to nurse the expected squire. Some share of the first expenses connected with the mortgages had, they said, been improperly thrown upon their client, and they again and again demanded, in language which was almost insolent, the immediate payment of the amount. Then there was three months' interest overdue, and this also they pressed and clamored for, till the old gentleman was nearly driven out of his senses, and, as a consequence, drove everybody about the place out of theirs.

At last this state of affairs began to tell upon his constitution, which, strong as he was, could not at his age withstand such constant worry. He grew to look years older, his shoulders acquired a stoop, and his memory began to fail him, especially on matters connected with the mortgages and farm accounts. Ida, too, became pale and ill; she caught a heavy cold, which she could not throw off, and her face acquired a permanently pained and yet listless look.

One day, it was on the 15th of December, things reached a climax. When Ida came down to breakfast she found her father busy poring over some more letters from the lawyers.

"What is it now, father?" she said.

"What is it now?" he answered, irritably. "Why, it's another claim for £200, that's what it is. I keep telling them to write to my lawyers, but they won't; at least they write to me, too. There, I can't make head or tail of it. Look here," and he showed her two sides of a big sheet of paper covered with statements of accounts. "Anyhow, I have not got £200, that's clear. I don't know where we are going to find the money to pay the three months' interest. I'm worn out, Ida, I'm worn out; that's the long and short of it. I get so confused with all these figures. I'm an old man now, and all these troubles are too much for me."

"You must not talk like that, father," she answered, not knowing what else to say, for affairs were indeed desperate.

"Yes, yes, it's all very well to talk so, but facts are stubborn. Our family is ruined, and we must accept it."

"Cannot the money be got anyhow? Is there nothing to be done?" she asked, desperately.

"What is the good of asking me that? There is only one thing that can save us, and you know what it is as well as I do. But you are your own mistress. I have no right to put pressure on you. You must please yourself. Meanwhile I think we had better leave this place at once and go and live in a cottage somewhere, if we can get enough to support us; if not, we must starve, I suppose. I cannot keep up appearances any longer."

Ida rose and with a strange, sad light of resolution shining in her eyes came to where her father was sitting and, putting her hands upon his shoulders, looked him in the face.

"Father," she said, "do you wish me to marry that man?"

"Wish you to marry him? What do you mean?" he said, not without irritation and avoiding her gaze. "It is no affair of mine. I don't like the man, if that's what you mean. He is acting like—well, like the cur that he is, in putting on the screw as he is doing, but of course that is the way out of it and the only way, and there you are."

"Father," she said again, "will you give me ten days, that is, until Christmas day? If nothing happens between this and then, I will marry Mr. Edward Cossey."

A sudden light of hope shone in his eyes. She saw it, though he tried to hide it by turning his head away.

"Oh, yes," he answered, "as you wish; settle it one way or the other on Christmas day, and then we can go out with the New Year. You see, your brother James is dead, and I have no one left to advise me now, and I suppose that I am getting old. At any rate, things seem to be too much for me. Settle it as you like. Settle it as you like," and he got up, leaving his breakfast half swallowed, and went off to moon aimlessly about the park.

So she made up her mind at last. This was the end of her struggling. She could not let her old father be turned out of house and home to starve, for practically they would starve. She knew her hateful lover well enough to be aware that he would show no mercy. It was a question of the woman or the money, and she was the woman. Either she must let him take her or they must be destroyed; there was no middle course. And in these circumstances there was no room for hesitation. Once more her duty became clear to her. She must give up her love, she must give up herself. Well, so be it. She was weary of the long endeavor against fortune, now she would yield and let the tide of utter misery sweep over like a sea—and bear her away till at last it brought her to that oblivion in which, perchance, all things come right or are as though they had never been.

She had scarcely spoken to her lover, Harold Quaritch, for some weeks. She had, as she understood it, entered into a kind of unspoken agreement with her father not to do so and that agreement Harold had understood and respected. Since their last letters to each other they had met once or twice casually or at church and interchanged a few different words, though their eyes spoke another story, and touched each other's hands and parted, and that was absolutely all. But now that she had come to this momentous decision, she felt that he had a right to learn it, and so once more she wrote to him. She might have gone to see him or told him to meet her, but she would not. For one thing she did not dare to trust herself on such an errand in his dear company, for another she was too proud, thinking that if her father came to hear of it he might consider that it had a clandestine and underhand appearance.

And so she wrote. With all she said we need not concern ourselves. The letter was passionate, more passionate than one would perhaps have expected from a woman of Ida's calm and stately sort. But a mountain may have a heart of fire, although it is clad in snows, and so it sometimes is with women who look cold and unemotional as marble. Besides, it was her last chance—she could write him no more letters, and she had much to say.

