CHAPTER XIII

ABOUT ART

Edward Cossey drove from the Castle in a far from happy frame of mind. To begin with, the Squire and his condescending way of doing business irritated him very much, so much that once or twice in the course of the conversation he was within an ace of breaking the whole thing off, and only restrained himself with difficulty from doing so. As it was, notwithstanding all the sacrifices and money risks which he was undergoing to take up these mortgages, and they were very considerable even to a man of his great prospects, he felt that he had been placed in the position of a person who receives a favour rather than of a person who grants one. Moreover there was an assumption of superiority about the old man, a visible recognition of the gulf which used to be fixed between the gentleman of family and the man of business who has grown rich by trading in money and money's worth, which was the more galling because it was founded on actual fact, and Edward Cossey knew it. All his foibles and oddities notwithstanding, it would have been impossible for any person of discernment to entertain a comparison between the half-ruined Squire and the young banker, who would shortly be worth between half a million and a million sterling. The former was a representative, though a somewhat erratic one, of all that is best in the old type of Englishmen of gentle blood, which is now so rapidly vanishing, and of the class to which to a large extent this country owes her greatness. His very eccentricities were wandering lights that

showed unsuspected heights and depths in his character--love of country and his country's honour, respect for the religion of his fathers, loyalty of mind and valour for the right. Had he lived in other times, like some of the old Boisseys and de la Molles, who were at Honham before him, he would probably have died in the Crusades or at Cressy, or perhaps more uselessly, for his King at Marston Moor, or like that last but one of the true de la Molles, kneeling in the courtyard of his Castle and defying his enemies to wring his secret from him. Now few such opportunities are left to men of his stamp, and they are, perhaps as a consequence, dying out of an age which is unsuited to them, and indeed to most strong growths of individual character. It would be much easier to deal with a gentleman like the Squire of this history if we could only reach down one of those suits of armour from the walls of his vestibule, and put it on his back, and take that long two-handled sword which last flashed on Flodden Field from its resting-place beneath the clock, and at the end see him die as a loyal knight should do in the forefront of his retainers, with the old war cry of "/a Delamol--a Delamol/" upon his lips. As it is, he is an aristocratic anachronism, an entity unfitted to deal with the elements of our advanced and in some ways emasculated age. His body should have been where his heart was--in the past. What chance have such as he against the Quests of this polite era of political economy and penny papers?

No wonder that Edward Cossey felt his inferiority to this symbol and type of the things that no more are, yes even in the shadow of his

thirty thousand pounds. For here we have a different breed. Goldsmiths two centuries ago, then bankers from generation to generation, money bees seeking for wealth and counting it and hiving it from decade to decade, till at last gold became to them what honour is to the nobler stock--the pervading principle, and the clink of the guinea and the rustling of the bank note stirred their blood as the clank of armed men and the sound of the flapping banner with its three golden hawks flaming in the sun, was wont to set the hearts of the race of Boissey, of Dofferleigh and of de la Molle, beating to that tune to which England marched on to win the world.

It is a foolish and vain thing to scoff at business and those who do it in the market places, and to shout out the old war cries of our fathers, in the face of a generation which sings the song of capital, or groans in heavy labour beneath the banners of their copyrighted trade marks; and besides, who would buy our books (also copyrighted except in America) if we did? Let us rather rise up and clothe ourselves, and put a tall hat upon our heads and do homage to the new Democracy.

And yet in the depths of our hearts and the quiet of our chambers let us sometimes cry to the old days, and the old men, and the old ways of thought, let us cry "/Ave atque vale/,--Hail and farewell." Our fathers' armour hangs above the door, their portraits decorate the wall, and their fierce and half-tamed hearts moulder beneath the stones of yonder church. Hail and farewell to you, our fathers!

Perchance a man might have had worse company than he met with at your boards, and even have found it not more hard to die beneath your sword-cuts than to be gently cozened to the grave by duly qualified practitioners at two guineas a visit.

