

(ORIGINAL.)

GEOFFREY MONCTON.

BY MRS. MOODIE.

Continued from our last Number.

CHAPTER XVII.

FROM this, to me, pleasing task, I was roused, by a message from Miss Moncton, desiring to speak to me in her own withdrawing room. On entering the apartment, I found Margaret sitting on the sofa, in earnest conversation, with the poor invalid. The face of the latter, wore a more cheerful expression, but she was pale as marble, and a blue shade about the rigid lips and eye, gave her a death-like appearance. She held out her hand as I approached, and in feeble accents thanked me, for saving her from the perpetration of a great crime.

"I hope God will forgive me for it," she continued, "I was not in my right mind, Mr. Geoffrey, when I attempted to put an end to a miserable existence—I had suffered a great calamity, and wanted moral courage to bear it."

I told her, I felt for her peculiar situation; and would gladly do anything in my power to save her."

"You can do much, Mr. Geoffrey. You know my brother?"

"He is my dearest friend"

"Write to him for me, and tell him how sincerely I repent my past conduct to him. That I am not quite the guilty creature he took me for, though swayed by minds more daringly wicked, to commit evil. Tell him not to avenge my wrongs on my cruel husband—that heaven will be my avenger, and that I die blessing him."

"Shall I go to London, Alice, and fetch him down hither?"

"Oh, no, no," exclaimed the unhappy girl, holding my arm with frightful energy. "Not here. He must not be seen in this neighbourhood."

"Alice," I said, solemnly; "I know the reason of your repugnance to see him here. Philip has told me that dreadful tale. And were it not for your share in the business, I would commit that dreadful woman to take her trial at the next assizes."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Alice, falling back upon the sofa, and covering her face with her hands. "And you know it all. Oh, would to God! that all were known. But my lips are sealed."

"Let me seek Dinah North, Alice, and wrest the truth from her reluctant lips."

Alice burst into a wild laugh. "Leave her to God, Mr. Geoffrey. Expect not to wrest the truth from lips, that through a long life of guilt have never been in the practice of uttering it—Dinah North would endure the tortures of the rack, without confessing a crime, unless goaded to it by revenge. Listen to the advice of a dying woman. Leave this

hardened sinner, for a few brief months, to the tortures of an overburdened conscience, and her hatred to Robert Moncton and his son will induce her to confess, what you so much desire to know."

"Alice," I said, taking her hand; "what hinders you from clearing up the doubts that involve the birth of Philip Mornington. Is he your brother?"

"No."

"The son of Robert Moncton?"

"May God forbid."

"Was he your mother's son?"

"Mr. Geoffrey, I am sworn to secrecy—I will not break my solemn oath."

"In keeping it you are guilty of a great crime."

"It may be so. The memory of my mother is dear to me, and I am determined to go down to the grave without betraying the trust reposed in me."

It was in vain I argued, and even threatened—there was too much of the leaven of old Dinah in her grand-daughter's character, for her to listen to reason. She became violent and obstinate, and at length told me haughtily, to desist from asking impertinent questions, for she would not answer them; and she put an end to the strange conference by rising, and abruptly leaving the room. I looked after her, with feelings less tinged with compassion than contempt.

"Forgive her, Geoffrey," said Margaret, who had listened in silent astonishment to the whole scene; "her reason is disordered—she knows not what she says."

"I feel little pity for her, Margaret; she is artful and selfish in the extreme—and though it may appear harsh to say so, deserves her fate. Review for a moment her past life."

"Alas, it will not bear investigation," said Margaret, interrupting me; "yet I loved her, so fondly."

"Do you love her still?"

"Geoffrey, I pity her sincerely—and would gladly divert her mind to the contemplation of better things—but she has forfeited my esteem forever."

"Have you informed Sir Alexander of these circumstances?"

"I have, and he has written to Robert Moncton, acquainting him with the marriage of his son."

"What will be the result of all this?"

"God knows," replied Margaret; "I feel anxious and unhappy. By the bye, Geoffrey, my father wished to see you in the library at three o'clock—it is near upon the hour."