

steps of the altar ; here and there, upon the floor, some women, some old people were kneeling in the subdued light. Maurice sank upon his knees and prayed. He prayed to obtain pardon from his father for his errors, to obtain from Heaven happiness for Madeleine.

At length, after fifteen days of solitary travel, he traversed, without being recognized, the little village adjoining Valtravers. His costume was sufficient to assure his incognito ; besides, in that assured step, in that proud and serene glance, in the calmness and dignity of that noble and manly figure, how could anyone recognize the young man that had been seen, three years previously, passing through the town like an outcast ?

Who could be able to tell what emotions attacked him, when he saw, an hour later, looming above the horizon, the leafy shades that had screened his cradle, when he set foot upon the edge of the forest, when he plunged into the mysterious depths that he had so often traversed in company with his father and the marquise, where Madeleine was revealed to him ? Finding himself again, overflowing with love and life, in those beautiful places where, three years previously, he had brought only a sentiment of his degradation, his first movement was to cry out to Nature that he was young again, that he could love, that he loved ; his regenerated soul was lifted up in holy raptures. He proceeded slowly ; souvenirs sprang up before him like larks from the meadows. Under the shade of that oak he had reposed at the chevalier's side ; under the silver foliage of this poplar he had dreamed away a day, listening to the nascent murmurs, counting the incipient palpitations of youth just starting into life within him. At a turn in the path, he recognized the place where, one autumn evening, he had met his cousin. He recalled all the details of that poetic evening : he recollected also that a year later, on the day of his departure, he had found Madeleine seated at the same place.

'Ah ! unhappy one, what demon drove you away ?' cried he sadly. 'She was even then beautiful and charming, like a celestial warning, like the image of happiness that you were leaving behind you. Had you then but taken her by the hand and retraced your steps !'

Day was declining. Worn out by his emotions, Maurice had thrown himself upon the greensward. He rose and turned his steps towards the chateau. As he did not know the people that inhabited it ; not very anxious, he it understood, to see and recognize them, he but wished, through the bars of the gate, to cast a devout glance into the park ;

he wished to bid a final adieu to the Eden from which he was for ever exiled.

He walked beside the wall that enclosed the park, as far as to the gate, and remained for a long time with his forehead pressed against the palings. Mechanically he opened the gate ; by an impulse of the heart, he entered. The park was deserted, the shades of evening were beginning to fall. Maurice heard only the murmur of the wind among the leaves, the cries of birds hiding in their nests, the noise of the sand under his feet. Pushing aside the thick branches, he advanced with a furtive step. At a bend in the path, when the facade was about to appear, he stopped, held his breath, crossed his arms upon his chest as if to quell its rising emotion. Finally he looked. Could he believe the evidence of his own eyes ? Was it not a dream, a mirage, a hallucination of his over-excited brain ? He wanted to cry out, but his voice died upon his lips. The stick that he carried escaped from his hands, his limbs refused to support him, and, to prevent himself from falling, he was obliged to lean against a tree. There before him, twenty paces distant, seated upon the perron, in the subdued light of the last rays of the setting sun, while two children, well known to Maurice, played upon the lawn, Madeleine, Sir Edward, Pierre Marceau and his wife, were chatting together. Suddenly Madeleine arose, and Maurice saw her advancing towards him smiling, as serene, as calm, as if the occurrence were the simplest and most natural thing in the world.

'*Mon ami*, we were waiting for you,' said she.

And, taking his arm, the young girl drew him gently towards the baronet, Therese and Marceau, who, on their side, came to meet him. They pressed his hands in silence ; not a word was uttered. Every heart was moved ; every lip was mute.

'Oh, my friends !' said Maurice, at last, in a trembling voice, stopping at the foot of the perron and throwing around him a confused glance, 'Oh my friends ! what has happened ? What is happening ? Speak, answer me. Have I dreamed of grief and despair, or am I now indeed dreaming of happiness ?'

The faces which surrounded him answered only by a gentle smile. Supported by Madeleine, he ascended the steps of the perron. Already all the servants were assembled in the hall. Maurice recognized them all ; all had seen him born and grown up.

'My children,' said Madeleine to them, 'here is your young master, who has come back among you.'