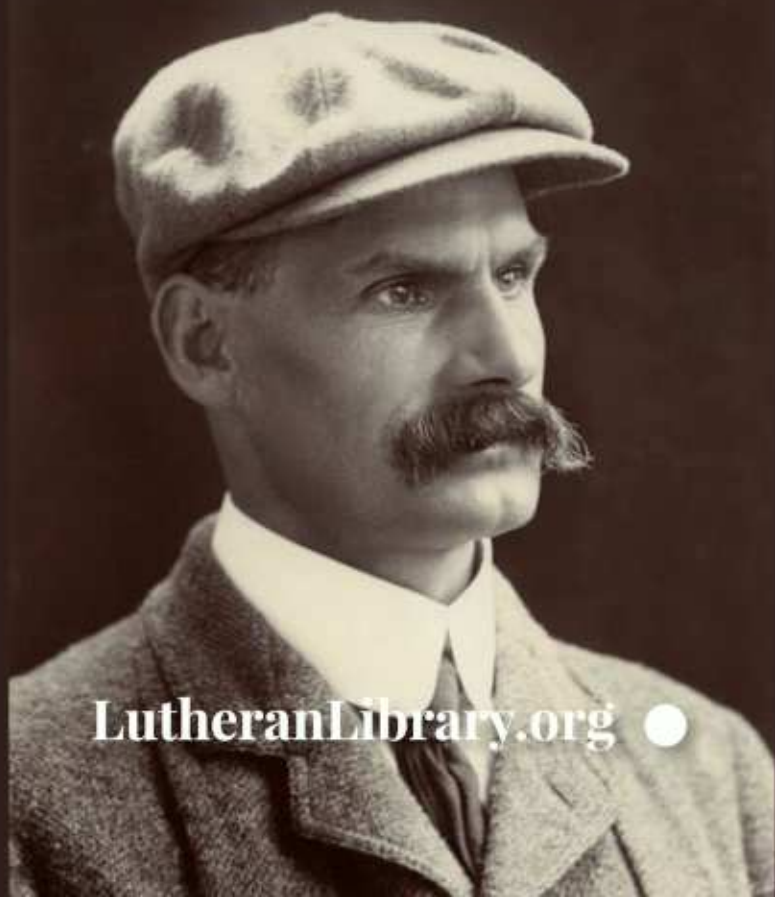


Joseph Hocking

A Strong Man's Vow



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A
Strong Man's Vow

BY

JOSEPH HOCKING

*Author of "The Jesuit," "The Romance of Michael Trewail,"
"The Woman of Babylon," "A Flame of Fire," etc.*



CASELL AND COMPANY, LTD
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne
1912

First published *February* 1907.

Reprinted 1910.

Popular Edition *May* 1909.

Reprinted June 1909, 1912.

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A STRONG MAN'S VOW

BOOK I.—THE MAN

CHAPTER I.

ROSSINI KEVERNE.

NEVER before had such a thing happened within the memory of the oldest inhabitant in Penwithen, and as a consequence the whole neighbourhood for miles around was agog with excitement. But then the circumstances were peculiar. Three generations had passed away, and no daughter had been born in Penwithen House, the home of the Earls of Cornwall. People regarded the fact somewhat superstitiously, and perhaps it was not at all wonderful that they should. For three generations, only one child had been born to be heir of the great Penwithen estates, and that child was a son. In each case he had been given the same name, Rex; and each in turn, when he entered into his possessions, had married a lady befitting his rank, and in each case one son, the one son only, had been born. But exactly seventeen years before my story opens, a daughter had been born to the Earl of Cornwall. Of course, the Earl hoped for a son as well, but his desires were not realised.

Again only one child was born, and the child was a daughter, who was named Beatrice.

The day on which she was born was the twenty-ninth of June; and when her seventeenth birthday drew near, it was decided that it should be celebrated by great rejoicings. It was arranged that there should be two days' feasting. The first day should be a feast for the people. Everyone on the Penwithen estates, young and old, rich and poor, should be invited. Every inch of the grounds should be open to the public, and all the people should be entertained as though they were kings and queens. There was not a house on the estate—and it stretched for miles around—that was left without its card, inviting the inhabitants to the great feast. Indeed, that card may still be seen in hundreds of houses, framed, and set in a prominent position. It was surmounted by the Penwithen crest, and in letters of gold beneath it was stated that Lord Penwithen requested the honour of the company of Mr. John Fluter—or some other equally undistinguished name—and family at Penwithen House, on the twenty-ninth of June, on the occasion of his daughter Beatrice's seventeenth birthday.

"We might be rail laadies an' gen'lemen," said many of the villagers, as they received it. "I 'ope 't'll be vine weather. Ef tes, we shall have a grand time."

"I do hear that the Earl es goin' to be ready fer rain," someone would reply. "People be zayin' that there's goin' to be several tents which they call markais, that'll 'ould thousands of people."

"'Ave 'ee ever seed Laady Beatrice, then?"

"Only when she was a hill maid. She must be quite a young laady now."

And so on. Young men went to Truro and St. Austell to get new clothes. Some went even so far as Plymouth, thinking by so doing they could obtain more fashionable attire. Local dressmakers were simply overwhelmed with orders for new dresses. The whole countryside was aroused, and everyone looked forward to this June day, when the lodge-gates of Penwithen would be open to them, and they would walk those three miles through woods and moorland and park, in order to reach the great house.

At length the great day arrived. The sun arose in a clear sky, and throughout the day not a speck of cloud darkened the great dome of blue. The birds sang gaily, the flowers bloomed everywhere. It seemed as though all Nature, as well as the simple villagers, had clothed herself in her most beautiful garments to celebrate the natal day of the young maid who was to be the possessor of those wide, rich domains.

The people rose early that day, and ere long the lanes for miles around were dotted with old men and maidens, young men and children, who wended their way to the one stately mansion in the district. This was in accordance with Lord Penwithen's wishes. He had given orders for a luncheon at noon, tea at five o'clock, and supper at eight. The gates were to be opened at an early hour, and no one was to be refused admittance. No one worked that day, save those whom the Earl had engaged to give pleasure to his guests. It was to be a general holiday, for all had been invited to the rejoicings.

And yet I am scarcely correct in saying this. There was one person who lived on the Penwithen estates who had been omitted. Not that he intended to stay away

on account of it. Rather he rose with the rest and made his way thitherward. The reason he had not been invited was because the Earl did not know of his existence. His name was not on the list of householders; in truth, although he had lived in the parish all his life, he was scarcely looked upon as an inhabitant.

There was nothing very peculiar about his history, and yet it may be of sufficient interest to merit my setting it forth here.

His father and mother had been drunken ne'er-do-weels. His father was a tinker, who went around mending the kettles and pans of the various cottages. He was said to be very clever at his work; but he only worked precariously, for no sooner did he earn a little money than both he and his wife went on a drinking bout, and never ceased to drink till it was gone. Report had it, moreover, that when their child was born, they did their best, by neglect and starvation, to murder him. But he was tenacious of life, and friendly cottagers, learning of his condition, gave him food.

The only home they had was a disused hut in the middle of Burgotha Wood. Granfer Flew, famous as a wizard, had built the hut; and when he died, Uzziah and Tamsin Keverne took possession of it. Before this they had slept in the open air through the summer, and in some friendly barn through the winter. They called their boy Rossini, after the great Italian lyric composer. The villagers knew nothing of Italian music, and wondered why Uzziah had called the boy by such a strange name. They did not remember, however, that Uzziah was a great lover of music, and that the one thing he loved, and which he never ceased to care for even when he was drunk, was his fiddle. He had a

fine voice, too, when he was a younger man, and when no tinkering jobs could be obtained, earned a few coppers by singing at public-houses, and sometimes at farmhouses during Christmas time.

When the boy Rossini, or Zinney, as the people called him, was about five years old, his father died. It did not make much difference to the lad, except that he had only one parent to cuff him and otherwise maltreat him, instead of two. He still lived at Maji-pies, the hut in Burgotha Wood, and, as usual, spent most of his time alone.

After his father's death, his mother, in order to get a living, hoed turnips and picked stones in farmers' fields. She was also employed in gathering corn during harvest. During the winter it was a mystery how she obtained food ; but obtain it she did.

People took but little notice either of Tamsin or Rossini Keverne. They simply regarded her as a thriftless, drunken woman, who lived in a lonely hut with a strange, unlovely boy.

When Rossini was six years old, he went to work in the farmers' fields and in this way earned his living. He was a sullen, silent boy, never taking part in the games of the other boys in the district. Perhaps the reason for this was that he was regarded as having, as the villagers called it, "a screw loose." By this they meant that he did not possess all his faculties. He was very ignorant. He did not know how to read or write ; books he knew nothing of. His knowledge consisted of how to manage horses and tend farm-cattle. His clothes generally consisted of cast-off rags, and perhaps this caused him to hide himself as much as possible from his fellow-creatures.

By the time he was fifteen he had attained to a man's stature, but he was loosely built and walked in a shuffling, shambling sort of way. There was a furtive look in his eye, too, as though he were afraid of something. When working in the fields, he was heard mumbling to himself, but he never took part in the conversation of the farm-men.

Soon after he was fifteen, his mother died. She had gone to the Whitsun fair at Truro, and while there became drunk. On her way home, a distance of several miles, she had been run over by a conveyance and had been fatally injured. Thus Rossini was left alone in the world—a poor, ignorant youth, without friends, without money, and without a home, save the hut which Granfer Flew, the wizard, had built.

His mother's death made but little difference to him. If it affected him at all, it was for the better. For as the boy grew old enough to earn a little money Tamsin grew less and less willing to earn any for herself. She saw to it that all the boy's earnings came into her hands, and most of the money found its way afterwards into the till of some beerhouse.

Tamsin Keverne was buried by the parish, and after the funeral, attended only by Rossini, the boy found his way to the hut in the middle of the woods, where for a long time he sat like one dazed. At night, however, someone passing the hut heard the sound of a fiddle, and remarked afterwards that the boy had inherited his father's love for the instrument.

From fifteen to nineteen, Rossini continued to work as before. He grew from a tall, ungainly boy into a more ungainly young man. He walked with a slouch and stooped awkwardly. He did not seem to know

what to do with his long limbs. He had the stature of a giant; nevertheless he was still the sport of every lad in the countryside. Sometimes during harvest he had been led to wrestle with other farm-lads, but there was not one of them but could throw Rossini. He was perfectly aware that he was regarded, according to the parlance of the countryside, as a "half-baked droozle-head." But this awaked no resentment in his heart. It was what he had become accustomed to. The only effect it seemed to have upon him was to make him more sullen and morose.

At nineteen, therefore, he had no hopes, no ambition. In a dim way he had heard of the great life of the world, but it meant nothing to him. He had no definite thoughts for the future. If he thought at all, it was that he would one day be able to build a haystack or a corn-mow, and perhaps plough as straight a furrow as the best hind in the parish.

No one troubled about him. He worked for a small wage and wore the cast-off clothes of others. He never went to church or school, and although he had managed to learn to read by looking at bills of sales of farm-stock and the like, he could not write his own name.

This was Rossini Keverne, then. A great, raw, ignorant youth of nineteen. Loose-jointed, ungainly, and not over clean. He was not ill-featured, but he was made to appear so because of his sullen ways, and perhaps also by the great shock of unkempt, black hair that covered his head. He was a wastrel, into whose life no noble force had ever come. No thought of love ever came into his heart. How could it? There was not a maid in the parish, however low she might be, but looked with scorn upon him, and he knew it.

What spare hours he had, he spent in roaming around the fields setting rabbit and bird snares, or sitting alone in his hut, watching the flames from the wood fire ascending the chimney. No friends, no companions even, had he. No books, no love, no God. No tenderness had ever come into his life, no ambition had ever stirred him, no hope had ever cheered him.

When Rossini heard that Lord Penwithen, Earl of Cornwall, was to give a great feast in honour of Lady Beatrice's seventeenth birthday, he determined that he would be present. He did not expect one of those golden-lettered cards, neither did he get one, but he determined to go. Presently he heard of lads he knew getting measured for new clothes, and then Rossini counted his money and wondered if he also could get some. He went to William Kurgy, the one-legged tailor, who worked at people's houses for eighteenpence a day and his food.

"Mr. Kurgy," he said, "make me some clothes."

"To be sure," said William. "What would 'ee like, Zinney?"

"Don't know. I'm going to the feast—I want to look fitty."

The tailor laughed. "Oa, iss, to be sure. You do want to get a sweetheart!"

"I doan't!" said Rossini, his eyes flashing angrily; "but I want to go and zee everything."

"Look here," said William, who had bought a piece of corduroy cheap. "Now, wudden this do?"

Rossini looked at the piece of stuff attentively. He seemed to be in doubt. Presently he said—

"That would do for the trousers, but not for the waistcoat and the jacket."

"Oa, you d' want to be fine, I zee," said the tailor. "You d' want a cloth jacket."

Rossini had no very clear idea as to what this meant, but he said "Yes."

"All right," said the tailor. "Now lev me misure 'ee."

"No, not yet," said the youth. "'Ow much will it cost?"

"Oa, tha's oal right. You can pay me so much a week."

"Shaan't!" said Rossini. "Tell me."

"I c'n tell 'ee better when I've finished," said the tailor.

"If you doan't tell me now, I sh'll go to St. Austell," said Rossini doggedly. "Besides, I want to see the cloth."

William Kurgy looked at the boy wonderingly. He was more difficult to deal with than he had imagined. At length, however, all was arranged: the cloth was selected and the price fixed.

When the clothes were ready, Rossini carried them away to his hut, and having bolted the door, he clothed himself in his new attire. No society belle ever paid so much attention to her ball-dress as Rossini paid to that suit of clothes. He had no looking-glass, but he went out to the river which ran through the wood, and there examined himself. At first a feeling of joy passed through his heart, but presently he felt dissatisfied. He went back to the hut, put the clothes carefully away, and went out into the fields.

It was now evening, and he saw Charlie Sloggett on his way to see his sweetheart.

Now, Charlie Sloggett was famous for one thing.

This was a necktie. It shone with all the colours of the rainbow and was regarded as a marvel. There was not a farm-servant in the parish but envied him that necktie. It was commonly reported that his present sweetheart would never have taken notice of him but for this wonderful adornment.

When Rossini saw Charlie, he stopped him.

"Laive me look at yer necktie," he said.

Charlie, nothing loth, stopped before him. "Shall I taake en off?" he asked.

Rossini nodded his head, whereupon Charlie took off the wondrous thing and placed it in Rossini's hand. After that, Sloggett enlarged upon the uses of a shirt-collar. When Rossini reached his dwelling-place again, he counted the money that remained. He had paid William Kurgy, and wondered what a new shirt, a collar, and new pair of boots would cost. His mother had been dead four years, and during that time he had saved his earnings.

The next evening he walked to St. Austell. It was the first time he had ever been so far, and he wondered at the sights he saw. He wore his old clothes, and people pitied the ungainly figure in rags. When he reached home that night, he examined his purchases carefully.

On the morning of the twenty-ninth of June, Rossini clothed himself in his new attire. He put on his corduroy trousers, his coat and waistcoat of rough, black cloth, and his new, hobnailed shoes. Had he known, he looked but little better than in his rags, for these new clothes only accentuated his uncouth, awkward figure. He also tied around his neck a brightly coloured necktie. He had discarded a linen collar from the first.

In his purchases he had been unable to afford a hat. But that did not trouble him. He put on the greasy thing he generally wore, but decided he would do better without it. He was accustomed to go bareheaded. One thing his new clothes did for him, however. It led him to go to the river and have a bath on the morning of that June day. When he had dried his head, his shock of tangled hair looked better. It formed itself into a great mass of curls which glistened in the sunlight.

Rossini was early at Penwithen Park, and watched the incoming crowds with great eagerness. So intent was he that by and by he forgot his own new attire, nor did he dream of the strange figure he made. If he had come in his rags, he would have attracted less attention than now. His trousers, long as were his legs, were too long. His coat hung awkwardly around his body.

Presently the multitude gathered close to the great house. The Earl and his daughter were to appear. Rossini was among the foremost.

"She's seventeen to-day, is she?" he said to himself. "Well, I'm nineteen to-day. I've got a birthday as well as she."

Although he failed to stand upright, he was head and shoulders above the crowd. Not only did he see everything, everyone saw him. Many jeered and teased him about his new clothes, but he said nothing in reply. Some, however, said there was the gleam of a devil in his great, black eyes.

A great shout went up! Lord Penwithen came out of the front door, and by his Lordship's side was Lady Beatrice. She was a beautiful fair-haired

girl, with finely formed features and deep blue eyes. She was but a child, although rather tall, and she looked at the crowd of her father's tenants and dependants with a child's wonder and delight. Perhaps there was a certain haughtiness and pride in her demeanour and carriage, but that was scarcely to be wondered at. Her eyes laughed, her face was radiant with smiles, her golden hair gleamed in the sunshine. It was her seventeenth birthday, and the world was a Paradise.

Rossini looked at her with wide-staring eyes and open mouth. To him this was no maiden of flesh and blood. It was an angel he saw. He would not have been surprised if she had grown wings and soared heavenwards. He had forgotten the crowd, forgotten the singing of the birds, forgotten the far-stretching park dotted with trees, and the great woods beyond—forgotten everything, in fact. He simply stood and gazed at the face of the maiden and wondered. She was the revelation of a new life, of new hope, of new beauty. Nothing so wonderful had ever existed before, nothing would ever be so wonderful again. This lady of high degree was an angel.

The crowd shouted and cheered. The musicians burst forth with a strain of gladsome melody, the bells at the village church rang out joyously, but Rossini heard nothing of it.

Unknowingly, unconsciously, he crept nearer and nearer to where the girl stood by her father's side, until he came within a yard of where she stood. She had been looking the other way, but now she turned and saw him, and their eyes met. Rossini felt his knees trembling. He would gladly have fallen down and worshipped her; but as he looked, he saw her face change.

He saw that she regarded him with loathing and fear. She drew back as one might draw back from a serpent or a mad dog.

"Oh, dad!" she said, "how did that terrible looking creature come here?"

Rossini heard. For a moment his head whirled and he thought he would have fallen. But he recovered himself. Into his heart came a feeling such as he had never known, never dreamt of before. Worship, wonder, hatred, revenge, murder, love—all were in his heart at that moment.

"Tell him to go away, dad," said the girl. "He is simply awful!"

But the Earl had no need to tell Rossini to go away. The youth turned on his heel and slouched away like some gaunt animal. His lips trembled, his features were contorted, his eyes burned with passion.

He said no word, but in his heart he registered a vow, so wild, so impossible, that even to record it would seem like madness. Yet away in the silent woods he brooded over it and swore that he would never rest until what he had vowed should come to pass.

CHAPTER II.

HUGH HENWOOD.