And the upshot of all this is that the Squire was not altogether wrong when he declared in the silence of /his/ chamber that Edward Cossey was not quite a gentleman. He showed it when he allowed himself to be guided by the arts of Mr. Quest into the adoption of the idea of obtaining a lien upon Ida, to be enforced if convenient. He showed it again, and what is more he committed a huge mistake, when tempted thereto by the opportunity of the moment, he made a conditional bargain with the said Ida, whereby she was placed in pledge for a sum of thirty thousand pounds, well knowing that her honour would be equal to the test, and that if convenient to him she would be ready to pay the debt. He made a huge mistake, for had he been quite a gentleman, he would have known that he could not have adopted a worse road to the affections of a lady. Had he been content to advance the money and then by-and-bye, though even that would not have been gentlemanlike, have gently let transpire what he had done at great personal expense and inconvenience, her imagination might have been touched and her gratitude would certainly have been excited. But the idea of bargaining, the idea of purchase, which after what had passed could never be put aside, would of necessity be fatal to any hope of tender feeling. Shylock might get his bond, but of his own act he had debarred himself from the possibility of ever getting more.

Now Edward Cossey was not lacking in that afterglow of refinement which is left by a course of public school and university education. No education can make a gentleman of a man who is not a gentleman at heart, for whether his station in life be that of a ploughboy or an Earl, the gentleman, like the poet, is born and not made. But it can and does if he be of an observant nature, give him a certain insight into the habits of thought and probable course of action of the members of that class to which he outwardly, and by repute, belongs. Such an insight Edward Cossey possessed, and at the present moment its possession was troubling him very much. His trading instincts, the desire bred in him to get something for his money, had led him to make the bargain, but now that it was done his better judgment rose up against it. For the truth may as well be told at once, although he would as yet scarcely acknowledge it to himself, Edward Cossey was already violently enamoured of Ida. He was by nature a passionate man, and as it chanced she had proved the magnet with power to draw his passion. But as the reader is aware, there existed another complication in his life for which he was not perhaps entirely responsible. When still quite a youth in mind, he had suddenly found himself the object of the love of a beautiful and enthralling woman, and had after a more or less severe struggle yielded to the temptation, as, out of a book, many young men would have done. Now to be the object of the violent affection of such a woman as Belle Quest is no doubt very flattering and even charming for a while. But if that affection is not returned in kind, if in short the gentleman does not

love the lady quite as warmly as she loves him, then in course of time the charm is apt to vanish and even the flattery to cease to give pleasure. Also, when as in the present case the connection is wrong in itself and universally condemned by society, the affection which can still triumph and endure on both sides must be of a very strong and lasting order. Even an unprincipled man dislikes the acting of one long lie such as an intimacy of the sort necessarily involves, and if the man happens to be rather weak than unprincipled, the dislike is apt to turn to loathing, some portion of which will certainly be reflected on to the partner of his ill-doing.

These are general principles, but the case of Edward Cossey offered no exception to them, indeed it illustrated them well. He had never been in love with Mrs. Quest; to begin with she had shown herself too much in love with him to necessitate any display of emotion on his part. Her violent and unreasoning passion wearied and alarmed him, he never knew what she would do next and was kept in a continual condition of anxiety and irritation as to what the morrow might bring forth. Too sure of her unaltering attachment to have any pretext for jealousy, he found it exceedingly irksome to be obliged to avoid giving cause for it on his side, which, however, he dreaded doing lest he should thereby bring about some overwhelming catastrophe. Mrs. Quest was, as he well knew, not a woman who would pause to consider consequences if once her passionate jealousy were really aroused. It was even doubtful if the certainty of her own ruin would check her. Her love was everything to her, it was her life, the thing she lived for, and

rather than tamely lose it, it seemed extremely probable to Edward Cossey that she would not hesitate to face shame, or even death. Indeed it was through this great passion of hers, and through it only, that he could hope to influence her. If he could persuade her to release him, by pointing out that a continuance of the intrigue must involve him in ruin of some sort, all might yet go well with him. If not his future was a dark one.

