonel hinder Miss Stainer from marrying Mr. Chatworth, if they love one another?" said Mildred. "Every body gives him the character of an excellent young man."

"The world never fails to praise its own," replied the brother. "It is ever ready to substitute a godless morality in the place of real piety, and to extol above Christian graces, those virtues which we hold in common with the heathen,—such excellence holds no place in my father's creed. If my sister does not fix her affections upon a Christian, he will never consent to see her a wife. Surely, Miss Rosier, you must approve of my father's motives for withholding his consent to my sister's marriage."

"His motives may be good," said Mildred; "but I perceive that the effects which they produce are bad. If my mother could bring no

better reasons for refusing her consent to make me happy with the man I loved, I would take my own consent, and marry him without."

"That is honest at least," said William, starting, and regarding the beautiful speaker with a glance which had little to do with his assumed character. "I wish, Miss Rosier, I were the happy man."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mildred, with unfeigned surprise. "How could you bring yourself to view with affection an unconverted sinner like me?"

"I would ask no questions for conscience' sake, fair Mildred."

"I would spare you the trouble," returned she, "by frankly confessing my disbelief in your gloomy creed. God has placed before me good and evil, and if I voluntarily seek the curse instead of the blessing, I deserve the punishment inseparable from such a choice. But let us dismiss this subject, which has turned wiser heads than ours, and return to poor old Rachel, whose story I will tell you as nearly as I can, in the same words in which she told it to me."

Many times the tears clouded the beautiful eyes of Mildred, during her short relation; and in spite of his hard, worldly character, William Stainer was affected by the touching simplicity of her words, looks and manner, while the old witch herself became an object of interest and curiosity.

"What a charming, clever creature have we here," thought he; "the beauty of her person, and the natural graces of her mind, can even invest an ugly, disgusting osteast, with an interest foreign to her nature. If she had but a fortune, what a delightful wife she would make!"

Happily for Mildred, this great want saved her from much persecution. Such men as William Stainer may, for their own amusement, try to win the affections of women superior to themselves in mind and person, but they rarely seek them in wedlock.

He was still thinking upon the beauty of Mildred, and her perfect ignorance of the ways of the world, when the carriage drove up to the lodge.

#### CHAPTER XII.

"Alas! what tempted thee to this fell deed?  
Faith in a stern, unchanging, cruel creed!"

For some days the spirits of Charlotte Stainer seemed to revive under the sympathizing and tender attentions of her young companion. Sorrow had touched the heart of Mildred; love had awakened all the beautiful sensibilities of her