THE great rejoicings passed away at Penwithen without a single discord in the music. The great dome of sky remained blue, the birds sang blithely; Nature had done her utmost for the heiress of Penwithen. The simple villagers felt this, and because it is easy to laugh in the sunshine, the woods echoed with their merriment. Lord Penwithen was perfect as a host, while Lady Beatrice charmed everyone with her winsomeness and her gaiety. There was only one cloud in the sky of her life that day. She regretted that she had spoken harshly about the strange-looking youth who had stood before her. Had she had time for thought, she would have repressed her feeling of revulsion, and have tried to look as kindly upon him as she did upon all the rest. But the haunted look in his eyes had frightened her, and then, with the thoughtlessness of youth, she had uttered the words of which she afterwards repented. Still, before the day was at an end, and she had seen no more of him, she had well-nigh forgotten him.

The rejoicings were continued until late at night, and long after sunset the boys and girls enjoyed the games to the music which echoed across hill and dale. It was a never-to-be-forgotten day. Long after Lady Beatrice had grown to womanhood, and had taken her place in the great world of which they knew nothing, youths and maidens related incidents of that glad time.

Rossini remembered it, too, only in a different way. He never spoke of it, and no one troubled about him. Why should they? Who would trouble about "Zinney Vearn?" But few noticed his absence from the festive scene, and those who did only laughed at the strange figure which he had cut.

Nevertheless, that June day formed an epoch in his life. For the first time he realised that there was a world of which he knew nothing. Instinctively he felt that there were forces in life unrealised by him—that there was a great world, far away, and different from that in which he lived and moved and had his being.

In a way he did not resent the treatment he had received. He had been accustomed to it from his earliest childhood; all the same, this new vision of life had caused him to take the vow to which I have referred. She, Lady Beatrice, beautiful as an angel, possessor of unknown wealth, and living in an enchanted land, had shrunk back from him as though he were a reptile. This was what haunted him, and he brooded over it through the long summer day, heeding not the pangs of hunger nor the loneliness of his life.

When he got back to his hut at Maji-pies, he took off his new clothes, and put them in a box—not carefully, but angrily, as though he hated them.

"I'll never wear 'em again," he said, "never, never—that is, until——" But he did not finish the sentence.

After having put on his old, torn clothes, he seemed to feel better. He ate his supper, and then sat down on a low stool and began to brood again. Evidently, however, his mind refused to do the bidding of his will, for he cried out passionately: "I doan't zee 'ow I c'n do et."

After this he went to a cupboard and took therefrom

his fiddle. This he played hour after hour. He knew nothing of the *technique* of music; nevertheless, the sounds he brought forth from it were wonderful. At first they were wild and turbulent. They suggested the blackness of night and the anger of storm. But presently his passion died out. Untutored as he was, he made the instrument tell of babbling brooks and singing birds. One could fancy the summer wind playing with the flowers, or the dew falling on new-mown hay.

A strange new light came into his eyes, too. It was evident that his sluggish brain had been quickened, that the new force which had come into his life had in some way aroused dormant faculties.

"Tha's ev et," he said at length; "tha's what the Cheap Jack zed at hes snow in Zummercourt Fair. 'Knowledge is power,' he zed. 'Tis true, and I doan't knaw nothin'. No, nothin' t'oal."

He went out into the night. Above, the moon sailed in a cloudless sky. Pale streaks of light reached him through the leafy branches of the trees. Away in the far distance were the woods which surrounded Penwithen Hall, near him the river murmured its way down the valley. The scene he saw looked like fairyland. Leaves and grass and flowers glistened in the pale light of the moon. The summer wind made music as it sighed its way across hill and dale.

"No, I doan't knaw nothin' t'oal," he repeated; "but I will—I will."

He went into the hut again and then lay down on his bed of dried ferns. It was the only bed he knew of, and at that time he wanted nothing better. Ere long he fell asleep, to dream wondrous dreams of the coming time.

"Well, Zinney," said Charlie Sloggett, the owner of the wonderful necktie, and servant on the farm where Rossini worked, "you ded'n git a maid yesterday?"

This was on the day following Lady Beatrice's birthday.

"No."

"I ded. She's 'ousemaid up to Passon Childs'. Nancy es goin' to ax 'er missis to laive me come to zee 'er every Tuesday night, and to taake 'er 'ome from church every Sunday."

"What about the Passon?" asked Rossini. "Will 'e like et?"

"Oa, 'e waan't care; 'e's allays weth hes books."

"Books?" said Rossini, looking at Charlie with great eagerness.

"Iss. Ded'n 'ee knaw? Passon Childs do write books. 'E do knaw French and all they furrin languages."

"What do 'ee main?" asked Rossini.

"Why, doan't 'ee knaw?" said Charlie. "Ovver in France they do talk another language. How the children d' git on I caan't maake out, not knawin' a word of English."

Rossini was silent a minute; then he nodded his head.

"Iss; Passon Childs do knaw more than anybody fer miles round," went on Charlie, "altho' I d' hear that the new minister what 'ave come to Polgooth Independent Chapel do knaw so much as Passon Childs; but I doan't believe et. Nancy do zay zo, too."

"'Ave 'ee ever spoke to Passon Childs?" asked Rossini.

"No. 'E's ter'ble proud, Passon es, ter'ble. 'E's a

great gen'leman, you know—nearly as big a gen'leman as Loard Penwithen. No; 'e wudden spaik to me."

"Ah!" said Rossini.

After that Charlie related his experiences during the previous day, laying great stress upon his "cutting out" another youth who had been courting Nancy Penvean, the housemaid at the Rectory. But Rossini paid but little heed to him. He hoed row after row of turnips without speaking. Now and then he stopped, and seemed to be thinking, and then went on with his work again.

When his day's work was over, Rossini started for Polgooth. On his way he passed Penwithen Rectory and looked at it longingly. He stopped at the gate, and seemed on the point of going in; but just then a horse and phaeton came up. A stately gentleman in clerical attire got out and looked at Rossini, who stood staring at him.

"Well, my lad, what do you want?" he asked.

"Nothin'," replied Rossini, and walked on.

"No, 'tes no use axin' 'e," mused Rossini; "besides, I doan't want nobody to know."

Polgooth was more than three miles away, but he heeded not the distance. No thought of tiredness came to him. As he crossed Douglas Downs on his way thither, he stood and gazed around him. A look of utter despair came into his eyes, and he burst out sobbing.

"I caan't do et," he sobbed; "I bean't no use t'oal."

But he mastered himself presently and trudged on. As he came to Polgooth village he stopped.

"How can I vind un, I wonder?" he said, and looked helplessly around him. "That do look like a chapel; p'raps that be et."

He hurried forward until he came to a fairly large

building. On the notice-board were written the words: "Independent Chapel." Following this, the hours of service were set down, and then, at the bottom of the board, the name and address of the minister.

"Rev. Hugh Henwood, M.A., The Lilacs," he read. "'Hugh Henwood.' Iss, it do zound oal right; but what do they letters at the end of 'is name main? 'M.A.'—that might main middle-aged, but then I shudden think 'e'd any need to 'ave that prented."

There was a kind of fascination in the name to Rossini. He tried to imagine what kind of a man he was. He thought of him as the man who preached at the chapel, and although he knew nothing about chapels, he had a vague idea that such a man must be very grave and very wise. He fancied, moreover, that he must be middle-aged—not pompous and dignified like Parson Childs, but a man of severe countenance and iron-grey hair.

His heart failed him as he came to this conclusion. How could he go to such a man and tell him what was in his heart? No, no; he must think of some other way. And yet to whom could he go? He was afraid of the Penwithen schoolmaster. He had known of boys who dreaded to go to school and had often played the truant because of the master's love for the use of the cane. Moreover, the stories he had heard about him drove away all possibility of seeking his help. Either he must seek help from the Rev. Hugh Henwood, M.A., or he must fail in the vow he had made.

"After oal, 'e caan't 'urt me," he decided at last, "and 'e caan't more than order me off 'ome. I'll go."

He had no difficulty in finding The Lilacs, for Polgooth was only a village of a few hundred inhabitants,

and ere long he stood before a comfortable-looking house which stood in a garden that was ablaze with flowers.

His knees trembled as he knocked at the door, and his heart beat so loudly that he was afraid he would be unable to speak. He expected Mr. Henwood to appear in person, and, in spite of his fears, he was disappointed when a middle-aged and somewhat sour-faced woman appeared at the door.

"What do 'ee want?"

"Es this the Independent praicher's 'ouse?" asked Rossini.

"Iss; but 'e ed'n in. What do 'ee want?"

"I want to zee un."

"What for?"

Rossini hesitated a second.

"Shaan't tell 'ee. Ted'n your bisness."

"Go 'way," said the woman. "Mr. Henwood doan't want no tramps nor beggars."

"I bean't a tramp. I bean't a beggar," replied Rossini.

"Well, 'e ed'n in. Go 'way, or I shall call the police."

"Who be you?" asked Rossini, doggedly.

"Never mind who I be. Mr. Henwood ed'n in."

"When will 'e be in?"

"Shaan't tell 'ee. Go 'way."

"You waan't tell me when 'e'll be in?"

"No; and ef you bean't gone to wance, I'll fetch the police."

Rossini laughed quietly. "I did zee Blewitt on Douglas Downs," he said; "'e was on his way to Leven-water."

"Go 'way, I tell 'ee."

"I shaan't."

The woman looked at him angrily.

"Ef you waan't tell me when 'e'll be in," continued Rossini, "I'll zet down 'ere in the gard'n an' wait till 'e do cum."

"Go 'way, I tell 'ee," said the woman in a louder voice, but at that moment both caught the sound of the click of the garden gate.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Rosecarrow?"

"This 'ere tramp do zay 'e waan't go 'way till 'e've zeed you, Mr. Henwood."

"I bean't no tramp," said Rossini, looking up into the face of the new-comer.

His heart beat light as he saw him. Here was no severe, middle-aged man, but a young man only a few years older than himself—a young man with bright, laughing eyes, clean-shaven cheeks, and a well-shaped head covered with crisp, brown hair. His light, springy step, his cheery voice, and his merry eyes drove away the fear in Rossini's heart.

"I bean't no tramp," he repeated.

"Well, you want to see me?"

"Ef you be the Rev. Hugh Henwood, M.A., I do," said Rossini slowly.

"Well, I am," said the young man, with a laugh. "Now, what do you want?"

"Tell she to go 'way," said Rossini, nodding to Mrs. Rosecarrow, "an' I will."

"Ef ever I did 'ear sich imperance!" remarked that lady, but she did not move an inch.

The young minister understood the situation at a glance. The youth had something to tell him, and his housekeeper determined to know what it was.

"Come into my study," said Mr. Henwood, turning to the lad.

"What! will 'ee taake that great, hulkin' good-fer-nothin' into yer study, Mr. Henwood? Surely you never will. I clained et only to-day."

"I be so clain as you be," retorted Rossini. "I baaved in the river only yesterday."

There was something in the boy's eyes which appealed to Mr. Henwood, and he determined to have his way. Besides, he found that the time had come for him to assert his rights. He had come to Polgooth only three months before, and had engaged Mrs. Rosecarrow as his housekeeper immediately after his arrival. That lady had not been in the house a week before it was evident that she determined to take entire charge, not only of the young minister's domestic arrangements, but of the young minister himself. She took it upon herself to tell him what time he ought to rise in the morning, and what time he should go to bed at night. She also regarded it as part of her duty to decide what callers Mr. Henwood should receive.

"I bean't goin' to taake such trouble to kip the plaace like a new pin, ef sich as he c'n come in and make et bais'ly," she remarked testily, still standing in the doorway.

"Then I must get someone else who will, Mrs. Rosecarrow," said the young man, with a laugh. "Will you come this way?" he said, turning to Rossini.

Perhaps Mr. Henwood might not have been so set upon getting Rossini into the house but for his determination to let his housekeeper see once and for all that he intended to be master in his own house. As it was, he led the way into the passage, while Mrs. Rose-

carrow made room for them, scarce knowing what she was doing.

The sun was scarcely set, and the light was yet bright in the young minister's study. Rossini gazed around him in wonder. Two of the walls of the little room were fairly covered with books. As ministers' libraries go, it was not large, for Mr. Henwood was a young man, and so had not amassed a large number of books; but to the boy it was very wonderful.

"Will you sit down?"

He said this with hesitation, for Rossini's clothes were very ragged and not over-clean.

The lad sat down.

"Now tell me what you want."

"I'm tould you be a great schullard."

The young man laughed. "Well, what then?" he asked.

"I want to learn things."

"What things?"

"Things what'll give me power."

"What do you mean?"

"I once 'eard a Cheap Jack at Zummercourt Fair say that knowledge was power. I want knowledge."

There was a grim strength in the boy's voice that interested Hugh Henwood. He looked at him again. His clothes were poor and ragged, and he spoke like one ignorant and uncared for. Still, there was strength in his face, there was something out of the ordinary in his great, black eyes. His head was large and well-shaped.

"How much do you know now?"

"Nothin' t'oyal."

"Not how to read and write?"

"To read, but not to write."

"And yet you want to learn now?"

Rossini nodded.

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"And yet you do not know how to write? When did this desire for knowledge come to you?"

"Last night."

"Last night! Why?"

"I doan't want to tell 'ee that. Besides, that woman is hearkenin' at the door."

"Oh, you lyin' good-for-nothin'!" remarked Mrs. Rosecarrow, from the passage.

Hugh Henwood laughed. He was becoming more and more interested. The lad might be dressed like a tramp, but he was sure he was not one.

"Where have you come from?"

"The other side of Penwithen."

"That's a good walk—between three and four miles. You must be hungry. Are you?"

"I ain't 'ad nothin' to ait since twelve o'clock. I doan't want nothin'!"

"Oh, yes you do." Hugh Henwood opened the door and went into the passage where Mrs. Rosecarrow stood.

"Will you please bring in some supper, Mrs. Rosecarrow?" he said. "I will have the chicken and ham that was left from lunch. I wish plates for two and coffee for two. After you have brought the things in, I shall not need you any more, so you can go to bed when you like. There will not be the slightest need for you to wait in the passage."

"What do 'ee main?"

"Just what I say," he said, with a smile. "Be as quick as you can with the supper."

Mrs. Rosecarrow did as she was told. She realised for the first time that her position as housekeeper was not so secure as she had thought. She discovered, moreover, that, in spite of Mr. Henwood's pleasant ways, he must be obeyed.

"Now then," said Hugh, when he returned, "you have not told me your name yet."

Rossini told him, and as one thing led to another, before Mrs. Rosecarrow appeared with the supper the lad had related to him the incidents of his early life.

"There," said Mrs. Rosecarrow, as she finished laying the table, "there's your supper, sir."

"Thank you," said Hugh, with a smile.

Mrs. Rosecarrow determined to strike another blow for victory.

"I thought, sir, when, on account of my husband's death, I was forced to taake a place, that you, bein' a minister, would be a gentleman."

"Yes," said Hugh, with a smile.

"I've been a member of the Independent Chapel for 'ears," went on the irate housekeeper. "You be a young man, and can aisy lose the good opinion people 'ave of 'ee; so ef you'll taake a bit of advice fram wann who was a member of the Independent Chapel afore anybody knawed anything about you, I should say, taake care of the comp'ny you kip."

"Thank you, Mrs. Rosecarrow," replied Hugh; "but as I did not engage you as my adviser, but as my housekeeper, will you kindly keep to your duties? Moreover, will you please remember that I have a fatal objection to my housekeeper remaining in the passage?"

"I c'n stand a grait dail," remarked Mrs. Rosecarrow, "but——"

"You can't stand me, eh? Well, I think a month's notice was the time you mentioned. Very well, Mrs. Dain will be glad to look after me when you are obliged to leave. Shall I take the notice from to-night or to-morrow? Please think about it. Good-night; I want to be alone now."

Mrs. Rosecarrow left the room only partly vanquished. "Who'd 'a' thought he'd be sa stubborn?" she said when she entered her kitchen. "To-morrow I'll ax un, with tears in my eyes, ef that's the way a minister of the Gospel shud trait a widda. Ef that waan't conquer 'im, I sh'll have to give in, for I'm 'terminated that Sarah Dain shaan't come 'ere. I wonder ef I durst hearken at the door?" But remembering the look in the young minister's eyes, she remained where she was.

Meanwhile Hugh and Rossini went on with their conversation.

"You do not wish to tell me why you determined to obtain knowledge."

"No," replied Rossini slowly. "No, I shaan't tell nobody that, but I want to know things. Knowledge is power."

"Do you think you can learn?"

The lad's eyes flashed brightly. "Iss," he said slowly; "I can do anything I set my mind to."

"But supposing I were to do what you ask? That is, suppose I were to teach you——"

"All you d' know," broke in Rossini.

"Yes, well, all I know—what then?"

"Then," said Rossini slowly—"but look 'ere. Laast winter we 'ad the thrashin'-machine, and it got into the

wrong plaace. The men haived and haived, and cudden move un, for et was tons weight. Then a man what knawed, put a thing called a screw-jack under the axle, and in a minute 'e'd got un in the right plaace. Well, things be like that great thrashin'-machine. I can't move 'em. But ef I do knaw—then I shall 'ave the screw-jack."

The young minister saw he possessed the elements of thinking. After all, the massive head, untutored though the lad was, meant something.

"But having the screw-jack, what would you do with the threshing-machine?" he said.

"I caan't tell 'ee that," said Rossini.

"Look here," said Hugh Henwood presently. "I'll give you a trial. I'm going to set you some lessons—hard ones—real hard ones. You must come to me in a week's time, and then I shall know whether it will be worth while for me to trouble any more about you."

An hour later, the lad was walking across Douglas Downs with a parcel of books under his arm.

"I'll learn every bit of 'em, every bit—iss, and more than 'e've told me—by this day week," he said grimly.

CHAPTER III.

THE VISION OF A NEW WORLD.

THERE could be no doubt about it, Rossini was aroused. Thoughts to which he had been a stranger filled his mind. Feelings which he had never experienced before possessed him. Already the world was bigger. His conversation with Hugh Henwood had enlarged his horizon. He could not tell why, but his conversation with an educated man made life different. For the first time, the lad felt, although in a very indistinct way, that two people might live in the same parish, and yet be in different worlds—that life depended upon what a man was, rather than where he lived. He thought of those rows of books with wonder; he tried to fancy the great college in the university town, where the minister had gained his learning.

“Knowledge is power,” he repeated again and again. “Everybody have laughed at me; but I’ll let ’em knaw.”

He stopped in the road and seemed in deep thought.

“What’s that I’ve ’eerd?” he said presently. “’Twdn’ the Cheap Jack that zed et, but I’m sure I’ve ’eerd et. ’Twas summin’ about a still tongue and a wise ’ead. Lev me zee, now.”