"And so I have decided, Harold," she said, after telling him of all her doubts and troubles. "I must do it; there is no help for it, as I think you will see. I have asked for the ten days' respite. Well, I really hardly know why, except that it is a respite. And now, what is there left to say to you except good-by? I love you, Harold; I make no secret of it, and I shall never love any other. Remember all your life that I love you and have not forgotten you, and never can forget. For people placed as we are there is one hope—the grave. In the grave earthly considerations fail and earthly contracts end, and here I trust and believe we shall find each other—or at the least forgetfulness. My heart is so sore I know not what to say to you, for it is difficult to put all I feel in words. I am overwhelmed, and my spirit is broken, and I wish to God that I were dead. Sometimes I cease to believe in a God who can allow his creatures to be so tormented, and give us love only that it may be daily dishonored in our sight; but who am I that I should complain, and after all, what are our troubles compared to some we know of? Well, it will come to an end at last, and meanwhile pity me and think of me. Pity me and think of me; yes, but never see me more. As soon as this engagement is publicly announced, go away, the further the better. Yes, go to New Zealand, as you suggested once before, and in pity of our human weakness never let me see your face again. Perhaps you may write to me sometimes—if my—if Mr. Cossey will allow it. Go there and occupy yourself; it will divert your mind—you are still too young a man to lay yourself upon the shelf, mix yourself up in the politics of the place, take to writing, anything, so long as you can absorb yourself. I send you a photograph of myself, I have nothing better, and a ring that night and day I have worn since I was a child. I think that it will fit your little finger, and I hope that you will always wear it in memory of me. And now it is late and I am tired, and what is there more that a woman can say to the man she loves, and whom she must leave forever? Only one word—Good-by. IDA."

When Harold got this letter it fairly broke him down. His hopes had been revived when he thought that all was lost, and now again they were utterly dashed and broken. He could see no way out of it, none at all. He could not quarrel with Ida's decision, shocking as it was, for the simple reason that he knew in his heart that she was acting rightly, and even nobly. But oh! the thought of it made him mad. It is probable that to a man of imagination and deep feeling hell itself can invent no more hideous torture than that he must undergo in the position in which Harold Quaritch found himself. To truly love some good woman or some woman whom he thinks good—for it comes to the same thing—to love her more than life, to hold her dearer even than his honor, to be, like Harold, beloved in turn, and then to know that that woman, that one thing for which he would count the world well lost and would even sacrifice his hope of heaven, that light that makes his days beautiful, that starry joy set like a diadem upon life's dark brows, has been taken from him by the mockery of fate, not by death, for that he could bear, taken from him and given—for money or money's worth—to some other man! It is, perhaps, better that a man should die than that he should pass through such an experience as that which threatened Harold Quaritch now; for though the man die not, yet will it kill all that is best in him, and whatever triumphs may await him, and whatever women may be ready in the future to pin their favors to his breast, life will never be for him what it might have been, because his lost love took its glory with her.

No wonder then that he despaired. No wonder, too, that there rose up in his breast a great anger and indignation against the man who had brought this last extremity of misery upon them both. He was a just man, and could make allowances for his rival's infatuation—which, indeed, Ida being converted, it was not difficult for him to understand. But he was also, and above all things, a gentleman, and the spectacle of a woman being inexorably driven into a distasteful marriage by money pressure, put on by the man who wished to gain her, revolted him beyond measure, and, though he was slow to wrath, moved him to fiery indignation. So much did it move him that he took a resolution—Mr. Cossey should know his mind about the matter, and that at once. Ringing the bell, he ordered his dog cart and drove to Edward Cossey's rooms, with the full intention of giving that gentleman a very unpleasant quarter of an hour.

Mr. Cossey was in, and fearing lest he should refuse to see him, the colonel followed the servant up the stairs and entered almost as she announced his name. There was a grim and even formidable look upon his plain but manly face, and something of menace, too, in his formal and soldierly bearing; nor did his aspect soften when his eyes fell upon the full length picture of Ida over the mantelpiece.

Edward Cossey rose with astonishment and irritation, not unmixed with nervousness depicted on his face. The last person whom he wished to see and expected a visit from was Col. Quaritch, whom in his heart he held in considerable awe. Besides, he had of late received such a series of unpleasant visits that it is not wonderful that he began to dread these interviews.

"Good day," he said, coldly. "Will you be seated?"

The colonel bowed his head slightly, but he did not sit down.

"To what am I indebted for the pleasure?" began Edward Cossey, with much politeness.

"Last time I was here, Mr. Cossey," said the colonel, in his deep voice, speaking very deliberately, "I came to give an explanation; now I come to ask one."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. To come to the point, Miss de la Molle and I are attached to each other, and there has been between us an understanding that that attachment might end in marriage."

"Oh! has there?" said the younger man, calmly, with a sneer.

"Yes," answered the colonel, keeping down his rising temper as well as he could. "But now I am told, upon what appears to be good authority, that you have actually condescended to bring, directly and indirectly, pressure of a monetary sort to bear upon Miss de la Molle and her father in order to force her into a distasteful marriage with you."

"And what the devil business of yours is it, sir," asked Cossey, "what I have or have not done? Making every allowance for the disappointment of an unsuccessful suitor, for I presume that you appear in that character," again he sneered, "I ask what business is it of yours?"

"It is every business of mine, Mr. Cossey, because if Miss de la Molle is forced into this I shall lose my wife."

