

ing with sweet hopes. If he loved Madeleine, if he had not been able to see so much candour and reason, so much grace and beauty, without being fascinated by it, he also loved Maurice with intense affection, and that which especially delighted this poetic mind, this tender and generous soul, was the thought of avenging these two young people for the injustice of fate, in restoring them, in the face of the world, to the position that they had lost.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### HIS SACRIFICE.

Left alone, Maurice was sunk in a chaos of thoughts so confused, and of sentiments so conflicting, that the cleverest analyst, the most subtle psychologist, would have been perplexed in seeking to explain them. Having conducted, by a supreme effort of will, Sir Edward to the head of the stairs, he re-entered his room and throw himself upon his bed, as if crushed by the words to which he had just listened. He felt at first a horrible agony, impossible to describe. This torment was succeeded by an utter prostration. The tumult of his senses was appeased; little by little his perceptions became more precise and lucid. Soon his face shone with a gentle radiance, like the first light of the dawn. Indeed, it was the dawn of a new life. A celestial ray beamed in his look, a child-like smile enlivened his half-opened lips, still pale and trembling. He continued long in mute ecstasy. Then his breast heaved and swelled; suddenly tears sprang from his eyes, a cry went forth from his breast, and, like resuscitated Lazarus, he raised his arms towards Heaven. In looking to the bottom of his heart, Maurice had just perceived a newly-opened flower; he breathed its perfume,—this flower was love. He loved! Ah! to understand this intoxication, one must himself experience it; at the decline of a precious autumn, he must feel germinate in his soul a second spring-time—he must feel revive and re-expand, under a Divine breath, that flower of love which he believed for ever blasted!

This intoxication was of short duration; Maurice left it by a sudden movement of anger and despair. Like a bird mortally struck in free air, he fell back heavily upon the ground of reality. Unhappy mortal! he loved when it was too late; he had arrived too late at the gates of Paradise; he discovered happiness only in time to bid it an eternal adieu. His violent nature was re-animated for a last time; he burst forth in

jealous imprecations against Sir Edward, who had robbed him of life; in the frenzy of his grief he hardly spared Madeleine. He recalled the late bearing of his cousin; he saw her smiling upon the baronet, who looked fondly upon her, and he felt his breast torn by all the tortures of hell. He had not even the consolation of saying to himself that he had perhaps deceived himself. Even though he had not observed these two young people—even though he had not followed with an uneasy eye the progress of their mutual passion, the vague malady which he had suffered should have already enlightened him; the martyrdom that he endured at this hour would have cried plainly enough that Madeleine loved Sir Edward. He walked fiercely in his room, when he suddenly stopped, ashamed of his frenzy. He looked into his own heart, and blushed with confusion.

'Why complain, miserable one?' exclaimed he, bowing his head. 'Only just escaped from the muddy stream where thou hast wasted thy youth, thou complainest because thou art not loved; thou art incapable of seeing that a noble heart, a spotless virtue, a conscience that has never weakened, may be preferred to thee! What hast thou done to merit that tenderness which appears to thee to-day the supreme good? For more than two years thou hast had this treasure under thy hand, what hast thou done to render thyself worthy of it? Thou hast misunderstood her, thou hast contemned her, thou hast trampled her under foot, and now thou rebellest against thyself at the thought that another should possess her! As a reward for the insults with which thou hast overwhelmed her, it does not satisfy thee that the adorable creature that God has placed under thy care, has drawn thee from the bottom of an abyss, that she has washed the stains from thy soul and directed thy steps with consecrated thoughts. As a price of the insane affronts that thou hast lavished upon her, as a recompense for thy harshness, for thy infamous conduct, it would seem to thee that her love could not be too much. Ah! be dumb, remain in thy obscurity, and thank Heaven, which has given thee the grace of being able to love.'

Maurice had never wept with so much bitterness upon the mistakes of his past life; never, at the remembrance of his errors, had he shed such bitter, such burning tears; never had remorse for ill-spent days weighed upon him with greater force. He measured for the first time the extent of his ruin; his mind had just opened to the sentiment of happiness which he had had under his hand and had not been able to seize.