But at that moment his thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a human voice. At first, Rossini thought that some men were quarrelling, for he heard loud and angry words. He noticed, however, that only one voice

broke the stillness of the night, and on looking he saw only one figure, standing out clearly on the waste land. As the figure drew nearer, the voice became clearer; moreover, it rose higher and became more angry. Oaths and curses, wild denunciations and terrible threatenings followed one another in quick succession. He saw that the figure waved its arms, as though in a mad fury, and stamped savagely on the road.

"Who can et be?" thought Rossini. "'T must be zomebody from Bodmin 'sylum."

But as only one man appeared, he was not afraid, and he waited quietly for him to come up.

Suddenly the voice ceased. Evidently the man had seen him.

"Who be you?" said the voice presently.

"Who be you?" retorted Rossini.

"Oa, tes you, Zinney! I be ter'ble glad."

"Why?"

"I was 'fraid 'twas zomebody that wud go gabbin' bout me. Ded 'ee 'ear me, Zinney?"

"Oa, tes you, Siah Yelland. Iss, I 'eerd 'ee."

"Zinney, let me tell 'ee summin'. I've bin tryin' an experiment"

"What?" asked Rossini.

"I was curious to knaw what my tongue wud zay ef I was to laive un go. I knawed what a ter'ble chap fer gab 'e was, but I zed: 'There, now, tongue, zay all you can zay.'"

"Well?" asked Rossini.

"Well, as I was comin' cross Dougas Downs, and there be no houses here, I just let my tongue go. You 'eerd me."

Rossini nodded.

"I sh'll never do et again. I was fair shamed, I was for sure. The things my ould tongue ded zay! Iss, I was fair shamed. I had to stop un. The things was too ter'ble."

Rossini laughed quietly.

"Take a word of advice from me, Zinney," continued Josiah. "Never laive yer tongue go; there's no knawin' what he'll zay. Kip un in check. I tell 'ee I be fair shamed of mine."

"I'll remember," said the youth.

"'A still tongue makes a wise head'—remember that," went on Josiah, who was noted as the most fluent talker in the parish.

The boy would have made a remark not very complimentary to his companion, but for the fact that he had just uttered the proverb which he had been trying to remember.

"Rossini," went on Josiah, "you'll never tell nobody what you've 'eerd my ould tongue zay?"

"People would purtly laugh," replied the youth.

"Iss, iss, I do knaw et. Tha's why I doan't want 'ee to zay nothin'. Doan't 'ee, now, doan't 'ee."

"I doan't zee why," remarked Rossini.

"Ef you do——" said Josiah, savagely, and he lifted his hand; but here he stopped. He was but a little man, who earned a living by odd jobs of painting and cobbling, and felt instinctively that he was no match for the large-boned youth who stood before him.

"Zinney," he continued, "I've 'eerd that you be fond of the fiddle, and that you do play yer father's. Look 'ere, ef you'll promise not to tell, I'll taich 'ee the fiddle. I'll taich 'ee the notes. I'll taich 'ee to play so that you can earn a livin' by fiddlin'."

The boy's heart beat with joy. Although Josiah Yelland was nearly as much of a wastrel as himself, and was regarded as fair sport for everyone in the parish, he could play the fiddle divinely. It was the one thing Rossini had envied in him, for he loved his fiddle.

"How many times will 'ee come a week?"

"What! ovver to Maji-pies?"

"Iss."

"You've never seed Granfer Flew's ghoast, 'ave 'ee?"

"No."

"Ef I do come, you'll always come back with me to Trewalzick Gate, waan't 'ee?"

"Iss."

"Then I'll come twice a week—but you'll 'ave to give me my supper."

"Oal right."

"Then that's settled. When shall we begin?"

"A week to-morrow night," replied Rossini, after a moment's hesitation.

"Tha's right, then. Never laive yer tongue go, Zinney. You'll be shamed ov un ef you do. 'A still tongue makes a wise head.'"

The little man turned into a path which led to Five Lanes, where he lived, while Rossini trudged quietly back to his hut in the woods.

"Knowledge is power," he said as he walked. "I doan't zee what the knowledge of music will do for me. But I do mind what the young praicher zed: 'No knowledge comes amiss.' Besides, I *do* love the fiddle. But I waan't zay nothin' to nobody. 'A still tongue makes a wise head!'"

When Rossini reached his hut that night, he lit a candle, and then turned to the books and the papers which the young minister had given him. He worked away at them for an hour or two, and then he laughed.

"I c'n do 'em aisy," he said. "Iss, and I'll do 'em so well that when I do go to zee Master Henwood next week, he'll begin to taich me French."

He stopped a minute and he considered.

"He zed there was a God above," he said slowly, "and that I must ax He to 'elp me." His eyes grew large with wonder. "God," he said quietly—"He made the sun and the stars and the say and things. He can't waste Hes time over me, but I'll ax Him to bless Maaster Henwood." So he knelt down. "Great God," he said, "You that made everything and can do anything, please to give Maaster Henwood anything he d' ax for."

After that Rossini went to bed.

'During the rest of the week, Josiah Liddicoat remarked that Zinney Vearn 'was funnier than ever. "He do mumble to hisself like a dog dreamin'," he said to Charlie Sloggett, of necktie fame; "but ef you do ax un anything, he doan't seem to 'ear 'ee."

"He waan't say nothin' to me, neither," remarked Charlie; "but while we was 'awin' turmutts yesterday, I 'eerd un zayin': 'William the Conqueror comed over in 1066,' and 'the Spanish Armada comed in 1575.' What et do main I doan't know. 'E must be goin' maazed."

"'E edn' sich a fool as he d' look," remarked Josiah Liddicoat, the farmer, sententiously.

The truth was that Rossini was up each morning at four o'clock, and worked at his lessons until seven.

After he had finished his day's work at half-past five, he betook himself to his books again, and worked at them until far into the night. Throughout the day he kept on repeating to himself what he had learnt during the mornings and evenings.

His power of memory was prodigious. No sooner had he read anything than he knew it; and when a fact was once in his mind, it seemed as though it were written on tablets of brass. His mind, which had for such a long time lain dormant, now sprang into unusual activity. He seemed to know nothing of weariness, and no sort of knowledge seemed to come amiss to him. History, geography, arithmetic, his mind fastened upon each with the same eagerness, and before the end of the week came he had learnt all the lessons Mr. Henwood had set him, and a great many more. But he spoke to no one concerning what he was doing, although more than once he laughed quietly at the thought of what Mr. Henwood would say when he appeared before him.

When he came to Polgooth the second time, Mr. Henwood expected him, while the housekeeper admitted him without a word. He still wore his old clothes. He had been on the point of putting on those he had worn on Lady Beatrice's birthday; but when he looked at them, he threw them aside in anger. "I'll go to St. Austell and git some new wauns as soon as I've got enough money," he said; "but I'll never wear they again till——" And then he relapsed into gloomy silence.

Hugh Henwood had looked forward to Rossini's coming. He thought much about the wild-eyed lad through the week, and wondered what was in his

mind. "He may be but a dullard and a wastrel, after all," he said to himself. Nevertheless, he did not believe himself to be mistaken in his estimate of the youth's character.

"Well, you've come?" remarked the young minister, as he appeared at the door.

Rossini nodded.

"That's right. I'll have a cup of tea brought in; and after that I'll see how you've learnt what I told you."

"No," replied Rossini, "I doan't want no tay. I want to zay what I've larned. You didn't b'lieve I cud do what you towld me. Now hearken."

"All right," said Hugh Henwood. "See, I've prepared a list of questions on the tasks I set you. Mind, I shall be a very strict teacher."

"Go on," said Rossini; "ax me oal you mind to."

Half an hour later Hugh Henwood sat back in his study chair amazed. The lad's mind, unprepared for learning as it was, had absorbed knowledge like a sponge absorbs water. Of course, the lessons he had set him were elementary and superficial, but the boy had already gone deeper; his mind had been seeking for principles. He had not only learned facts; he had been seeking a reason for those facts.

"Be 'ee vexed weth me?" said Rossini, noticing the look on the young minister's face.

"Vexed! Why should I be vexed?"

"'Cause I ain't larned more." Although the lad had been pleased with himself on his way thither, his knowledge seemed as nothing now he stood in the presence of one who knew so much.

"Learned more!" said Hugh Henwood, with a

laugh. "The miracle to me is how you have learned so much."

"I've pleased 'ee, then?"

"Pleased me! I've been thinking what you can know at the end of a year if you continue to learn at such a rate."

"I will, I will!" said Rossini eagerly, breaking through the reserve he had determined to maintain. "I'll work 'arder, I'll larn more—I will, I will!"

His black eyes burned red, his nostrils dilated.

"Well, we'll see," said Hugh, becoming more guarded. "Now that I can see what you are able to do, I must arrange for some method in your learning. We must begin from the beginning, and lay a good foundation."

"I do zee what you do main," replied the boy. "When we ded buld a new barn, we 'ad to zee that the foundations was all right. Ef we 'adn', the plaace wud 'a' tumbled down."

"Exactly," replied the minister. He looked again at the ungainly, ragged youth and wondered. Here was a strong nature newly born, a great mind just sprung into life. What had caused the change? He opened his mouth to ask him, but refrained. No; if the lad had a secret, let him keep it. Perhaps the time would come when a deeper and greater life would be born, and then he would tell him. At present, however, the lad's reserve should be respected. Still, there were certain things he must say.

"You want to be a gentleman, Rossini?" he said presently.

"A gentleman! 'Ow can I be? I ain't got no money."

Then Hugh Henwood uttered some very commonplace truths, which, however, gave new thoughts to his listener. He told him what a gentleman was. He pictured him as kind and courteous and considerate—one who was gentle in deed and pure in heart. Hugh Henwood was a lover of Chaucer, and he pictured such a knight as the old poet would have pictured had he lived in these modern days.

“You do main,” said Rossini at length, “that I doan’t talk fitty nor look fitty.”

I need not relate what Hugh Henwood said. Enough that he opened the lad’s mind to a new vision of life.

That night, as Rossini again tramped across Dougas Downs, he thought of all he had heard. Reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography, grammar, were not everything; even those foreign languages of which Mr. Henwood had spoken were not enough. There was something else. He knew now that it was not the young minister’s knowledge that made him different from the men who worked with him on the farm. There was that indefinable something which he could not put into words. That also was why the sight of Lady Beatrice made him think of another world than that in which he lived. It was not because of what she knew; it was because of what she was.

Not that this was very real to Rossini; rather it was all a long way off. Nevertheless, these new forces had touched his life, even while he determined to devote his whole strength to the amassing of knowledge rather than to those other things which he but dimly comprehended

"I made un glaze (stare) at what I larned," he laughed; "but lev un wait a bit. Laive me 'ave a chance. I'll laive un knaw."

He was as good as his word. His strides in knowledge were simply prodigious. Each week as he presented himself at the study of the young minister, the man who had obtained an honourable place in his college was amazed at the amount of knowledge Rossini absorbed. As the weeks passed by, moreover, he grew more and more interested in him. He was no common farm lad. The young minister realised that if his rugged and uncouth but powerful mind were trained and developed, he could leave an impress on the life of his age. It was true that the obscure part of Cornwall in which he lived offered him but little opportunity for the development of his powers; but he was young, and the great world was before him.

As the months went on, however, Hugh Henwood saw that the bent of Rossini's mind tended in a direction which was to him a sealed book. The young minister was a lover of the arts rather than of the sciences. The poetry of Homer he rejoiced in with a great joy; but in the realm of mechanics he was utterly at sea. He could never be a wrangler because he had no love for mathematics. While his pupil remained in the world of history, literature, and language, he was able to help him and inspire him; but as one subject led to another, and he found that Rossini revealed a love for mechanics, he felt himself to be but a poor teacher.

Rossini saw this, too, and while he did not neglect the studies which the young minister loved, he knew

that if he was to make advances in those subjects which fascinated him, he must go to another teacher than Hugh Henwood.

After he had been paying his weekly visit to Polgooth for about nine months, the boy, while on a visit to St. Austell in order to get some new clothes, entered the market-house, where he saw a second-hand bookstall. Eagerly he read the titles of the few books which were placed on the stall. He was about to turn away, when his eyes fell upon a volume the title of which had been erased from the cover. On opening it, he read the words: "Engineering for Beginners." He was about to ask the bookseller how much he would sell it for, when he saw the price on the fly-leaf. It was ninepence, and then Rossini reflected that after paying for the clothes, for which he had been so long saving, he possessed only sixpence in the world.

He threw down the book with a look of despair on his face.

"That book isn't in your line, I expect," said the bookseller.

"Why do 'ee think so?" said Rossini.

"Because you threw it down as though you were vexed. But look here, I've got some fine story books. Here are some of Sir Walter Scott's that I can sell for threepence each."

The boy shook his head. "I read some of they," he said.

"Read Sir Walter Scott?"

Rossini nodded. "I don't think so much of them," he remarked.

"Why?" asked the bookseller.

"They don't lead nowhere," replied Rossini. "They make you forget everything else for a time. They make you feel as though you were one of those old men who wore iron round their body and carried a sword. But when you've finished, you find you are not. You've jist got your work to do, and you don't know any better how to do it."

The bookseller opened his eyes with wonder at this unusually long speech of what he took for some wagoner's boy who had found his way to town. It is true he spoke in the dialect of the county, although not so strongly as when he had first visited Hugh Henwood; but his words showed that he was no common country lout.

"And you want to get somewhere?" remarked the bookseller.

Rossini was silent.

"That book you've thrown down leads somewhere," he went on.

"Perhaps," replied Rossini.

"Then why don't you buy it?"

"Too much money."

"What! ninepence too much? Lots of people spend as much as that in tobacco every week."

"I never do."

"What would you do with this book if you got it?"

He picked up the book again and turned over the leaves. He glanced at the diagrams, the definitions, and the explanations.

"What would I do with it?"

"Yes. That is a book which tells about engineering—how the idea grew. It also gives sketches of

the lives of great engineers. Without knowing the things which are explained there, we could not have railways or steamships or machinery. What would you do with it?"

"I'd larn every word of et in a week," he said savagely. "I'd git to knaw the mainin' of they hard words and they pickshers. I tell 'ee oal that's in that book should be mine, in my 'ead here. I would know et oal, oal!"

He forgot himself as he spoke, and unconsciously relapsed into the Cornish dialect, from which he had been breaking himself little by little. He spoke rather to himself than to the bookseller, else he would not have poured forth what was in his heart.

"Ninepence isn't much."

"I've only got sixpence."

"Have you been out of work?"

He shook his head.

"Then how have you spent your money?"

Rossini was silent.

"Here, I'll give you the book for nothing," said the bookseller.

"No," replied the boy. "Look 'ere, would you lose money ef you took sixpence?"

"Why?"

"'Cos 'tis oal I've got. Ef you like to take sixpence, I'll buy it; but not ef 't cost 'ee more'n that."

"Here, take the book," said the bookseller.

"You waan't be chatin' yerself?"

"No," replied the bookseller, with a laugh. He had bought a lot of books, this included, at a sale, for a mere song.

Rossini counted out his sixpence in coppers, placed

them on the board where the bookseller had piled his wares, then he grasped the volume eagerly.

"When you come to St. Austell again, tell me how you get on with it," said the bookseller.

"All right," said Rossini, as he walked away.

Many long miles lay between him and his hut at Maji-pies, but the distance did not trouble him; he was dreaming of the treasure he possessed. It was the first book he had ever bought. During the past nine months the young minister had lent him all the books he needed, and while he prized these eagerly, they were as nothing to this book, which was his very own. The wind blew stormily—for the time was the end of March, and the spring was late in coming—but he never heeded the cold, biting wind or the driving sleet.

"I've got candles," he muttered, "and plenty of furze and wood to make a good fire. To-morrow is Sunday, too, so I shall have nothin' much to do. So much the better; I'll be learnin' all the day."

His excitement was almost feverish as he entered the hut, and his hands trembled as he lit the candle. A few minutes later, a bright wood fire burnt in the open chimney of the hut, while on the rickety table by his side burnt a farthing candle. Chair he had none. A three-legged stool was all there was to sit on, but this fact did not trouble him; he had known nothing else all his life. Besides, he had forgotten everything else when he began to read the book.

The volume opened with short sketches of the lives of eminent engineers—Stephenson, Watt, Davy, Brunel. These sketches were not well written, they had no literary merit whatever; but they gave out-

lines of the lives of these great engineers, and, bare as these outlines were, they transported him from his surroundings as truly as the fabled carpet of the "Arabian Nights" transported all those who sat on it. He had been engrossed in Sir Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe," which the young minister had lent him, and which he deemed necessary to give him a larger outlook on life and to make him feel the romance of history. But "Ivanhoe" did not possess as great a fascination for Rossini as the lives of these men. Especially was this true of Stephenson and Watt. The well-worn stories of the early lives of these men were unknown to him. He read them for the first time with all the greed and hunger of a starving man.

"This is what I wanted!" he cried, with flashing eyes. "I'm glad of all I've larned from Mr. Henwood—but for that I shudden be able to understand this; but this is the rail thing. I see the meanin' of the screw-jack more than ever now."

The candle burnt low in the socket of the iron candlestick, spluttered, and went out. Rossini lit another. The wood in the chimney died out, but Rossini heeded not this. He dug deep into the wealth which the book offered him. When he turned from the lives of the engineers to the great principles which formed the basis for their work, he was for a time dismayed and confounded. But he never thought of giving up his task as too hard. Hour after hour he worked, until both body and brain refused to respond any longer to the bidding of his will.

"A few hours' sleep," he said, "then I'll go at et again. 'Tis Sunday to-morrow, and there's ardlly nothin' to do."

When morning dawned, however, and he looked out of the hut to see the wild clouds flying across the sky, he remembered something that Hugh Henwood had said to him, and he reflected.

"He zaid Sunday was a day of rest," he mused. "He zaid that a man had a soul to feed as well as a body—that this life was only just a little bit of life."

He lit his fire and cooked his breakfast. After he had eaten it he began thinking again. Ought he to go to church, as the young minister had more than once suggested to him? Then his eye fell upon the book he had bought, and he forgot everything else. He read throughout the whole day, scarcely allowing himself time to eat his food.

When the next Friday evening came, he walked towards the minister's house with a strange, haunted look in his eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

ROSSINI'S SECOND MEETING WITH LADY BEATRICE.

"MR. HENWOOD," said Rossini, when they were alone together in the minister's study, "why do you stay 'ere at Polgooth?"

"Why do you ask, Rossini?"

"Because people be talkin' 'bout et. They do say that you be a great scholar, and that you be thrawin' your talents away. They say that you be cut out for one of thews great churches in one of the big towns. I can see it, too. They doan't understand 'ee, and you be thrawin' away your learnin' and your talents."

"I came here because I felt it was my duty to come."

"Duty?" repeated Rossini.

"Yes, duty," replied Henwood. "A man must do what he thinks best with the talents God has given him."

"I see," said Rossini, with a far-away look in his eyes.