"Then you will certainly lose her. Do you suppose that I am going to consider you? Indeed," he went on, being now in a towering passion, "I should have thought that considering the difference between us, of age and fortune, you might find other reasons than you suggest to account for my being preferred to you, if I should be so preferred. Ladies are apt to choose the better man, you know."

"I don't quite know what you mean by the 'better man,' Mr. Cossey," said the colonel quietly. "Without wishing to make any comparisons, I may say that in birth, in breeding, perhaps even in education and the record of my life, in which at least I have not disgraced myself, I am fully your equal, though I admit that you have the advantage of me in money and in years. However, that is not the point; the point is that I have had the fortune to be preferred to you by the lady in question, and not you to me. I happen to know that you and the idea of marriage with you is as distasteful to Miss de la Molle as it is to me. This I know from her own lips. She will only marry you, if she does at all, under the direct necessity, and to save her father from the ruin you are deliberately bringing upon him."

"Well, Col. Quaritch," he answered, "have you quite done lecturing me? If you have, let me tell you, as you seem anxious to know, that if by any legal means I can marry Ida de la Molle, I certainly fully intend to marry her; and let me tell you another thing, that when once I am married to her it will be the last that you shall see of her if I can prevent it."

"Thank you for your admissions," said Harold, still more quietly. "So it seems that it is all true; it seems that you are using your wealth to harass this unfortunate gentleman and his daughter until you drive them into consenting to this marriage. That being so, I wish to tell you privately what I shall probably take some opportunity of telling you in public, namely, that a man who does such things is a cur, and worse than a cur, he is a blackguard, and you are such a man, Mr. Cossey."

Edward Cossey's face turned perfectly livid with fury, and he drew himself up as though to spring at his adversary's throat.

The colonel held up his hand. "Don't try that on with me," he said. "In the first place it is vulgar, and in the second you have only just recovered from an accident and are no match for me, though I am over forty years old. Listen: our fathers had a way of settling their troubles; I don't approve of that sort of thing as a rule, but in some cases it is salutary. If you think yourself aggrieved it does not take long to cross the water, Mr. Cossey."

Edward Cossey looked puzzled. "Do you mean to suggest that I should fight a duel with you?" he said.

"To challenge a man to fight a duel," answered the colonel, with deliberation, "is an indictable offense, therefore I make no such challenge. I have made a suggestion, and if that suggestion falls in with your views, as," and he bowed, "I hope it may, we might perhaps meet accidentally abroad in a few days' time, when we could talk this matter over further."

"I'll see you hanged first," answered Cossey. "What have I to gain by fighting you except a very good chance of being shot? I have had enough of being shot as it is, and we will play this game out upon the old lines, until I win it."

"As you like," said Harold. "I have made a suggestion to you which you do not see fit to accept. As to the end of the game, it is not finished yet, and therefore it is impossible to say who will win it. Perhaps you will be checkmated after all. In the meanwhile, allow me again to assure you that I consider you both a cur and a blackguard, and to wish you good morning." And he bowed himself out, leaving Edward Cossey in a curious condition of concentrated rage.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE COLONEL GOES TO SLEEP.

The condition of mind which could induce a peaceable, Christian natured individual, who had moreover in the course of his career been mixed up with enough bloodshed to have acquired a thorough horror of it, to offer to fight a duel is difficult to picture. Yet this condition had been reached by Harold Quaritch.

Edward Cossey had wisely enough declined to entertain the idea, but the colonel had been perfectly in earnest about it. Odd as it may appear in the latter end of this Nineteenth century, nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to put his life against that of his unworthy rival. Of course, it was foolish and wrong, but human nature is the same in all ages, and in the last extremity we fall back by instinct on those methods which men have from the beginning adopted to save themselves from intolerable wrong and dishonor, or, be it admitted, to bring the same upon others.

But Cossey utterly declined to fight. As he said he had had enough of being shot, and so there was an end of it. Indeed, in after days the colonel frequently looked back upon this episode in his career with shame, not unmingled with amusement, reflecting when he did so on the strange potency of that passion which can bring men to seriously entertain the idea of such extravagances.

Well, there was nothing more to be done. He might, it is true, have seen Ida, and working upon her love and natural inclinations, have tried to persuade her to cut the knot by marrying him off hand. Perhaps he would have succeeded, for in such affairs women are apt to find the arguments advanced by their lovers weighty and well worthy of consideration. But he was not the man to adopt such a course. He did the only thing that he could do—answered her letter by saying that what must be must be. He had learned that on the day subsequent to his interview with his rival, the squire had written to Edward Cossey, informing him that a decided answer would be given to him on Christmas day, and that thereon all vexatious proceedings on the part of that gentleman's lawyers had been stayed for the time. He could now no longer doubt what that answer would be. There was only one way out of the trouble, the way that Ida had made up her mind to adopt.

So he set to work to make his preparations for leaving Henham and this country for good and all. He wrote to land agents, and put Molehill upon their books to be sold or let on lease, and also to various influential friends to obtain introductions to the leading men in New Zealand. But these matters did not take up all his time, and the rest of it hung heavily on his hands. He moped about the place until he was tired. He tried to occupy himself in his garden, but it is