

imputed to him, and saw the fair and noble face of a woman rise out of the past, like a stainless and unbroken marble statue amid the dreariest ruins. His porter brought him a letter with a black seal. The Comtesse de Montcornet wrote to inform him of the death of her husband, who had returned to the army, and again commanded a division. She was his heir; she had no children. That letter, in spite of its womanly dignity, told Blondet that the woman of forty, whom he had loved in his youth, held out a comrade's hand to him and a considerable fortune.

Shortly afterwards a marriage took place between the Comtesse de Montcornet and M. Blondet, a newly-appointed prefect. He went to his prefecture by the route on which the Aignes formerly lay, and stopped the traveling carriage opposite the place where the park gates used to stand, to see once more the commune of Blangy, so thronged with tender memories for them both. The country was no longer recognizable. The mysterious woods, the avenues in the park, had been cleared away, the country looked like a tailor's chart of patterns. The Peasantry had taken possession of the soil as conquerors and by right of conquest; already it had been divided up into more than a thousand holdings; already the population of Blangy had trebled itself. The once beautiful park—so carefully ordered, so luxuriantly fair—was now an agricultural district, with one familiar building standing out in strong contrast against the changed background. This was the hunting-lodge, re-christened *Il Buen-Retiro* by Mme. Isaure Gaubertin, who had converted it into a villa residence. The building looked almost like a château, so miserable were the peasants' cabins scattered round about it.

"Behold the march of progress!" cried Émile. "Here is a page from Jean-Jacques' *Contrat Social*. And here am I, in harness, a part of the social machinery which brings about such results as these! Good heavens! what will become of kings in a little while? Nay, what will become of the nations themselves in fifty years' time, if this state of things continues?"