"You see," said the young minister, "it was only a few months ago that I left college. I knew nothing of the world. I had no experience of the life of men. So I thought I would begin in an obscure place and I would seek to study the ways of the common people. If God calls me to a larger sphere, I shall go. When I left college, I had several calls. This was the poorest and the smallest. I came here. After a few months it is possible I may remove."

"Where?"

"I don't know. But I don't think my time has been wasted."

"No," said Rossini, "you've been new life to me."

"Perhaps that was the reason God sent me here."

The lad was silent for a few minutes, then he burst forth—

"Have I made progress?"

"Progress!" and Hugh Henwood laughed.

"Don't laugh at me," said Rossini.

"Laugh at you!" said Henwood. "Laugh at you! You are a marvel to me. When you came here a few months ago, you were——"

"No better than the cows I drove to field," suggested Rossini.

"I don't say that; but as you confessed, you knew nothing. While now——"

"Yes, now?" said the lad eagerly. "Be 'ee pleased with me, Mr. Henwood?"

Here he lapsed a little into the Cornish dialect; but during the last few weeks he had spoken correctly when he was with the young minister.

"Pleased! There never was such a pupil. You've been learning nine months, and yet you know more than most men would have known if they had given nine years to study."

Rossini's eyes shone with pride.

"Thank you, Mr. Henwood," he said. "You've made me live in a new world."

Henwood looked at the lad proudly. There was certainly a wondrous change in his appearance. For the first time, he wore the new clothes he had obtained from St. Austell. A fashionable tailor would have laughed at

them; but compared with the rags he wore when he had first visited the young minister, or even those which William Kurgý had made for him to wear on Lady Beatrice's birthday, they were quite presentable. For the first time, Hugh Henwood realised that Rossini would become a distinguished-looking man. He carried himself erectly and had lost most of his ungainliness. The face which a few months before had been sullen, and almost repulsive, had wondrously improved. He was still far from what might be called good-looking; but his head was well shaped, while his features suggested strength, determination, and daring. Purpose was beginning to reveal itself in his physical form. When attired in his old farm clothes, he unconsciously moved in the old way; but clad decently, he was changed. He walked with decision, he lifted his head, and squared his broad shoulders as if by instinct. He was not yet twenty, and if he were true to the powers which God had given him, he would, by the time he was five-and-twenty, be unrecognisable by those who had only known him as a youth.

"I'm going to leave Penwithen," he said suddenly.

Hugh Henwood was prepared for this. He had no knowledge of what was in Rossini's mind, but he felt sure the lad would tire of farm-work.

"When?" he asked.

"Sunday."

"Why?"

"My quarter-day is up to-morrow. I shall get my wages then. Josiah Liddicoat do owe me two pound ten. He'll pay me at five o'clock to-morrow night. Sunday morning I shall start for Plymouth."

"Why Plymouth?"

"There's a new railway making near there. They are advertising for men."

He drew a copy of the *West Briton* from his pocket and showed the advertisement to Hugh.

"You'll get a job as a navvy?"

"At first."

"And afterwards?"

"We shall see," and Rossini's eyes became hard.

"What put that in your mind?"

"This."

He took from his pocket the book he had bought the previous Saturday. Hugh glanced at it quickly. He read Rossini's mind in a moment.

"You mean to be an engineer?"

"I mean to work on those lines," he said quietly.

"And your education?"

"I shall go to schools in Plymouth," he replied. "I read in the paper that there are all sorts of night-classes held there. Classes for everything. Classes for chemistry, mechanics in all departments, languages, and literature."

He uttered the words with diffidence, but as one who knew of what he was talking. Nine months before, he knew nothing of what these things meant; but during those nine months he had, as Hugh Henwood said, learnt more than most would have learned in nine years.

"And you go on Sunday?"

Rossini nodded.

"How? By train?"

"I shall walk. I can easily do it in a day. It is fifty miles odd. Twelve hours, at four miles an hour, and I shall be nearly there. I shall start at four o'clock in

the morning ; and I shall have very little to carry," he added grimly.

"You don't know Plymouth, of course?"

Rossini shook his head.

"That doan't matter," he replied, lapsing into Cornish again. "I sh'll git there 'bout six in the ev'nin', and I can git lodge aisy. Ef I caan't, I doan't mind sleepin' out. Then I can be at the new railway early Monday."

"And you'll not forget what I told you?"

"I sh'll forgit nothin' you've tould me. And I sh'll work from mornin' till night. I sh'll waaste no time. I must git knowledge. I shall never do what I've made up my mind to do else," and at these words Rossini's eyes burned as if with anger.

"I wasn't thinking of that altogether," said Henwood.

"What, then?"

"A man's more than an animal," said Hugh, "more than a thinking machine, more than a working, money-making machine. A man's a man with the breath of God in him. You'll never forget that. Life would be a poor business if he lived only for fifty or sixty or seventy years. Man has for ever."

Rossini sat looking at the minister, but he did not speak.

"You've read the New Testament that I gave you?" said the minister.

"I've had no time," said Rossini; "ther've bin too many things to learn."

"Then you've missed the chief learning. There's more wisdom in the New Testament than in all the other books I lent you."

"What?" he asked eagerly.

"You have a memory like a vice," said Hugh, "therefore I've only need to repeat two passages just once, for you to carry them in your mind. The first is this: 'A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth'; the other contains the same meaning; 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'"

"I think I see what you mean," said Rossini.

"I mean that if a man cultivates his mind and gains position and honour and wealth, but does not cultivate the highest part of his being, he has made a miserable mess of his life," said Hugh.

"That's worth thinking about," said Rossini. "Who said the words you repeated just now?"

"The greatest Teacher the world has ever known. I want you to promise me something."

"I'll promise 'ee anything—*anything*, Mr. Henwood!" said Rossini passionately.

"Then I want you to read the New Testament through once every year."

"Yes, I'll do that. Anything else?"

"Ask God to help you and guide you aright."

"Very well, I'll do that too, although I see no use in it."

"Why?"

"What can the great God, who made all the stars and the sun and the sea and the mountains, care about me?"

"The New Testament will teach you. But you promise?"

"Yes, I'll promise," and then he repeated the two passages from the New Testament which Hugh had

quoted. "Ther's a wonderful mainin' in it, after all," he said. "Good night, Mr. Henwood."

"Let me make you a present before you go," said Hugh. "If I'd known the drift of your mind, I would have given it to you before." He went to his bookshelves and took therefrom two books. They were both by Samuel Smiles: one was "Self Help," and the other contained the lives of some famous engineers. He wrote Rossini's name in each of them.

"God bless you, Rossini!" he said, as he gave him the books. "If ever you need my help, be sure to write me."

Rossini grasped his hand and looked steadily into the young minister's face. He tried to speak, and failed. Tears welled up into his eyes, and a great sob came into his throat. His body shook like an aspen leaf.

"I love 'ee, love 'ee, Maaster Henwood," he said passionately, and again lapsing into broad Cornish. "I'd do anything for 'ee. I ain't a-prayed for myself, but I've always prayed for you. I—I allays will. And, and —zumtime I'll, I'll——" But he did not finish the sentence. He was unable. "God bless *you*, sur!" he cried, and left the house without another word.

On the Sunday night following, as Hugh Henwood looked over his congregation, he saw Rossini. He seemed to be paying but little attention during the singing of the hymns or the reading of the lessons; but he never took his eyes from the preacher during the sermon.

When the service was over, Hugh Henwood tried to get to him and speak to him, but he was unable. Before he reached the door, Rossini was gone. Nevertheless, a pleased look was in the minister's eyes.

"He's not commenced his journey on a Sunday, after all," he said to himself; but he did not know that it was Rossini's love for him, rather than because of any religious feeling, that kept him in Penwithen a day longer than he had intended to stay. And yet, perhaps, I am wrong, after all. There was something religious in his action. It was love for a man who had made him think of the true meaning of manhood.

By six o'clock the following morning Rossini was several miles on his way towards Plymouth. He had bidden "Good-bye" to the only home he had ever known before dawn that morning. Moreover, the parting was not without pain. He left but little behind. Only a three-legged stool, a rickety table, a bed of ferns, a frying-pan, a kettle, a plate, a cup, a spoon, two knives, a saucepan, a brandis,* and a few other simple things. Yet it gave him pain to leave them. They had been used by his father and mother; and although his feelings towards his parents were not tender, he could not help thinking of them kindly. Besides, the lonely hut in the middle of the wood was home to him. There he had lived his life, there he had made most of his resolves. He had been quiet and unmolested there. Other boys had been afraid to follow him there, because the place had the reputation of being haunted. He did not fear anyone else coming there to live, for that reason. The hut which had been the home of a wizard, and which was said to be haunted by Granfer Flew, would be shunned like a pestilence.

"Maybe I shall come and stay here again sometime," he said to himself. "It'll be still my home. I've made

* A triangular piece of iron, supported by three legs, on which kettles and frying-pans are placed over an open fire.

the roof watertight, and the place'll stand for years. But I must go 'way now. P'raps when I return again, I sh'll be zomebody. P'raps the people'll wonder. P'raps, p'raps——" and then he shut his lips with a snap, while his eyes became hard and angry. The thought of Lady Beatrice's words burnt in his heart even yet.

The package he carried was larger than he imagined. It contained the new suit of clothes he had just bought, and the other suit which William Kurgy had made for him, these and one or two other articles of attire; besides the three books which Mr. Henwood had given him. "They'll be heavy," he said, as he placed the New Testament with the two volumes of Smiles, "but I'll never part wi' they, never."

But that was not all. Besides the package was his fiddle. This was enclosed in a somewhat battered case, but he handled it gently. "I caan't go without she," he reflected.

The package containing his clothes and books was wrapped in a large handkerchief; this he carried over his shoulder by means of a stout stick, his fiddle he carried in his hand. He wore a suit of working clothes which he had bought a few weeks before, and which he had carefully brushed. His heavy, hobnailed boots he had washed and greased on the Saturday night before.

Mile after mile he tramped, taking long, vigorous strides. There was nothing shuffling or slouching in his walk now. Determination was in every step he took, the light of resolve shone in his eyes. By means of a map which he had borrowed from Charlie Sloggett, of necktie fame, he studied the road carefully. Charlie wondered what need he had of this map, and asked him

repeatedly what he wanted it for, but Rossini never told him.

"You d' zeem defferent from what you did, Zinney," remarked Charlie. "Anybody might think you'd got a maid."

"Well, I aan't," replied Rossini. "Thank you for the map. I'll let you 'ave it again to-morrow."

"Ther ed'n another in the parish," remarked Charlie proudly. "My 'ome es up to Linkenhome, and I went to Liskeard and bought et when I got this plaace. I gived a shellen for't. I vound my way here by it."

This map, Rossini, as I said, had studied carefully, and thus he had no difficulty about the road he should take. After two hours' tramp he found himself at St. Austell. From there he took the road to Lostwithiel. Here he obtained some food and then trudged on to Liskeard. By this time he was somewhat footsore and weary; but after a rest of a few minutes at a little inn he started again.

"I made up my mind to get to Plymouth to-night," he said grimly to himself, "and get there I will."

He spoke to no one, save when once or twice he was in doubt as to which road to take, and then he spoke as few words as possible. More than one turned to have a second look at him; there was something in his appearance which attracted attention. His figure was still gaunt and somewhat ungainly; but it was not of that which people thought. It was the long, determined strides he took, and the look of resolution in his eyes.

Strong as he was, however, he was very weary when at length he entered Plymouth. It was quite dark, and the lights of the busy town were a revelation to him. Tired as he was, he would have liked to have sauntered

along the well-lit streets, with their gaily dressed shop windows and their rush of human life; but he reflected that he must find a place to sleep, and that he must be up betimes in the morning.

"Lodgin's? Oh, iss, I can d'rect 'ee to lodgin's," said a policeman to whom he spoke. "Do 'ee want 'em for long?"

"Dunnaw," he said. "I've come to look for work."

"Oh, I zee. I'll tell 'ee what to do. Join the Army."

"What do you mean? Be a sodger?"

"Yes, tha's what I main. You'll be took aisy. And sodgerin' es a aisy life when ther's no war."

"There's a new railway close by here, isn't there?"

"Iss, but that do main 'ard work."

"I'd rather work 'ard," replied Rossini.

"Oh, plaise yerself. Ere, I can taak 'ee to a plaace to lodge. I've just finished for to-day."

And so the friendly policeman obtained a supper and a bed for him for the night, Rossini determining as he lay down to rest that he'd be up by dawn in the morning. But in this he failed. Whether he was over-tired, or whether it was the comfort of a bed, which, poor though it was, was a luxury to him, he slept on until nine the next morning.

"A day lost, I'm 'fraid," he said, as he ate his breakfast; "but there, I must make the best of it."

By twelve o'clock he was at the new railway, and was employed without question. No one asked him whence he had come or whither he was going. He was young and looked strong, and that was all that was needed. Work happened to be plentiful at this time, and the contractor was anxious to get the work done with

all speed. But even Rossini's heart sank as he saw the kind of work he had to do, and the men with whom he had to work. He had dreamed of an occupation whereby he might be able to add to his knowledge ; but as far as he could see, nothing was expected of him but to throw rubbish into a barrow, wheel it to a tip, and then come back again. How could he become an engineer by such means? Still, as he reflected, he knew practically nothing of railway construction, and he had obtained work close to Plymouth, where he would be able to continue his education. His study of the lives of Stephenson and Watt had revealed to him how little he knew and how much he had to learn.

"George Stephenson and James Watt began at the bottom," he said to himself, "well, so be I."

He started to work that same afternoon, and did the drudgery of a navvy with the same firm determination that he had worked at the lessons Mr. Henwood had set him, the "ganger" (foreman) remarking that he was "a great lerrupin' chap, that could take his place with the best of 'em." When the day's work was over, he hurried back to Plymouth, and having partaken of his evening meal and changed his clothes, he made his way to the technical school of which the young minister had told him.

Almost unconsciously he kept repeating the words which had come to him that night on which he had first visited the minister: "Knowledge is power"; and "A still tongue maketh a wise head."

The teachers in the technical school were not long in realising that their new pupil was of no common description. His prodigious powers of memory, and the ease with which he grasped the principles of mechanics,

astonished them. And this was not altogether because of the talents with which Nature had endowed him, but because of the eagerness with which he threw himself into his work. He did not seem to know the meaning of weariness. Hard as was his work on the railway, he entered upon his studies in the evenings as though he had been resting all day. As a consequence, his progress was abnormal. He outstripped students who had been studying all their lives.

He was no favourite with the gang of men with whom he worked. He never laughed at their obscene jokes, he never entered into their conversation, he never drank with them. And he was always to be depended on. He was never away from his work of a Monday morning, which was a very common occurrence among the rest of the men; moreover, drudgery as his work was, no one could help realising that he did it with more intelligence than others. Easy as it would have been to lapse into the coarse language of the men among whom he worked, he was very careful about his speech. So marked, indeed, was the difference between him and the others that presently stories got to be afloat about him. Some said one thing, while some said another; but as personal character was not much troubled about among them, little notice was taken. There seemed little or no chance of promotion; nevertheless, little by little he realised that he was selected for work of a special nature.

Still, months passed away, and he seemed to have made no headway. He still continued his studies, at nights, but by day he remained a labourer on the railway.

"I'm not getting on," he said again and again. "I'm

nearly one and twenty now, and yet I'm only a navy. Will my chance ever come? 'Knowledge is power.' And yet I d' know a hundred times more about railways than either the ganger or the foreman, while here I am working for a pound a week."

Already his weekly wages, which at first appeared wealth to him, seemed contemptible. A few days in a big town had opened his eyes concerning money. He realised that wealth, like everything else, was relative.

"Dr. Smiles said that the chance always comes to the man who is ready," he thought, after a hard day's work. He had been employed to wait upon some iron-workers who were engaged in throwing a bridge across a deep ravine. More than once it had occurred to him that the working engineers were clumsy and ignorant. They seemed to work according to the rule-of-thumb, rather than according to scientific methods. They obeyed the chief engineer's instructions unintelligently. They did not seem to grasp the thoughts which had been translated to the plans by which they worked. At this Rossini grew impatient; he felt sure he saw what was in the engineer's mind, that he understood the principles on which he worked. He had now been several months in Plymouth, and during the whole of that time had been studying under able teachers. He had worked at the practical side of bridge-building while on the railway, while studying theories at the technical school, and, as his teacher had said repeatedly, the progress he had made was simply astounding. Thus the knowledge which Rossini had obtained made him impatient at the clumsy, unscientific methods of the working engineers. But he dared not speak. He was only a labourer. The foreman had promoted him from the work of a navy to

that of a labourer for the working engineers; but he was still a labourer, and if he dared to express his views, he would be told in no very polite language to do as he was bidden and to hold his tongue.

"Will my chance ever come?" he said impatiently. "It is all very well for Dr. Smiles to say that it always comes to a man who is ready; that is because of the lives of the engineers he wrote about. But what about those who have lived and died unknown? There may have been hundreds who knew as much as the great men whose names have been put into the books, but they've never had the chance. Oh, if I only had the chance!"

He trudged through the streets of Plymouth towards his lodgings, heedless of everything which took place around him. Presently he stopped and gazed into space.

"I must make my chance," he said. "I must make it; yes, and I will, too."

He clenched his fist as he spoke, and struck as if at some imaginary enemy. He had no idea of what he was doing—had no thought, indeed, of where he was. He was brought back to reality, however, by the fact that his fist had come into contact with something, and by an angry voice near him.

"What do you mean, fellow? Are you mad?"

He looked up, and then the blood rushed madly into his face. Before him stood Lord Penwithen and Lady Beatrice.

"Forgive me," he said hoarsely. "I was—that is, I didn't know what I was doing!"

He rushed away and lost himself among the crowd. "I never thought I should see her like that," he said.

“What must she think of me? I wonder if she recognised me?”

When he reached his lodgings, he went to his bedroom and sat alone for a long time in silence. “But I will make my chance!” he cried presently.

Even then the chance he sought was near to him. It was to come to him the next day, in fact.

CHAPTER V.

ROSSINI'S CHANCE.

THE next morning Rossini found his way to the bridge which was being thrown across the ravine. The bridge was of steel construction, owing to the fact that the ravine was too wide to span by means of a stone arch. The chief engineer had designed what he believed would create an epoch in the engineering world. A suspension bridge which should be rigid and of great strength, was at the same time to be remarkable for the smallness of its cost, its endurance, and for the elegance of its appearance. Rossini had seen the working drawings a hundred times while waiting on the mechanics, and he was sure that he understood them. He saw the thought of the inventor, and grasped the principles on which he worked. Again and again he had in his lonely hours reproduced them on tracing-paper. He seemed to know every joint, every screw in the construction. He saw the central idea in the engineer's mind, too, and he had himself worked it out again and again.