This was the state of affairs before he became attached to Ida de la Molle, after which the horizon grew blacker than ever. At first he tried to get out of the difficulty by avoiding Ida, but it did not answer. She exercised an irresistible attraction over him. Her calm and stately presence was to him what the sight of mountain snows is to one scorched by continual heat. He was weary of passionate outbursts, tears, agonies, alarms, presentiments, and all the paraphernalia of secret love. It appeared to him, looking up at the beautiful snow, that if once he could reach it life would be all sweetness and light, that there would be no more thirst, no more fear, and no more forced marches through those ill-odoured quagmires of deceit. The more he allowed his imagination to dwell upon the picture, the fiercer grew his longing to possess it. Also, he knew well enough that to marry a woman like Ida de la Molle would be the greatest blessing that could happen to him, for she would of necessity lift him up above himself. She had little money it was true, but that was a very minor matter to him, and she had birth and breeding and beauty, and a presence which commands homage. And so it came to pass that he fell deeply and yet

more deeply in love with Ida, and that as he did so his connection with Mrs. Quest (although we have seen him but yesterday offering in a passing fit of tenderness and remorse to run away with her) became more and more irksome to him. And now, as he drove leisurely back to Boisingham, he felt that he had imperilled all his hopes by a rash indulgence in his trading instincts.

Presently the road took a turn and a sight was revealed that did not tend to improve his already irritable mood. Just here the roadway was bordered by a deep bank covered with trees which sloped down to the valley of the Ell, at this time of the year looking its loveliest in the soft autumn lights. And here, seated on a bank of turf beneath the shadow of a yellowing chestnut tree, in such position as to get a view of the green valley and flashing river where cattle red and white stood chewing the still luxuriant aftermath, was none other than Ida herself, and what was more, Ida accompanied by Colonel Quaritch. They were seated on campstools, and in front of each of them was an easel. Clearly they were painting together, for as Edward gazed, the Colonel rose, came up close behind his companion's stool made a ring of his thumb and first finger, gazed critically through it at the lady's performance, then sadly shook his head and made some remark. Thereupon Ida turned round and began an animated discussion.

"Hang me," said Edward to himself, "if she has not taken up with that confounded old military frump. Painting together! Ah, I know what that means. Well, I should have thought that if there was one man more than

another whom she would have disliked, it would have been that battered-looking Colonel."

He pulled up his horse and reflected for a moment, then handing the reins to his servant, jumped out, and climbing through a gap in the fence walked up to the tree. So engrossed were they in their argument, that they neither saw nor heard him.

"It's nonsense, Colonel Quaritch, perfect nonsense, if you will forgive me for telling you so," Ida was saying with warmth. "It is all very well for you to complain that my trees are a blur, and the castle nothing but a splotch, but I am looking at the water, and if I am looking at the water, it is quite impossible that I should see the trees and the cows otherwise than I have rendered them on the canvas. True art is to paint what the painter sees and as he sees it."

Colonel Quaritch shook his head and sighed.

"The cant of the impressionist school," he said sadly; "on the contrary, the business of the artist is to paint what he knows to be there," and he gazed complacently at his own canvas, which had the appearance of a spirited drawing of a fortified place, or of the contents of a child's Noah's ark, so stiff, so solid, so formidable were its outlines, trees and animals.

Ida shrugged her shoulders, laughed merrily, and turned round to find

herself face to face with Edward Cossey. She started back, and her expression hardened--then she stretched out her hand and said, "How do you do?" in her very coldest tones.

"How do you do, Miss de la Molle?" he said, assuming as unconcerned an air as he could, and bowing stiffly to Harold Quaritch, who returned the bow and went back to his canvas, which was placed a few paces off.

"I saw you painting," went on Edward Cossey in a low tone, "so I thought I would come and tell you that I have settled the matter with Mr. de la Molle."

"Oh, indeed," answered Ida, hitting viciously at a wasp with her paint brush. "Well, I hope that you will find the investment a satisfactory one. And now, if you please, do not let us talk any more about money, because I am quite tired of the subject." Then raising her voice she went on, "Come here, Colonel Quaritch, and Mr. Cossey shall judge between us," and she pointed to her picture.

Edward glanced at the Colonel with no amiable air. "I know nothing about art," he said, "and I am afraid that I must be getting on. Good-morning," and taking off his hat to Ida, he turned and went.

"Umph," said the Colonel, looking after him with a quizzical expression, "that gentleman seems rather short in his temper. Wants knocking about the world a bit, I should say. But I beg your pardon, I

suppose that he is a friend of yours, Miss de la Molle?"

"He is an acquaintance of mine," answered Ida with emphasis.