

who were already at work, near the cradle of their children; he saluted them with an affectionate gesture. Having contemplated with an envious eye, for a few minutes, the peace and happiness of this little menage, he busied himself with the preparations for his departure: this occupied him a quarter of an hour at the most. When all was ready, he buckled around his blouse his belt of patent-leather, put upon his back the knapsack that contained his whole fortune, seized with one hand the staff of the journeyman; then, having cast a tender glance around the little room, into which he had entered hardened by egotism, stained by idleness, rendered prematurely old by debauchery, he went out regenerated by work, rejuvenated by love, sanctified by sacrifice.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOME AGAIN.

While he remained in Paris, his sorrow was mixed with secret irritation. He felt the generous resignation that had impelled him to leave Madeleine, falter within him. It seemed there was, in the atmosphere of the great city, a remnant of the fatal influence to which he formerly had been subjected. Once outside of Paris, when he felt his chest dilate in the vivifying air of the country, in face of nature, his anger [was appeased, his heart was softened, and he permitted himself to be dominated wholly by an unique sentiment, his love for Madeleine. In the time of his stormy life, which he foolishly took for an earnest life, every time that one of his desires was opposed or could be gratified only after an obstinate struggle, resistance awoke in him spite or hatred. He could not understand love without possession; he might have smiled in pity if one had told him that the heart could taste in love a happiness independent of the object loved. Now, alone with his own thoughts, he realized the grandeur and the holiness of a sentiment that he had never before understood, of which he had embraced hitherto only the grosser image. He withdrew from Madeleine; his heart bled at this separation, and yet he flavoured his grief with pleasant thoughts. In his voluntary isolation, in the exile to which he resigned himself, he experienced a joy more vivid and profound than in the intoxications of his satiated passions. He was not loved, but he felt himself worthier of being loved, and the consciousness of his moral worth inspired in him a legitimate pride. He was not loved, but he applauded himself for the sacrifice

that he had just made for the woman that he loved; and he found, in this very sacrifice, a joy that it was not in the power of any one to rob him of. In his pilgrimage to Valtravers he was not guided solely by the desire to acquit himself with respect to the memory of his father; he wished also to see again the place where he had met Madeleine for the first time, and bless the imprint of her steps. He wished to breathe the air that she had embalmed with her presence; to run through the places in which he had listened to her voice; it was for him a last and supreme form of gratitude.

He walked with head erect, breathing the air with dilated lungs. The appreciation of the beauties of nature, long deadened in his heart, was at last awakened. It approached the last days of May; the sun smiled upon the earth. All the undulations of the hill sides, all the caprices of the sky, all the accidents of the scenery, were, for Maurice, a source of unexpected joys. To witness his naive enchantment, it might have been said that he saw, for the first time, the wonders of creation. The austere fatigues of this pedestrian journey were sweeter to him than all the excursions made not long since in the bottom of an indolent caletche, at the gallop of horses. The halts, at evening, in the little inns, the departures at the early dawn, the rencoures at the common table, the salutations exchanged upon the road, the chats with children upon the stone steps before the door, were, for him, so many poetic episodes that renewed at each instant the interest in his pilgrimage, at the same time intiating him into the practice of equality.

Last of all, a final moral revolution was destined to crown all the others.

Madeleine had succeeded in re-animating the religious sentiment in the heart of Maurice, but she had ever vainly supplicated him to have recourse to prayer, and invoke, in his woes, divine consolation. Whatever she might say to him, he had never consented to set foot in a church. It was left to grief to bring him back by an insensible grade, to the faith and to the religion that he had hitherto railed at. Every sincere grief lifts us towards Heaven. Maurice proved it. Walking through a village that was found on his way, he passed before a church; impelled by an irresistible instinct, without being importuned, without deliberating within himself, he entered. It was one of those poor churches that God is said to prefer to sumptuous and gilded temples. The sun shone softly through the lowered blinds; wild flowers were scattered upon the

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