He made his way to the works with more eagerness than usual, for the chief engineer was that day to personally superintend the most important phase of the construction. Moreover, he had heard that several railway experts, as well as some of the directors of the company, were to be present. The contractor had promised a certain section of the railway to be ready

on a given date, and the fulfilment of his promise largely depended on the completion of the bridge on which they were engaged. The railway company, moreover, was exceedingly anxious that the piece of line should be ready, owing to heavy responsibilities in connection with an industry in the neighbourhood.

"Who'd have thought I should have seen her?" thought the young man, as he made his way towards the bridge. "I don't think she recognised me, for there was a laugh in her eyes. Oh, she is beautiful! She is not altered a bit. She looks a child still, although she's more than nineteen now. What did she think of me, I wonder?"

He stopped in the road and looked at his coarse working clothes.

"She must have thought I was a drunken navvy," he went on. "Just a drunken navvy. It's a good job I rushed away, or Lord Penwithen would have brought me up for assault."

He could not help laughing. After all, the thing was ludicrous. He, a labourer on the railway, had, like Alnaschar, of "Arabian Nights" fame, been day-dreaming, and in his vehemence and absentmindedness had actually struck an English peer.

His thoughts were diverted from this channel immediately afterwards, however, for on arriving at the works he saw that great consternation prevailed. He heard whispers to the effect that the chief engineer had a dangerous attack of typhoid fever, that he was unconscious, and would probably remain so for days to come.

These whispers were soon confirmed. The contractor arrived a little later, looking disturbed and

anxious, while, when the railway experts and directors arrived, impatience almost amounting to anger was expressed.

Rossini saw them gather together and converse anxiously.

"But you have the plans, the working drawings," he heard one say. "What can you want more?"

"Yes," was the reply, "we have the working drawings; but Mr. Groster never told us the principle upon which he worked. He said he would superintend this part of the construction himself. You see, his idea is new in bridge-building, and he was anxious to keep it a secret until the thing was manifest in the actual structure."

"But do you mean to say that you have had these drawings for all this length of time, and yet not got hold of his idea?"

At this there was silence on the part of the working engineers.

"The delay will mean thousands of pounds," said someone who was evidently in high authority. "Mr. Groster is ill with typhoid. He has a bad attack. The doctors say it must be many weeks before he can attend to his work again, even if ever he does. This will mean that the whole of our plans will be disarranged, contracts will have to be cancelled, and Heaven only knows what!"

A look of chagrin and dismay settled on the group of faces.

"It is absurd!" said a pompous, choleric-looking man. "The chief engineer has never told his thoughts to his subordinates, while they have not had the brains to grasp it from the working drawings!"

Therefore we shall either have to sacrifice all the money we have spent on this bridge, and have drawings for an entirely new bridge, or we shall have to let the work stand idle until Mr. Groster is well enough to superintend it. This may be months—months which will mean the loss of many thousands of pounds. If I professed to be an engineer, I'd be an engineer!" he added angrily.

"Will you kindly look at the plans we have?" said one. "You will see then how difficult it is to understand Mr. Groster's idea. As you know, he kept his main thought a secret; and but for your absolute confidence in his genius and his fame as an engineer, you would not have accepted his conditions. This bridge has been talked about all over the country, and experts of all sorts have been speculating about his new principle of construction."

Almost unconsciously Rossini drew near to the group of anxious men who pored eagerly over the diagrams which had been prepared. He saw that one after another they examined the plans and then came away nonplussed.

"The shareholders will howl us down at the next meeting," he heard one say. "They will call us madmen and fools."

"But what can we do?" said another. "The man did not mean to have typhoid; he cannot help that."

"Yes; but we need not have given way to his quixotic ideas. That's the worst of having to do with geniuses."

"Can we not obtain the services of an eminent engineer who will work out his principle?" said another.

"But who would do it? There's not an engineer who would accept the responsibility. One would say that Groster was mad when he schemed it, and another would introduce something of his own. Surely there was never such a state of things known since the first railway was made."

Still Rossini drew nearer step by step. His eyes were shining with excitement; his heart was beating wildly. He did not realise what he was doing, or he would never have dared to creep silently up, until he had well-nigh joined the group of anxious and angry men.

"I've no responsibility for the engineering work," he heard the contractor say. "I will carry out faithfully the plans prepared, but I can't be expected to guess at the thoughts in Mr. Groster's mind."

"Then we are at a deadlock," said another. "Mr. Jay, isn't there a man among you that can get us out of this difficulty?"

"No," said someone faintly.

"Yes."

It was Rossini who spoke. His heart was almost in his mouth as the word escaped him, but he could not help speaking.

Two or three turned around as he spoke. They had been so intent upon Mr. Groster's plans that they had not seen him come up.

"Get away, fellow!" said someone. "How dare you come here in such a way!"

But Rossini did not move. He felt himself trembling in every limb, while his tongue seemed to refuse to give utterance to his thoughts; but he determined to speak.

"You asked if no one could help you out of your difficulty," he said hoarsely. "I can."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

He had gained confidence by this time and had mastered his weakness.

"Who is this?" asked one of the directors, who had been less pronounced in his views during the conference than the others.

"One of the workmen," was the reply. "A mechanic's labourer. He knows nothing."

"Get away, fellow!" said one of the under-engineers, who had first spoken. "This is no place for you."

For a moment he felt like obeying. How could he, he reflected, know more than these trained engineers? But it was only for a moment. For months he had been trying to discover Mr. Groster's idea, and he felt sure he had accomplished his purpose. He would not be driven away easily.

"Forgive me," he said eagerly, speaking to the gentleman who he thought regarded him more kindly than the others. "But I have been working at this for months. I know I have discovered Mr. Groster's idea. Give me a drawing-board and a pencil, and I will show you that I speak the truth!"

Two or three laughed aloud, while others seemed angry at his interference. How could a labourer explain what baffled trained engineers?

But the chairman of the directors, who was himself no mean authority on engineering, did not laugh, nor did he grow angry. Clad in coarse working attire though Rossini was, and although but a boy in

age, he was not to be passed by without a thought. The large, well-shaped head, the square, overhanging forehead, the deep, shining black eyes, suggested strength and insight. Sir Michael Tresize had said but little during the conference even though his influence was greater than that of any other man present.

"Give him a drawing-board and a pencil," he said.

"But, Sir Michael——"

"Let him have the drawing-board and pencil," he repeated. "He can do no harm, while apparently you can do no good. Let us go into the office here."

A wooden structure had been erected by the side of the ravine, which had been used as an office, and Sir Michael Tresize made his way thither.

"Come," he said with a twinkle in his eyes. "Many things are hidden from the wise and the prudent."

No man seemed to think of thwarting Sir Michael Tresize, and so a movement was made towards the wooden shed, Rossini going with the rest like a man in a dream.

A broad desk had been fixed near a window at the end of the office, on which were placed all the necessities of a draughtsman.

"Now, my man," said Sir Michael, "let us see what you know."

Rossini gazed around him almost fearfully. More than a dozen incredulous men stared at him. Scorn and derision were evident on most of the faces. He went towards the window with fast-beating heart. His head was swimming; nothing seemed real. Even the faces of those around him were vague and shadowy. As for the plans over which he had brooded so long,

and the ideas of the great engineer, all had vanished as though they were phantoms of the mind. He took hold of the pencil mechanically and stretched out a piece of paper on the drawing-board, while, in spite of their scorn and derision, a great silence fell upon all present.

He tried to collect his ideas—tried to call back what a few minutes before had been outlined in his mind as plainly as if they were on the paper before him. But in vain; the more he thought, the further did the great engineer's idea seem to fly from him. He thought he was going mad.

"Oh, it won't come! It won't come!" he gasped.

A great laugh rose among many present, while one of the engineers cried out angrily: "Get out of the office, you fool!"

Rossini cast his eyes around and saw the angry and derisive looks. Doubtless these men felt that they had been befooled by a mad workman. Nevertheless, the scornful laugh and the brutal words of the engineer brought him to himself. Instead of fear, he felt anger.

"Stop!" he cried, and his voice rose above the laughter, "I've got it! I've got it!"

He turned to the paper and rapidly drew line after line upon the plain white paper, and again silence fell upon them. They could not help seeing that, whether he knew Mr. Groster's idea or no, he was reproducing the plan that many of them knew well. Rapidly he worked. Naturally, the drawing was rough and incomplete, but it suggested knowledge.

"He has a good memory," said one of the engineers. "He has seen Mr. Groster's plans, as we

have, and he's reproducing them. But let him fill up the gap. Let him show us the meaning of it all."

Silently they watched, while Rossini worked on. Minute after minute passed away, until the paper was covered with what, to the untrained eye, seemed meaningless figures and diagrams. Presently someone broke the silence.

"He's got it!"

Still the boy worked on; and even as he worked, more than one wondered that his great hands, so coarsened by labour, could guide the pencil so deftly; but they wondered more because of the wondrous insight.

"That's it," said Rossini at length. "I've been working at it for months. I determined to work it out; and I have."

"Now explain," said Sir Michael Tresize.

He was confident now. His voracious memory had laid hold of technicalities like a vice. He had not given all his powers to the study of engineering for many months for nothing. He justified Hugh Henwood's opinion of him—that he could learn as much in nine months as it would take most men nine years to learn.

In vain did the engineers try to confound him with hard questions. He had solved the problem, he had shown how the great heaps of steel which had been sent from the furnaces could be utilised, he had told them how order could take the place of chaos.

"But could you superintend the construction of all these pieces which have come from the foundry?" said Sir Michael.

The lad trembled in every limb. He seemed to

be standing on the brink of a ghastly abyss. He realised the significance of the question. After all, was his solution of the problem complete? Might there not be many difficulties which would arise in the construction which did not appear on the drawings?

"Yes," he said at length, "I could."

"You are sure?" said Sir Michael kindly. He had been simply amazed at the lad's knowledge of engineering. He had wondered how one who was so young and so unsophisticated could have mastered the intricacies of a problem which had baffled trained engineers. Nevertheless, he knew how much experience stood for, and knew, too, how much depended on the most careful and minute adjustment of the various pieces of steel which had been lying ready for Mr. Groster to arrange.

"Yes, I am sure," said Rossini, after a moment's hesitation. "But wait a minute; let me again examine the castings."

He left the office hastily and carefully examined the pieces of steel. Evidently Mr. Groster had made careful preparation—each component part was numbered and arranged.

Half an hour later he returned. As he re-entered the office he heard the hubbub of voices.

"Madness!"

"A country clown!"

"Yes, but there are the plans."

"The boy has a wonderful mind."

"A very prodigy!"

"Bah! he has by some means seen Mr. Groster's plans and copied them. It would be madness to entrust the construction to him."

"But what's to be done? Mr. Groster is ill. The doctor says he'll be ill for weeks. Meanwhile, if we wait, the shareholders' money will be lost. It's a matter of many thousands."

"Yes. But to place such an affair in the hands of a labourer! We should be the laughing-stock for the country."

"Suggest something better."

"Yes, that's it. It's easy to sneer at one who has done what has baffled the whole lot of you."

And so on. Rossini heard snatches of this as he made his way to the office. When he entered a dead silence fell upon the gathering.

"I think I can do it," he said, in answer to Sir Michael's inquiry. "I am sure I can. But before I promise, I want another hour here by myself alone."

"Why?"

Rossini looked around among the men, many of whom were still incredulous and angry. He felt no fear of them. Their very incredulity and anger nerved him.

"You can see as well as I that this is no child's play," he said. "It's a matter of completing another man's work. But that is not all. I have to work under difficulties. I have to divine Mr. Groster's thoughts. What I want is time to check the rough plans I have made, and to see whether my calculations agree with the castings. I am almost sure they do, but I want to verify."

He spoke with decision. There was nothing weak nor hesitating in his words; rather they revealed a mind governed by necessary caution, one who saw difficult work, and who would arm himself against all contingencies.

"That is but reasonable," said Sir Michael.

"There is another thing," said the boy. "There are some here who desire me to fail. If I undertake this work, no man must interfere."

It was a strange sight. The tall, raw-boned youth, who the day before had been regarded only as an intelligent labourer, now assumed a position of superiority. In spite of themselves, many felt that they were in the presence of a master mind. Those great, black eyes and rugged features told them that he was not to be trifled with. All knew that whether he satisfied the directors or not, here was a man who would be heard of.

It is said that on one occasion a renowned scientist said to another scientist equally renowned, concerning a statesman who had altered the destinies of Europe—

"Let that man be stranded on Salisbury Plain with only one garment on his back, and still nothing would be impossible to him."

Some of them felt like this concerning Rossini just then. Whatever else he was, he was a strong man. Besides, nothing short of engineering genius could have enabled him to do what he had done.

"It shall be as you say," said Sir Michael Tresize. "Mind you, I do not say you will be entrusted with this work, but take the time you need for checking your calculations; after that we will confer together again."

It was not often that such excitement prevailed on a railway. Great as had been the romance of engineering, wondrous as had been the experiences of such men as George Stephenson and James Watt, those which these engineers were undergoing was

scarcely to be surpassed. Had Rossini, before the bridge had been begun, appeared before them with a set of plans, plans full of unconventionality and startling ideas, they would perchance have considered them kindly; but for a labourer to come among them suddenly and to claim the power to explain Mr. Groster's thoughts, to solve a problem which had baffled trained engineers, was something unprecedented. Moreover, to entrust a delicate and important piece of work to such a one was staggering. And yet the very romance of the situation appealed even to these men of dividends, and almost in spite of their judgment they felt like risking a great deal.

"How," said one of the engineers, "can he do it? He has had no training, no experience. He was working as a navy before he was taken on as an engineer's labourer."

"Yes, but the history of engineering has been ever the history of how genius has laughed at the schools," said another. "The lad is a lad of genius, and genius knows no laws."

And so they talked while Rossini worked in the office. Time flew swiftly by, but he was unconscious of it. He lived in a world of mechanics, of diagrams, of calculation.

At last he saw his way clearly. Everything was plain in his mind. He felt sure that he could translate his thoughts into the bridge.

He came out of the office.

"Well?" said Sir Michael Tresize.

"I can do it," said Rossini.

"You are sure?"

"I **am** sure."

"Then you shall."

No man dared to dispute Sir Michael's dictum. He was one of the largest shareholders, and his opinion had for years been regarded as law—not because he was given to autocratic dealing, but because he had proved himself to be invariably right in whatever opinion he had advocated.

"And what is more," said Sir Michael sternly, "he must have a free hand. He must be obeyed implicitly. No disparaging remarks must be made. I know that we have decided upon an unusual thing. Our action may be taken as madness; but I will bear all responsibility, I will take all the blame. If there is any loss, I will bear it. I say this because I am sure that the one who has done what he has done can do the rest. Now, then, he must be obeyed as if he were Mr. Groster."

The men were called to their work, the machinery was put in motion. From the dizzy height the pieces of steel were fitted together, and slowly the idea which was thought only to exist in the mind of the great engineer took tangible shape. The preparation for this time had been going on for months, and now the gap which not one of Mr. Groster's subordinates knew how to fill, and on which depended the whole of the construction, was filled. The work was watched breathlessly, but at length, when the last section was fitted, a great shout went up. Great as was the idea of the engineer whose fertile mind had first invented it, it seemed scarcely less great that an untried lad should have seen the end from the beginning, and have thus translated another man's thoughts into actualities.

Darkness fell, and the crucial hour was past. There

was still much to be done ; but all who knew anything of engineering saw that what remained was only detail. Important detail doubtless, but still detail. The principle had been grappled and mastered.

Sir Michael Tresize and all the directors who came there that day had never left the spot. They were almost as anxious as the lad who had thus forced himself into prominence, and who, with colourless face but gleaming eyes, had directed and controlled everything.

"I have forgotten your name," said Sir Michael Tresize, when work ceased. "You will forgive me, I'm sure."

"Rossini Keverne."

"I shall be glad if you will come back to my hotel with me to-night."

"No, thank you, sir. I am very much obliged to you, but I cannot."

"Why?" asked Sir Michael, wondering at Rossini's earnestness.

"I must stay on the bridge, sir."

"Surely there is no need."

"Even now an enemy might spoil the work," replied Rössini. "I would like to ask a favour instead."

"Anything in my power I will grant," said Sir Michael.

"Then, sir, I should like to choose a dozen men in whom I can trust to stay here and watch. I would have them armed, sir, if I might. And I will stay with them."

There was something almost pathetic in the way he spoke. Sir Michael felt that the matter was one of life and death to him.

"Your wish shall be complied with. But how long is this to last?"

"By to-morrow night, if the men start at dawn to-morrow, all should be completed, sir; but until then I do not think I shall either eat or sleep."

Sir Michael laughed. A great burden had been lifted from his mind. The work could now go forward, and all contracts could be fulfilled.

"And by to-morrow night you will have nothing to fear?"

"No, sir."

Two hours later a liberal supper was sent to him from Plymouth, which Rossini offered to share with the men he had chosen. But he found that they also had been remembered in the same way.

At dawn the next day the work was proceeded with, and by nightfall it was finished. The bridge which has since been regarded with wonder by many, and created a new epoch in engineering, had been completed by one to whom the inventor had never spoken nor by any means conveyed his thoughts.

"You must be tired," said Sir Michael when all was done.

"No, Sir Michael," said Rossini, who by this time had learnt his name.

"Then you will come and see me to-night? I want a chat with you. There will be no one with us—only we two."

"Thank you, Sir Michael."

Two hours later he stood in the entrance hall of a great hotel.

"Take this gentleman to Sir Michael Tresize's private room," said the hotel manager to a waiter; and Rossini followed him like a man in a dream, wondering what the great magnate had to say to him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAN WHO WAS READY.

‘COME in. I’m glad to see you.’

Sir Michael Tresize rose and held out his hand to the young man whose name was on hundreds of tongues that night. The baronet was in ordinary evening dress, and Rossini felt his own awkwardness and lack of *savoir faire* as his hand grasped the hand of the man whose influence was so great in the world of finance. And yet, had he known it, he had no need to be ashamed. Tall, angular, and almost ungainly, he had a striking personality. Less than three years had passed since he had slouched away from Lady Beatrice Penwithen’s presence like a hungry wolf, but no one would have recognised him. Then he was just nineteen, now he was not quite twenty-two years of age. He knew nothing of ordinary conventions, and he had never dreamed of buying evening clothes; nevertheless, the Plymouth tailor who had supplied him with the suit he wore had no need to be ashamed of his workmanship. Moreover, the young fellow stood erect, and the intellectual life which he had been living for more than two years had set its stamp upon him. Awkward he was—it could not be otherwise, considering his history—but there was strength in his awkwardness; yes, and a certain dignity, too. And this was scarcely to be wondered at. In a way he was not aware that he had done anything won-

derful, and yet the crisis through which he had passed during the last two days gave him a certain masterfulness of which he was unconscious. His heart burned with a sense of victory, his eyes gleamed at the thought of the future that might lie before him. Therefore, in spite of his awkwardness, his appearance was striking. He had the stature of a giant, and although the work he had been doing tended to make his steps heavy and his movements ungainly, his thoughts, his hopes, his ambitions removed him infinitely from his class. No one would have regarded him, as he stood before Sir Michael, as a gentleman in the ordinary acceptance of the word, but still less would he have been taken to be an ordinary man. No one could have looked on him without thinking of his future, or regarding him as one who would bend circumstance to an iron will. Sir Michael felt it. He had felt it when, dressed as a mechanic's labourer, Rossini had dominated the situation the day before; he felt it more now as he took the well-dressed young fellow by the hand.

"A strong man," he could not help feeling; "a man to whom almost anything is possible."

"Won't you take a glass of wine, Mr. Keverne?" Sir Michael fully realised that on the previous day his guest had gone to work as a mechanic's labourer, but he treated him as an honoured guest nevertheless. Coming as he did from one of the oldest families in the West of England, he realised that the true gentleman was he upon whom Nature had bestowed her gifts of mind and heart, or he who in spite of humble circumstances strove after what was highest and best. He was not yet quite sure of Rossini. Of his intellectual powers he had had abundant evidence, but of the potential gentleman in the

real sense he was not so certain. Nevertheless, while he was his guest, he would treat him as such.

"No, thank you, Sir Michael."

"You are an abstainer, then?"

"Yes. I've never touched alcohol in my life."

"Of course, hard drinking is the curse of the British working man," said the baronet. "Doubtless you have seen enough evidences of that."

"Yes, yes; but it is not that only," said Rossini. Then almost involuntarily he burst out: "My father and mother both died drunkards!"

"Ah, I see," said Sir Michael. He did not order his after-dinner wine to be brought, but he pushed Rossini a box of cigars. "You smoke, I expect," he said.

"No, I never smoke; but pray, sir, don't let me hinder you."

"Well, you are a model young man," said Sir Michael, lighting his cigar with evident enjoyment.

"No, sir; I do not know that there is any credit in my not smoking. The truth is, I seem to have had no time—neither, for that matter, have I had any money to buy tobacco."

"Ah! You are not married, I suppose?"

"No, Sir Michael."

"Ah, then, you are a saving young man, I expect?"

"No," replied Rossini. "I have had to spend all my spare money in books and—instruments."

"I see," said Sir Michael, interested. "What kind of books?"

"Text-books of science mainly," said Rossini.

"You are fond of reading, I suppose?"

"I am afraid I can scarcely call it reading," replied Rossini. "I have simply learnt."

"What?"

"Well, mainly engineering, I am afraid."

"But why afraid?"

"Well, engineering is only one phase of life, isn't it? I have struggled with Latin and French and German, it is true."

"And you know those languages?"

"Oh, no—only a smattering!. I can read in them, with the aid of a dictionary, but I am not a linguist, I am afraid."

"But I should think you are. How old are you?"

"Twenty-one last June."

"Then you must be a linguist—to be able to read three languages besides your own, and without any especial advantages in education. Where did you get your early schooling?"

"I never had any."

"What!"

"I never had any."

"Then you must have been a bookish boy all your lifetime?"

"No."

"But—but——" He was interested, and wanted to press his questions, but refrained.

"No; that accounts for my ignorance," went on Rossini quietly.

Sir Michael stared at his guest with wonder. After all, it was a wonderful face that he saw. That great, square brow, those black, flashing eyes and strong features did not belong to an ordinary man. He must get him to talk, at all hazards.

"What you have done for us has greatly interested me in you," he said. "If you care to tell me anything of

your past, it might enable me to understand how I can be of service to you."

"Really, there is not much to tell," said Rossini; "and if there were, I could not tell it. I think this is about all. I was neglected by drunken parents. My father died when I was a child; my mother lived till I was fourteen or fifteen. I worked in the fields; I never went to school."

"But you picked up reading and writing, and that sort of thing?"

"I learnt to read a little, and perhaps something of calculation, but nothing more."

"But what part of the country did you live in? In the West, I can tell by your accent; but your language is so pure that I cannot tell what part."

"I would rather not tell you, if you don't mind."

"Oh, certainly! Doubtless you have your reasons for being silent."

"I have done nothing wrong," said Rossini, as if divining the other's thoughts; "only it is rather painful."

"Just so. And when did you start studying?"

"Two years ago last June."

"What!"

"Two years ago last June," repeated Rossini quietly.

"But—but——" cried Sir Michael in astonishment.

"It happened this way," went on the young man. "Up to two years ago last June, I lived as I had been reared—a sort of wild animal. I did not strive after anything, because there seemed nothing to strive after, or perhaps because everything seemed impossible. I could see nothing in front of me but a great blank wall. Of what lay beyond that wall I knew nothing, except what came to me when I was playing the fiddle."

"Ah!"

"Yes, when I played that, the wall seemed to melt away, and I could see a great, shadowy world beyond. But it was very shadowy, very unreal; there was nothing for me to strive after."

"How did you learn to play the fiddle?"

"I can scarcely remember the time when I couldn't play. It was the one thing my father left me, and somehow music came out of it unawares. It was the only thing I loved. Then something happened."

"Something happened?"

"Yes, something happened." Rossini's face became hard as he spoke. "It does not matter what. Something happened, and I seemed to wake suddenly. Something in my head seemed to snap, the vague, shadowy world which I saw when I played the fiddle became tangible. I longed for knowledge, and—and I vowed I would obtain it."

"Yes, yes!" Sir Michael was eager to hear more.

"The next day I heard of a man, who lived some miles away, who was a scholar. What gave me courage I cannot explain, but I went to him. He was a Non-conformist minister. He was not only a scholar, he was kind; he took pity on me. He was not a scientist; nevertheless—well, science seemed to come to me. He taught me the principles of mathematics, of grammar, of thinking. He said I learnt quickly; I suppose I did. I never forget."

He stopped here and seemed to be dreaming, while Sir Michael looked at his face like one fascinated.

"I never forget," went on Rossini presently. "When I once read a thing, I know it, and when I know it, I never forget. He was not a lover of mathematics—he

might have been a Wrangler but for that—but he was strong enough to set me going, and mathematics came naturally to me. I went through Colenso's Arithmetic in a week or two."

"What!"

"Yes, I did; it came so easy. There was nothing to hinder! one thing led to another without any difficulty. I suppose my mind was cast in that mould. Thus when I came to algebra and Euclid, I had no trouble. At the end of a few months I had gone through all the books of Euclid."

"Impossible!"

"But I did. I learnt other things to please him—Latin and French and German. Yes, I worked at them to please him."

"But the thing is impossible!" cried Sir Michael. "Besides, you were working in the fields at this time, you say."

"Nothing is impossible," said Rossini quietly. "You see, I had made up my mind. Then, as I told you, I never forget."

"But how many hours a day did you study?"

"All my waking hours. I only slept six or seven hours a day; all the rest I spent in learning. I would read a problem of Euclid in the morning, I would work it out before I went to labour; then, while I was on the farm, ploughing or hoeing, I would again work it out in my mind. Then I would make problems myself and work them out in my head. It really was very easy. I did the same with the languages. Mr.—that is, my friend—was very strong in languages. He taught me the principles of construction; he said I grasped them easily. So, to please him, I would learn half-a-dozen

verbs before going out to toil ; then I conjugated them in the fields—that is, as I thought they ought to be. When I came back, I saw whether my conjugations agreed with the book. In this way I was studying sixteen hours a day. You see, I was like the cattle : when I was not devouring new mental food, I was chewing the cud of what I had already devoured. Really, it was very easy ; I did not find it a bit hard when I was once started. He said I learnt as much in nine months as nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand could learn in nine years. But that is because of my memory ; I never forget—never ! ”

He said this quietly, although there was a kind of grim, sardonic strength suggested in his last words.

“ But I have heard you say nothing about engineering yet ? ” said Sir Michael.

“ That came later. My friend knew nothing about that, and I was so busy working at the other things that I did not seem to think much about it. But one day I saw a book on engineering on a bookstall in the market-house at—the town near where I lived. It also contained sketches of the lives of great engineers. In less than a week I had committed the book to memory—that is, all the marrow of it. Then I read in a newspaper an advertisement for men on the railway here. I walked here ; I got work. I worked through the day, and at nights I studied engineering. I went to classes here ; I bought books. The teachers at the classes said just what my friend said. You see, everything came so easy to me. Through August and a part of September the classes were not held ; but I went on with my work, and—and I worked out Mr. Groster’s principle. That was the toughest bit of work I ever did. I think my

practice of working out Euclid's problems in the fields must have helped me."

He spoke quietly, naturally; there was not a suggestion of boasting in either his words or tones. Sir Michael Tresize had asked him to tell him about himself, and he had obeyed; that was all.

Sir Michael sat back in his chair in astonishment. It was like a fairy tale. But that the youth's every word carried truth in it, he could not have believed it. Less than three years! It seemed as wild as a story in the "Arabian Nights."

"And you have studied all the time?"

"All the time."

"But have you never taken a holiday?"

"No."

"But what have you done with your Sundays?"

"On Sunday mornings I walked on the Hoe or away into the country. I kept up my old practice. On Sunday evenings I have gone to an Independent chapel."

"But why there?"

"Because my friend, to whom I owe everything, was an Independent minister, and I thought he would like me to go."

"Would you mind telling me his name?"

"I'd rather not."

"Have you written him?"

"Yes. I did not for a long time; I had nothing to tell him. When I ceased to be a navvy, and became a mechanic's labourer, I wrote to him. But my letter was returned; he had left P—that is, he had left the place where I saw him. The postmaster did not know where he had gone. So he does not know where I am. Some day I shall hear about him."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because he is a man who will be sure to be heard of."

"Then you have not read in the ordinary sense of the word?"

"Beyond works on engineering, I have only read one book—that is, since I left my friend."

"And that?"

"That is the New Testament."

Sir Michael Tresize again turned towards him. "Ah, you have read the New Testament!" he said quietly.

"Yes. I promised my friend I would. It is a most wonderful book."

"But other books—poetry, philosophy, history, romance?"

"None for eighteen months. I read two of Sir Walter Scott's novels the winter before last; but since I began to study engineering I have had no time. I suppose they were very fine; in a way they widened my outlook. But I am very ignorant."

"You read the daily newspapers?"

"No."

"You know nothing of the history of your own and other countries?"

"No, except what I have gathered from reading the lives of great scientists and engineers. But I can see that that must be very little."

"Yes," said Sir Michael quietly, "that is very little. Nevertheless, what you have done is wonderful"

"Do you think so? I do not. You see, I have given my whole time to it, and, really, there are a great many hours in a day. Besides, I never forget. My memory is like a vice; what it lays hold of, it never loses."

"And what are your thoughts for the future?"

"At present there seems nothing else but mechanics, engineering. I know that is because I am so ignorant. Some day I hope to explore the greater world, but I cannot do it yet."

"Why?"

"Because I know enough to know that I have only learnt the alphabet of the engineering world."

"And yet you have done during these last two days what trained engineers were unable to do."

"Yes; but they are such little men. They only walk along beaten tracks. They have never tried to think for themselves. That's why they were baffled."

Sir Michael Tresize sat back in his chair and closed his eyes. He smoked steadily for some time, as if considering what to do.

"What do you think of doing to-morrow?" he asked presently.

"I shall go to work," said Rossini simply.

"As a mechanic's labourer?"

"Yes; there is nothing else. Of course, I shall go to the classes as soon as they commence again."

Again Sir Michael was silent. He did not understand this strange young man. Was his apparent simplicity only simulated? How could the man who a few hours before had directed a most complicated piece of work again settle down to be the labourer of men who, intellectually speaking, were not fit to blacken his boots?

"Do you know that you have helped the company out of a very awkward fix, and saved them many thousands of pounds?"

"Yes, I must have done that," replied Rossini; "but

I am afraid I had not thought of it. What filled me was the desire to construct the bridge, to prove that I had grasped Mr. Groster's idea. I shall never forget the joy I felt when the thing was done."

"There should be a great future before you," said Sir Michael presently.

"I mean that there shall be. There must be."

He uttered the words with set teeth, and with such intensity that Sir Michael was drawn to look at his face again. He saw, too, that there was that in Rossini's mind which he could not comprehend. The young man did not at that moment seem to be aware of his companion's presence. His features were set and rigid, his eyes seemed to be fixed upon some far-away object.

"But how are you going to attain your desires?"

"My friend used to tell me that everything came to the man who was ready," replied Rossini.

"Your friend was a believer in Cardinal Mazarin, evidently."

"Who is Cardinal Mazarin?"

"He was the minister of a French king two hundred years ago. He was an Italian by birth. Of humble parentage and of great subtlety of mind, he rose from his obscurity to be the first minister of France. He dictated its policy. It is said that he married Anne, the widow of Louis XIII."

"Ah!" said Rossini, his eyes flashing.

"On one occasion, when someone told him about the impossibility of certain things happening, he replied: 'Everything happens!'"

"Yes, I understand," replied Rossini. "'Everything happens,' but he made things happen."

"Yes, he made them happen."

"So will I," replied Rossini grimly.

There was no boastfulness in his words. It was simply the expression of a man who was determined.

"What would you do if you had a hundred pounds?"

"I don't know. It would require thinking about."

Again Sir Michael was silent for some time, then he looked at his watch.

"It is time for me to go," said Rossini, rising.

"No," replied the baronet; "I am expecting someone just now whom I want you to see."

Rossini looked at him inquiringly, while Sir Michael lit a fresh cigar, smiling as he did so.

"I was thinking of your friend's words," he said. "I should judge him to be a thoughtful man. Like him, I believe that everything comes to the man who is ready. Ah! this is he, I expect."

A waiter entered the room, bearing a card.

"Mr. Pentewan," read Sir Michael. "Yes, that's all right. Show him in."

Rossini looked up and saw the contractor who was responsible for the railway on which he had been working.

"I'm not mistaken, Mr. Pentewan," said Sir Michael, looking towards the young man. "I think you can go forward."

Mr. Pentewan was a man well advanced in life; nevertheless, he looked strong and vigorous. His appearance suggested a mixture of great caution together with daring. He was a man noted for his shrewdness in business and his knowledge of men and things; but he also had the reputation of being at times erratic and unconventional. "He's always breaking out in a new

place, in spite of his level-headedness," had more than once been remarked about him.

In spite of himself, Rossini felt the strangeness of his situation. Two days before, neither of these men would have noticed him. Sir Michael would have passed him by without a thought, while Mr. Pentewan would have regarded him as one of his hundreds of workmen, whose wages had to be paid at the end of the week. Now, however, both regarded him with great interest.

By degrees Rossini realised that he was plied with a great number of questions, all of them bearing on railway construction, earthworks, bridges, masonry, and so forth. More than once, moreover, he found himself in disagreement with these men, and while he maintained his position, he did so modestly, realising that his knowledge was mainly theoretical, and having no comparison with that practical wisdom which the contractor possessed. In this way hours passed. He forgot that sleep had not visited his eyelids for many, many hours, forgot his unusual surroundings. It was the first time he had ever conversed on such terms with such men.

Presently he was awakened to the fact that a neighbouring clock was striking the hour of midnight, and again he rose to go.

"Not yet, if you please," said Mr. Pentewan. "I have a proposal to make, Mr. Rossini Keverne."

"A proposal?" said the young man.

"Yes," said Mr. Pentewan. "You may have heard that I have signed a contract to construct a piece of railway through a somewhat difficult tract of country in Wales."

"No, I have not heard."

"Well, I have. It is, as I said, a difficult piece of

work. It will mean tunnelling, viaducts, and bridges. I want a manager. Will you be the man?"

For a moment the lad was stunned. He thought a moment, then he replied: "No, sir."

"Why?"

"For two reasons. First, I have had too little experience. I have not studied the work experimentally. I should want at least two months of guidance before I should be competent."

"One," said the contractor, smiling on Sir Michael. "Now the other."

"I want to be an engineer," said Rossini. "I should like to construct bridges myself. I want——" and then he stopped, for the first time failing to find words to express his thoughts.

"Two. Is that all?"

"That's everything."

"As to the first, it shall be as you say. It is right. As for the second, Sir Michael must answer."

"A great railway company like ours is always glad to consider the plans of a good engineer," said Sir Michael. "Besides, the new railway is in the neighbourhood of Cardiff, where, in my opinion, the greatest engineer in England lives. He is simply hungry for promising pupils."

Half an hour after, Rossini realised that the old life was at an end, and that a new life had begun. He had accepted Mr. Pentewan's proposal.

Again he rose to go, and again Sir Michael Tresize stopped him.

"I asked you just now what you would do if you had a hundred pounds," he said. "I want you to accept that sum in recognition of your services."

"I did not do it for money," said Rossini.

"No; but I want you to take it. I shall be grieved if you do not."

"Do you think I have earned it?" said Rossini.

"The company will be greatly in your debt when you have received it," said the baronet warmly. "Accept it, then, with our gratitude and admiration."

When Rossini walked towards his lodgings a little later, he was like a man in a dream.

CHAPTER VII

BLACK ROCK LIGHTHOUSE.

"WELL, we have but little choice."

"None at all"

"You are right. This is the only scheme that meets the difficulty."

"What shall we do?"

"I should say accept it."

These last words were uttered by Sir George Winfield, the great consulting engineer.

"Consider, Sir George. Three times has a lighthouse been built there, and three times it has been swept away. The roughest seas which surround the country roll there. The foundation-work presents difficulties which are simply enormous. This we know from past experience. The work has baffled our greatest engineers; indeed, as you know, the whole profession has been afraid to undertake it. Among the drawings sent in, not one of them is of any value, and——"

"Save the one I have advised you to take."

"Yes, save that one. But the engineer in this case is an unknown man—he is only a boy, in fact—one whose training has been out of the ordinary and whose qualifications seem questionable."

"Exactly. But consider the other aspect of the business. That a lighthouse is required there, no one

denies. It has been the scene of innumerable tragedies. Scarcely a winter passes—but I need not enlarge upon that. True, lighthouses have been built, and swept away—all the more need for building another. Moreover, you have received special instructions to deal with the matter. Are we to confess ourselves helpless? Now, then, among all the plans sent in, not one, save this, gives evidence of security. All the others are on the lines adopted before. This, on the other hand, is original, and, as far as I am a judge, supplies what the others lack. True, I do not know the engineer, but I have no hesitation in saying that he is a remarkable man.”

The speakers were sitting in one of the rooms used by the Admiralty, and were discussing a problem which had for a long time baffled them.

“He is no ignoramus, who works by rule-of-thumb,” said another. “I was hearing about him only a few days ago. Sir Michael Tresize was telling me that he had carried through a most difficult piece of railway in Wales, and has simply astonished the directors of the railway company.”

“What’s his name, did you say?”

“Rossini Keverne.”

“Any Italian blood in him?”

“Haven’t the slightest idea.”

“Well, are we to fall in with Sir George’s recommendation?”

“Will you pardon me a moment?” broke in Sir George Winfield. “I still hold to my opinion. I believe the man has solved the difficulty, and that his plans should be accepted; but not before I question him on two or three matters.”

"There is no difficulty in that; he is within call"

A minute later the door of the room was opened, and a young man entered, who cast a quick glance around the room, and seemed to read the face of each man as he did so. Strangely enough, the last face upon which his eyes rested was that of the chairman; and as he saw him, he gave a start. But only for a moment. He mastered himself and stood respectfully waiting to be questioned.

Lord Penwithen, the chairman, gave him a searching glance, but there was no sign of recognition in his eyes. The young man before him was a stranger whom he thought he had never seen before. And this was no wonder. One could imagine no greater contrast than that which existed between the tall, gaunt, slouching youth who crept away from him on his daughter's seventeenth birthday, and the fine, stalwart, well-dressed young man who stood so calmly before them.

"Won't you take a seat, Mr. Keverne?"

Rossini did as he was bid, and then again quietly looked around him. There was an air of conscious strength in his presence. His whole demeanour suggested a man who had thought for himself, and was confident as to the truth at which he had arrived.

"I think I may tell you at the outset, Mr. Keverne, that we are very much interested in what you have submitted to us, but Sir George Winfield would like to ask you a few questions."

Rossini turned to Sir George quietly, while the great engineer drew nearer the table.

For the next ten minutes a conversation took place which I will not attempt to reproduce. Keen, searching questions were asked in quick succession—questions

which were answered with the assurance of youth backed by knowledge, which the engineer did not fail to appreciate.

"That is all I wish to ask, my lords and gentlemen," said Sir George presently.

"There are two others which have struck me," said Lord Penwithen.

"I will do my best to answer them," replied Rossini. He seemed far more nervous at the thought of the questions of the chairman than about those of the engineer, even although he knew that Lord Penwithen knew little or nothing of engineering.

"The first is, how long would this work take?"

"That's scarcely fair," said Sir George Winfield under his breath. He knew the tremendous difficulties in the way, and felt that no man should be required to give an answer.

"That depends upon another question," replied Rossini.

"And what is that?"

"Upon who undertakes the work."

"That is the question I was going to ask. Is there a contractor whom you could especially recommend?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Myself."

The members of the Board of Admiralty looked up in astonishment.

"I did not know you were a contractor."

"Neither am I, although I have for more than two years been manager for Mr. Pentewan, who has just constructed a railway through a part of Wales. I may say, moreover, that Mr. Pentewan would supply

me with the necessary capital. But this is my point. This is no ordinary piece of work, and I doubt whether you could find a contractor who would estimate for it. The work is of such a nature that I doubt whether any of those into whose hands you would care to entrust it could give an estimate as to its cost. Besides, if you employ me as engineer, I should like, for my own sake, to direct and control everything—*everything!*”

He repeated the last word with emphasis, as though he desired to make any misapprehension impossible.

“Of course, I need not remind you of the history of Black Rock,” he continued. “You know how it has defied both engineers and builders for generations. Twelve months ago, when the matter was again brought before your notice, I visited the Rock. Since then I have been there many times. I have studied the tides, and I have read the long story of its tragedies, and of the failures to erect a lighthouse there.”

“You might fail, too,” said Lord Penwithen.

Rossini was silent.

“You do not think you would?”

“I am sure I should not.”

Again there was no boasting; the tone was of quiet conviction.

“But you would want to be your own contractor?”

“I should then have to take entire responsibility. But I should also choose my men; I should examine all materials; I should superintend all works, and thus be certain that my plans were carried out in the minutest detail. For six months I should practically have to live on Black Rock. I have had three years' experience of railway construction, and——”

“Three years!”

Someone uttered the words almost scornfully.

"Yes, three years," said Rossini quietly.

"But you have had no experience of building harbours, sea-walls, and the like?"

"None."

"And yet you are desirous of constructing a building, perhaps the most difficult yet known in the engineering world?"

"Excuse me, I have submitted my plans and suggested a contractor, that is all."

There was a quiet dignity in his tones—the dignity of a strong, confident man.

"Do you insist on being your own contractor if your plans are accepted?"

"No; but I am afraid you would not accept the tenders of another contractor."

"Why?"

"Because they would be obliged to leave such a tremendous margin for emergencies that you would be staggered at the price they would name."

"But why should they leave such a margin?"

"Because they could not calculate with any degree of certainty either the time it would take or the necessary cost. Indeed, I doubt if any contractor of repute would care to bind himself to a sum."

"And you would?"

"I would."

"Have you, then, knowledge which other contractors have not?"

"Yes."

Lord Penwithen smiled.

"Excuse me, Lord Penwithen," said Rossini, "but I hope I am not boasting. I have been working at those

plans for months. I have calculated to a pound the strain the building would have to bear; I have worked out to a fraction the quantities; I have obtained the cost of transports; I have left nothing to chance or guess-work—everything has been worked out with mathematical precision.”

“But we may have a year of terrific storms.”

“I have reckoned on that. I have studied the storm-charts of the last fifty years.”

“And you think you would be successful?”

“I do not think. I am sure.”

Again there was no boasting. It was simply the assertion of a man who knew.

“But how can you be sure?”

“I do not think that twice two are four—I am sure,” replied Rossini. “The same principle holds good all the way through. It is simply carrying it a little further.”

“Well, then, what time would you need?”

He mentioned the time.

“And the cost?”

He named the sum.

“You have calculated on strikes, possible sickness of men, storms, difficulties with granite quarries, railway companies, shipping companies?”

“Yes, I have calculated all that.”

“Is there any further question, my lords and gentlemen?”

A few minutes later, Rossini had left the room, and the members of the Admiralty Board were again alone. Again they turned to Sir George Winfield.

“I stand by my opinion,” said the engineer.

“The worst of it is,” said someone, “he has nothing

to lose. It is true he says Mr. Pentewan is willing to finance him, but I dare say he is not worth a thousand-pound note. He risks nothing. If it were Mr. Pentewan himself, or one of the large contracting firms, we should feel safer. I suspect the statements of a man who in reality risks nothing."

"Pardon me," said Sir George Winfield, "but he risks more than anything you have mentioned."

"What?"

"One of the greatest futures of any man in the engineering world."

Two months later, the contracts for building the Black Rock Lighthouse were signed by Mr. Rossini Keverne. Some criticised the Admiralty for doing a mad thing; great contractors declared that the work could never be done for the sum announced, neither could it be finished in double the time mentioned. The engineering world gossiped freely on failure and success; but the great world outside knew little or nothing about it. Interviewers besieged the young engineer, begging for some information as to his past career; but without success. All were met with the statement that Mr. Keverne had no communication to make.

Lady Beatrice Penwithen was greatly interested, however.

"Dad," she said, when Lord Penwithen had related a part of the story to some guests at Penwithen, "it is simply wonderful! He must be a genius."

"Doubtless he is that."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"He is of humble origin, I believe. He was a manager, or something of the sort, for a railway contractor. I remember hearing something about him

three or four years ago in connection with a bridge. He astonished everybody then, I am told."

"But is—is he presentable?"

"What do you mean?"

"Does he look like a working-man? Does he drop his g's and his h's?"

"Oh, nothing of the sort. Rather, he is a very fine-looking fellow—one who would be noticed in any crowd. A masterful fellow, too. It was quite laughable to see how quietly he snubbed Lord Barehall. Some members of the Admiralty seemed quite in awe of him."

"Dad, I should like to see him."

"I'm afraid that's impossible."

"Why? You could invite him here."

"Hardly, I'm afraid."

"But why?"

"Well, you see, he's a sort of working-man."

"What of that? He'll not eat us. I am interested in him. I like to meet geniuses. Besides, if he's successful, he'll be the talk of the country."

"If he's successful"

"Don't you think he will be?"

"He says he's sure he will be."

"Then let us invite him here."

Lord Penwithen looked at the bright face of his daughter. She was now twenty-three, but she still looked only a child. Many had sought her hand during the last three years, but for some reason she had refused everyone. Nor had Lord Penwithen encouraged any suitor. She was his only child, and the light of the home. He could not bear the thought of his daughter leaving him; and he rejoiced in the fact that she showed no desire for matrimony. Of course,

he knew it would come some day; it could not be otherwise. Nevertheless, he was glad that, although a woman in years, she was still a child at heart, and that contact with the world had not destroyed the winsomeness which had characterised her all her life.

"Dad," she had said, after one of her suitors had been rejected, "why should I marry such a man as Lord Stoker? After all, how could I respect him, or, for that matter—those others? I cannot bear the idea of marrying a nobody. What have they done? Absolutely nothing! Of course, they are all right. They belong to good old families, and all that; but imagine being the wife of any one of them!"

"But, my dear Beatrice, the House of Lords, with but very few exceptions, is not noted for brilliancy of mind. The Radicals can laugh at us there with reason.—Very few hereditary peers have done anything."

"Exactly. And do you know, I am tired of these people who can do nothing but train horses and ride and shoot. You know Lord Stoker can talk of very little else than dogs or horses; while the highest enjoyment which poor Korlton has, although he's heir to a peerage, is in going to a music-hall."

"But all men are not geniuses, my dear. It isn't every man who can get a seat in the Cabinet or lead a party."

"Anyhow, I do insist on brains, and ambition of some sort!"

This was, perhaps, why Lady Beatrice was so interested in the story of the young engineer, and why she insisted that her father should invite him to Penwithen Hall. There was something of romance about his career. This young man, who had achieved so much

in such a short time, inspired her imagination, and she wanted to see him and speak with him.

Eventually Lord Penwithen yielded. After all, there was nothing very strange in doing this. He recalled the fact that several men he knew, who now took their place in the world, were of humble origin. Nothing was more probable than that this young man would one day be renowned among the great scientists. Besides, it would please Beatrice, and he could refuse her nothing.

Accordingly an invitation was sent to Rossini, asking him to become a guest at Penwithen Hall. When the young man received it, his heart beat with a great joy, and his eyes gleamed with a strange light. He was tempted to seize a pen and write his acceptance of the invitation at once. But he did not. Instead, he sat back in his chair and thought.

"Not yet," he said at length, "not yet. When the lighthouse is an assured success, and if they ask me again, I will go; but not yet—not yet."

So he wrote to Lord Penwithen, thanking him for his kindness, but pleaded as his excuse for non-acceptance the fact that he dared not relax his attention to the work in which he was engaged, even for a day. If, however, when they had reached a certain stage in the construction, Lord Penwithen were to again invite him, he would gladly avail himself of the opportunity of being his guest.

Lady Beatrice was greatly disappointed when the letter came. She had set her heart upon meeting him. The stories she had heard had inspired her imagination. Since she had heard such parts of his story as her father had been able to tell, she had read the history

of the Black Rock lighthouses ; she had heard of the tremendous difficulties which had to be mastered, and she longed more than ever to see the man who had declared that those difficulties should be overcome.

Moreover, she had eagerly read the letter which Rossini had written. She had noted the strong, firm handwriting, every line of which suggested boldness and masterfulness. In spite of herself, she began to think of what he was like. She reflected that most men in his position would have been eager to accept the hospitality of Penwithen Hall, and would have regarded the invitation as an event in their lives. As a consequence, his refusal somewhat angered her, even while it made her more anxious to see him. The very mystery that surrounded him heightened her interest in him. All her life she had admired strong men, men who struggled and overcame, and she had set her heart upon meeting this man.

However, she said nothing about it to her father ; and as a little later she went to town for the Season, she forgot her disappointment. Moreover, while there, an event took place which was destined to have a great influence over her life.

It happened in this way. One evening she was at a reception held at the house of a lady whose husband occupied a high place in the world of politics, when Lord Penwithen came to her.

"Beatrice," he said, "I want you to be very civil to a man I am going to introduce to you presently."

"Who is he, dad?" she asked.

"His name is Henwood. You may have heard how, about three years ago, old Sir Hugh Henwood died, and that his death was followed by that of two or three

others in quick succession. This led to a member of an obscure branch of the family coming into the title and the estates."

"Yes, I remember something about it."

"Well, the man I want to introduce to you is the present baronet, and, what is more, I want him to stand for the Penwithen constituency. He has the reputation of being a very fine speaker and a most able politician. Lord Winford has it that he'll be a member of the Cabinet in a very few years."

"How interesting!" she replied coldly.

"But, more than that, he was only a few years ago a Dissenting minister at the village of Polgooth."

"Dissenting minister! At Polgooth!"

The words came quickly, as though surprised. "Dad," she said, "think of it—a Dissenting minister!"

"Yes, it sounds strange, doesn't it? I believe he's still a Dissenter, although his health broke down, and he was obliged to give up his chapel. Besides, the Henwood estates are large, and he was unable to continue in his—his charge, I think they call it. Anyhow, I want to introduce him to you, and I hope you'll be very civil to him."

"Very well," she replied, expecting only to be bored.

A few minutes later she was talking eagerly with a young man about thirty years of age.

Lord Penwithen had given the facts about Hugh Henwood correctly. Not long after Rossini left Penwithen, Henwood's lungs began to trouble him—indeed, so serious were the symptoms that his doctor told him that to continue preaching for the present would be death to him—that his only hope was to travel. He was

ordered to spend the winter in Switzerland, and was advised to keep out of England during the summer. At the end of two years he was pronounced cured, although his doctors strongly advised him not to take another church. Then one after another the heirs to the Henwood title and estates died in quick succession, leaving him a great landowner, and as a consequence a man of great responsibilities.

"What did you think of him?" asked Lord Penwithen that night, as they rode home after the reception.

"A splendid man," replied Beatrice. "It is a long time since I have met anyone who has interested me so much."

"We return to Penwithen next week," he said presently.

"I am very glad," replied the girl.

"Sir Hugh is coming to stay with us during the autumn—the Whip of our party has suggested that I should invite him."

"That will be delightful."

"You will be interested to learn also that the young engineer has accepted my invitation. He will be a famous man shortly, and you have wanted to know him for a long while."

Lady Beatrice said nothing; nevertheless, she was very glad that she should see the young man of whom she had heard so much.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSSINI'S SECOND VISIT TO PENWITHEN HALL.

WHEN Rossini Keverne entered the gates of Penwithen Hall for the second time, he could scarcely control the wild beatings of his heart. It was now between six and seven years since the day on which he had first seen the face of the girl who opened his eyes to a new world. He had left the neighbourhood a few months afterwards, and had never until that day returned to it. He was not expected at Penwithen until after six in the evening, just in time to dress for dinner. Nevertheless, he came down from Plymouth by the first morning train, and having got out at the station a few miles from his old home, he gave instructions for his luggage to be sent on to Penwithen Hall some time during the afternoon, while he walked towards the hut at Maji-pies. It was no wonder that strange feelings possessed him. When he left the hut a few years before he was a great gaunt labourer clad in a workman's attire. He possessed only a few shillings, and he had started to walk to Plymouth in order that he might obtain work as a navvy. Now he was the talk of the engineering world. When the lighthouse was but half finished, a great storm swept over the works, which tested his new ideas of construction to the uttermost. "If it can stand this in its present condition," remarked Sir George Winfield, "it can stand anything." And it had weathered the storm

even while it was incomplete and therefore more likely to succumb. During the week in which the gale had continued, Rossini seemed perfectly calm and collected. "You will find it as you left it," he said to the men, when the sea was sufficiently calm for them to again venture near the rock." And he was right. Only the most trifling damage was inflicted; the main structure stood as securely as the great rock on which it was built.

He could not help being proud of what he had done as he entered the hut at Maji-pies. This place was but little altered. It was but a lonely hut among the woods when he lived there, and it was that still. Even the very ashes caused by the fires which he had lit there had been undisturbed. Some of the simple things he had left behind were there. The fern bed had been disturbed, but the wooden shutter which he had nailed to the window-place had not been pulled down. He called to mind what he had felt and what he had vowed as he sat alone there that night after the *fête* at Penwithen Hall. It was all very strange, it seemed like a dream; nevertheless, it was true. His name had been in hundreds of newspapers. He had succeeded in doing what had baffled renowned men. He was no longer an unrecognised unit in the sum total of the human race; he was a factor, and a factor of importance, in the life of the world. He counted for something—nay, he counted for a great deal. Then he was a wastrel and an outcast; now, after nearly seven years, he was the invited guest of Lord Penwithen.

He wandered among the fields where he had worked as a labourer, he noted the places where he had trapped rabbits, and at length came to the place where he had

registered his vow. His eyes grew hard as he thought of it, and then a far-away look of wonder crept into them. That very night he was to meet Lady Beatrice Penwithen as an equal. What should he think of her? He had never seen her but once since the day of the *fête*, and then he had met her father in one of the streets of Plymouth. He laughed as he called the incident to mind. Then he was still a labourer, for it was before the wonderful happening on the bridge; but many things had occurred since then.

He had no fear that she would recognise him. Lord Penwithen had not done so, and why should she? He knew that the shock-headed youth who crept away from her on her birthday and the engineer of Black Rock Lighthouse were utterly different. Besides, she had seen him only twice, and then it was to turn away from him with aversion.

Through the day he had spoken to people he had known as a boy, but no one had recognised him. He had had difficulty to keep from lapsing into the Cornish dialect as he spoke to them, so great was the spell which the old life had cast upon him; but he refrained. He saw that they looked upon him as "sum gen'l'man from up th' country," and he did not make himself known.

He felt that the greatest test of recognition would be when he saw Charlie Sloggett, of necktie fame; but when he came up to Charlie, who was carting manure from the farmyard to the field, he saw no sign in the man's eyes that they had known each other years before.

"Mornin', sur," said Charlie.

"Good morning. You are hard at work, I see."

"Doin' little, sur."

"You live in a beautiful part of the country."

"Do us, sur? I never thot nothin' 'bout et."

"Ah, perhaps you've lived here all your life."

"No, sur, not oal my life, but several 'ear."

"Ah, then you know everyone, I expect?"

"Iss, sur, neerly everybody. Besides, everybody do maake a lot more ov me since I married Maaster Liddicoat's daughter."

"Who's Mr. Liddicoat?"

"Th' farmer 'ere, sur. I wos 'ere as sarvant for sever'l 'ear; then I married Miss Mary, and now, as you may zay, I'm maaster."

"Ah, I should imagine you would be popular with the young women in your single days."

"Iss," said Charlie rather shamefacedly, "I kipt comp'ny weth sever'l. The laast maid I 'ad was the 'ousemaid up to the passon's; but when I seed that Miss Mary looked sweet top me, I gived up the 'ousemaid and made up to the woman I married."

"Ah, I see! By the way, I came across a curious hut in the woods a little while ago; it looks as though it has been inhabited at some time." Rossini pointed to Maji-pies as he spoke.

"Aw, iss, that was Granfer Flew's 'ouse. Then a great chap called Zinney Vearn lived there. 'E used to work weth me 'ere."

"An old man?"

"Oa, no, sur; onnly a booy, as you may zay. 'E was a funny chap, Zinney was. Maazed, zum people do zay; but 'is 'ead wadn' maade of turmut."

"Does he live here now?"

"Oa, no, sur! 'E went away sever'l 'ear gone, and

nobody 'ave 'eerd ov un since. Some d' think that oul Granfer Flew's ghoast made 'way wed'n."

"Granfer Flew's ghost?"

"Iss. Ya zee, Granfer Flew was a wizard, and a wizard es ten times wuss than a witch. Well, 'e lived there, and people zed that 'e 'unted the plaace. After 'e died, Zinney lived there by hesself, and—well, I must zay 'e ded act as though 'e was maazed. 'E used to work weth me 'ere, and 'e wud go round mumblin' and talkin' to hesself, like a dog draimin'; and 'e would look so strange that zumtimes 'e made me feared. Tha's why some people think Granfer Flew's ghoast made way wed'n; but Zinney wadn' sich a fool as oal that. But 'e went away zum 'ears agone, and a'an't bin 'eerd ov sence. I 'spect 'e went to 'Merica or some sich place."

"That's very interesting."

"Es et, sur? Well, as I d' say, 'e 'ad summin' else in 'es 'ead 'sides turmuts. Why, I tould un wawn day that ovver in France they ded talk another languidge; and a little w'ile arter, I 'eerd un gabbin' away words that I dedn' knaw the mainin' ov a bit, although I got a prize waunce for spellin' words and givin' their mainin' up to Churchtown Male Adult Class. So I axed un what et was, and 'e zed 'twas a French verb. I've minded that word 'verb' for 'ears, sur, whenever I've thought ov Zinney, though I doan't knaw a bit what et do main. You've never 'eerd ov Zinney, I s'poase, sur?"

Rossini shook his head.

"What part ded you come from, maakin' sa bould, sur?"

"I came from London yesterday."

"Ah, tha's a purty big plaace, edn' et?"

"Yes."

"Stayin' long, sur?"

"Only a day or two."

"Were to, then, sur, maakin' sa bould?"

"At Penwithen Hall."

Charlie touched his hat. "Beg pardon, I'm sure, sur; I dedn' main no offence. You be friendly weth Lord Penwithen, I s'poase?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, sur, ef you have a chance to tell un that the barns want repairin', and that I ought to 'ave a new stable, and that the rent es fifteen pound a 'ear too much, I should be very glad."

Rossini went away laughing; it amused him to see how anxious Charlie was to turn their conversation into financial benefit. But when evening drew near, and he entered Penwithen gates, all merriment passed away, and he was unable to control the tumult of his heart.

He had written to Lord Penwithen, telling him he preferred walking to the Hall, giving as his excuse that he wanted to visit a spot near by, which he had heard presented some curious geological remains; and thus his host did not regard it as at all strange that he should decline the conveyance that he proposed sending.

Yes, there stood the Hall, at which he had gazed nearly seven years before. Before him was the door from which Lady Beatrice had emerged, her hand resting on her father's arm. For a moment he fancied he was the wild boy who had come to Penwithen to be present at the rejoicings on Lady Beatrice's birthday, while around him were the simple rustics who joined in the merriment. It seemed to him that he could hear the girl saying: "Tell him to go away, dad. He is simply

awful!" while he had it in his heart to slouch away, as he had slouched away seven years before.

But only for a moment. He remembered the vow he had taken—remembered, too, that for seven years he had worked almost incessantly, and so successfully that difficulties which at first seemed almost insurmountable were overcome. He, the gawky, ignorant wastrel of seven years before, now stood at Penwithen Hall as a guest, while the woman who had then shuddered at the sight of him would probably welcome him.

Yes, he would fulfil his vow. For years he had kept this hour before him; for years he had toiled almost superhumanly that he might bring it to pass.

"Mr. Keverne, sir?"

"Yes."

"Will you come this way, sir? Your luggage arrived an hour ago. There is just time to dress for dinner."

"Thank you."

It was not the first great house he had entered, for Rossini had been made much of these last few months; nevertheless, he had difficulty in controlling his voice. Perhaps even then Lady Beatrice was close to him. At any rate, she was in the same house, and he would see her, he would touch her hand, he would speak to her.

Never in his life had he been so careful about his appearance, and he looked at the mirror anxiously. A tall figure, at least six feet two inches high, and the chest and shoulders of an athlete. No, there was nothing wrong with his appearance. His clothes had been made by a renowned West End tailor; they fitted his form perfectly. As for his face, it was clean-shaven; every feature revealed itself clearly—the square, deter-

mined chin, the strong face, the great, broad forehead surmounted by a wealth of black hair. His eyes were as black as coals, and shone brilliantly; his nose was large, but not too large for such a face.

Even the man who helped him to dress could scarcely repress his admiration. It was not often that a man of such splendid proportions, of such striking appearance, visited the Hall.

Lord Penwithen looked almost small and insignificant as presently the two stood together. The younger man, in spite of his early years, was a far more striking figure than the owner of Penwithen. Even the peer could not help noticing the imposing appearance of his visitor. It has been said that nothing indicates the gentleman and the clown more truly than evening clothes; but although Rossini lacked the perfect ease and the *savoir faire* of his host, if they met in a great assembly, the peer would be passed without a remark, while many eyes would be turned to have a second look at the young engineer.

Presently, all Rossini's self-control was put to the test. He had been expecting the entrance of Lady Beatrice, and, as a consequence, had been preparing himself to meet her; but a meeting took place which, for the moment, was harder to bear.

"Sir Hugh Henwood!"

Rossini felt his heart beat loudly as his old friend shook hands with Lord Penwithen. He made no sign, however, but stood watching him quietly. The years had made but little difference in him. He scarcely looked older than on the night when he told his irate housekeeper to bring refreshment for his ragged visitor.

When they were introduced, he held out his hand

quietly, while Sir Hugh Henwood scanned his face eagerly.

"I am afraid I did not catch the name, Lord Penwithen," he said.

"Mr. Keverne, the engineer who has lately built the lighthouse on Black Rock," said Lord Penwithen.

The eyes of the two men met—Rossini's hard and cold, but shining with a strange light, Sir Hugh Henwood's full of wonder and inquiry.

"Have we ever met before, Mr. Keverne?" said the young baronet, as if trying to collect his thoughts.

"I have never to my knowledge met Sir Hugh Henwood before," replied Rossini, never moving his eyes from the other's face.

Sir Hugh was about to make a further remark, when the attention of both was drawn to the presence of Lady Beatrice.

Rossini waited while Henwood spoke to her; nevertheless, he never took his eyes from her face. She was a revelation to him when, a few years before, she stood before him a happy, winsome child. Then she was clad in summer attire, and seemed a part of the beautiful summer day. When he had seen her in Plymouth, he had obtained but a passing glance at her face. Never before had he seen her in evening dress; but even now he heeded not the sparkling diamonds which hung on her neck, nor the perfect contour of her white arms. It was her face which charmed him—a face whose beauty made him wonder. True, that beauty might be enhanced by the dress she wore, but he thought not of it. It was the wondrous depth of her eyes, the perfect oval of her face, the sensitive lips, which charmed him. And he had vowed to—to—— The thought was madness.

But he controlled himself. Outwardly he was calm and serene; nothing but the quivering of the nostrils suggested what he felt. Besides, the girl put him at ease in a moment.

"Mr. Keverne," she said, "you are to take me in to dinner. I insisted on it. Do you know, I have read all the terrible stories about the Black Rock, and how engineers had despaired of ever erecting a lighthouse there; and when dad told me you had succeeded where everyone else had failed, and that you were paying us a visit, I determined that I would sit next to you, so that you could tell me everything about it. You will, won't you?"

"Still a child," he thought, "and as artless as any village schoolgirl. I see now. I am invited here as a sort of curiosity. Of course, there can be no other reason. How can there be? But Sir Hugh Henwood—I did not expect to meet him. I must be careful what I do."

Aloud he said: "It is very kind of you to bestow such an honour upon me, Lady Beatrice, especially as I shall be a very dull companion. I am but a poor talker. As for the lighthouse—well, there's nothing to say about it."

"Oh, but there is; its story is a romance!"

"Yes; but, you see, you know it all; and, after all, *things* are not interesting."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that no building, no construction is interesting of itself. Whenever interest attaches to anything, it is because of some person. In fact, there's nothing of interest in the world save a few men and women, and, alas! I am not one of those few."

They had taken their seats in the dining-hall, while the waiters moved deftly among the guests. Around the table sat the Vicar of Penwithen and several members of county families whom Lord Penwithen had invited.

"And what makes a person interesting?" she asked, looking up at his dark, strong face.

"That depends, doesn't it?" he replied. "There is an interest which is ephemeral—that is to say, you regard a man as interesting because he has done something. You hear of a great painter or writer or musician, and you are interested; but that interest may be the most ephemeral thing in the world."

"I do not quite understand."

"Well, last week I was invited to meet a man renowned in the scientific world. I was delighted. I sat next to him at dinner, and expected to be greatly entertained by his brilliant conversation. I volunteered two or three remarks, which were met by a kind of grunt. I was much disconcerted, but presently made another attempt at conversation. Then he said to me quite angrily: 'Excuse me, I came here to dine, not to talk!' After that I did not find him in the least interesting. I knew he had done great things in his own world, but somehow I forgot them. Accordingly I turned to my neighbour on the other side. He was a nobody—he had done nothing, and no one knew anything about him; but he could talk, and, do you know, I found him quite interesting."

"I think I see what you mean."

"Well, I can't talk; that is why I pity you. Believe me, I shall not be a bit surprised if presently you turn to your neighbour on the other side out of pure despair."

The girl laughed merrily. Whether he were sincere or not, he had become interesting to her, and she was bent on making him belie his words.

"Still, it is a great thing to have become interesting even for a time," she said. "The man who writes a great book, even although he is deaf and dumb, is interesting; he must be."

"Writers of books are the most uninteresting people I have ever met," he replied.

"Why?"

"They expect to be made a great deal of."

"Well, anyone who has done anything really great deserves to be made a great deal of."

"I do not see it."

"No? How is that?"

"Well, whatever we do, we do because we have certain gifts. We simply use those gifts; that is all."

"And those gifts make us interesting."

"Yes, in a sense, I suppose, you are right."

He lapsed into silence, and Lady Beatrice wondered why he had suddenly become so taciturn. Presently she began to feel that he was right, and that she would have to find a refuge in her other neighbour.

"After all," Rossini burst out presently, "the interesting person is one who conquers people, not things. When you deal with inanimate things, you deal with forces which have discoverable laws. Anybody can do that."

"Surely no."

"Yes, if one has will, energy. After all, were men like Brunel and Stephenson and Watt interesting—really interesting? But Napoleon was; so was Richelieu,

so was Cromwell, so was Abraham Lincoln. A great engineer is a great mathematician plus some constructive ability, that is all; but men like Napoleon and Cromwell were more. They risked more, too. I sometimes think I would rather be a charlatan like Cagliostro than an architect like Christopher Wren."

"Why?"

"Because he aimed at more. He sought to subdue wills instead of shape stones. A scientist may be uninteresting, but a man like Cromwell never."

"Then you take no pride in building the Black Rock Lighthouse?"

"I should take more interest in conquering someone who had a strong will."

The girl felt like shuddering.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because the one is a matter of calculation, of mathematics. But when you get into the realm of men and women, you get beyond calculation, you get beyond mathematics. Of course, the human will is governed by laws, but they are undiscoverable. Sometimes we think we have discovered them; then something happens which makes fools of us."

"Then you do not find enough in engineering to satisfy you?"

"No, it is not an end of life; it is simply a means to an end."

"I do not think I agree with you."

"If you were a man you would. For example, when I worked at the plans for that lighthouse, I had a kind of pleasure, but it did not go to the depths of my life. But one day there was a strife among the men; some of them threatened to murder me."

"What!"

"Some of them threatened to murder me," repeated Rossini quietly. "I would not yield to them in some of their desires; I made certain rules against which they rebelled. One evening they got me alone on Black Rock. They were six, and I was alone. I do not think they meant to kill me, but they determined to make me yield to them. I had to fight them all."

"But that would be impossible."

"Oh, it was not a matter of fighting with hands! They would have beaten me if it came to that. No, it was a matter of will-power; it was a matter of conquering men. The situation added to the interest. Perhaps you have never been on Black Rock. It is very wild, very lonely. I do not think I ever enjoyed anything so much in my life. That was pleasure—a pleasure which makes one feel what a grand thing it is to live."

"But who won? Did you yield to them?"

"Oh, no; of course, that would be impossible. The matter would have been easy enough if they had been of the ordinary convict type of men; but there was one who was their leader. He made it hard."

"Yes, I see."

"Thus presently I reduced the matter to being a struggle between him and me."

"And——"

"Well, I am here, and the men went quietly to work the next day."

If some men had spoken in this way, it would have seemed like boasting; but Rossini spoke so quietly that the girl never thought of it. Moreover, his presence fascinated her.

"Mr. Keverne," she said, "have you accomplished everything you have set out to accomplish?"

"No, not all—that is, not yet—but I mean to."

There was a kind of quiet intensity in his words that almost made her shiver.

"Years ago I made up my mind to do something," he went on. "It was very mad, seemingly impossible, but I made up my mind. I have not done it yet, but I mean to do it."

"Something to do with your profession?"

"No; the profession was only a means to the end."

"And are you near its accomplishment?"

"I hope so."

"Of course, it was something to do with some person?"

"Yes."

"Some man?"

"No, a woman."

He looked at her steadily, and seemed to be hesitating as to whether he should say more.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN AND THE WOMAN.

AS we have said, although Lady Beatrice was more than twenty-three years of age, she was still a child at heart, and the young man who sat by her side influenced her more than she could say. She realised that this was no ordinary dinner-party, that her companion had caused the conversation to drift into a channel hitherto unknown to her. Course after course had followed each other, and she had taken but little heed of them. She had become oblivious to everyone else. Rossini had spoken in such low tones that none but herself had heard his words, and his presence had influenced her in a way she could not understand.

"I am afraid I am making a strange kind of confession," he said, with a low laugh. "Pray forget it. It is not really worthy of your notice."

"It is very interesting," she replied; "but tell me more about that other matter. It makes one shudder to think of being on a lonely rock with six murderous men. I should so love to hear how you overcame them."

A dark look passed across his face. "It is not altogether pleasant to think about," he said.

"Pray do not speak about it if it gives you pain."

"Oh, it is not the kind of pain you are thinking of," he replied quickly. "The pleasure would have

been in conquering those fellows alone; but I did not."

"But you told me you were alone on the rock with them."

"Yes, I was for a time, but not all the time. After all, I got out of the difficulty rather by chance than by my own power. What I wanted to do was to conquer those men by myself, and, well—that is where you cannot calculate in the world of men and women. You think you have all the strings in your hands whereby you can control the world's marionettes; but you haven't. Human nature always seems to laugh at you. True, I have a sort of feeling that I could have done everything by myself, but I am not sure. Anyhow, in this case I was helped by another. The daughter of the leader of this gang had somehow discovered the plot, and she by herself, although only a girl, rowed to the Black Rock, effected a landing in spite of the treacherous tides, and—and, well it was really she who made her father give up his projects."

"She must have been a brave girl."

"The bravest I have ever known."

"A girl of the people?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I see, a romance! Is she pretty, clever? What kind of a girl is she? Do tell me?"

A dark look crossed Rossini's face. Somehow, the light, careless way in which she spoke grated on his feelings.

"There is no romance," he said quietly. "She is simply a cottage girl. She is a Sunday-school teacher, and is extremely good and pious. Her mother was an ordinary cottage woman—that is all. Her father is a

clever mechanic, but a good deal of a blackguard. The girl herself is above the ordinary cottage girl in intelligence, but her distinguishing feature is her brave, quiet courage, her devotion to her Sunday-school and her home, and her piety."

"You knew her before this—this happening, then?"

"Oh, yes, I had seen her at the chapel she attended."

"Oh, you go to chapel, then?"

"Yes; so does Sir Hugh Henwood," and he nodded towards the young baronet, who was busily talking to his neighbour.

"You do not know Sir Hugh Henwood? Of course not. He has been much abroad, and has but lately come to his title and his estates. Yes, I've heard he's a Dissenter."

"To return to what we were discussing," he said, "I said just now that Nature is always laughing at us, especially human nature. It is true; we can calculate the force of storms, and the resisting power of masonry, but when we come to deal with men and women, we are in the realm of unknown laws. I never knew what was in that young girl's mind, I never had a chance of finding out. But she, it seems, had been watching her father for weeks, and had, unknown to him, discovered his plans. More than that, she had discovered the means whereby she was able to control him."

"Is she beautiful?"

"Yes," he replied, looking at Lady Beatrice, "she is very beautiful, very. I never saw such a lovely face. Yes, a cottage girl, if you like, but a Joan of Arc nevertheless. A Protestant saint, but with all the courage

of a man. She would never be a Society beauty—that is, unless Society spoiled her. She is too *spirituelle*, too innocent. Her face is as free from guile as the face of a child of seven. Her eyes fairly haunt me."

In spite of herself, his words rankled a little in her heart. She forgot that this man was of humble birth, and that he had risen from an obscurity so great that no one seemed to know what his past had been. To her he was the most distinguished man in the house. He was the talk of the scientific world, even although he was but little more than a boy. His presence dwarfed that of every other man in the room. There was such an air of conscious strength about him that it was impossible not to look upon him as a leader. Because of this she desired to make a good impression upon him, and yet he had distinctly told her that this cottage girl was more beautiful than she. Moreover, she wondered whether this girl were the one concerning whom he had made up his mind to accomplish what seemed impossible. She determined to find out.

"Have you known her long?" she asked.

"I hardly know her at all," he replied. "I never saw her till a few months ago."

Then she remembered that it was years since he had determined to accomplish an impossible thing, and she wondered who the woman could be. She had determined to talk about the lighthouse, but the conversation had drifted into other channels, channels far more interesting.

"Were you very young when you made up your mind to do that which seemed impossible?" she asked.

"I was nineteen that very day."

"Oh! a birthday vow?"

"Yes."

"Let me hazard a guess, Mr. Keverne."

"By all means."

"You were born in the winter."

"No, I was born on the twenty-ninth of June."

"What!"

"What is there in that to surprise you?"

"Nothing, only I was born that day also."

He was about to say: "I knew it," but refrained. The time had not yet come. Instead he said: "My life ought to be a very happy one, Lady Beatrice."

"Oh, I do love to hear stories about attempting the impossible," she said with a laugh, and toying with her food.

"Nothing is impossible," he replied gravely.

"Of course, Louis XIV. and Napoleon said that, but both found out that some things were impossible. As you said just now, human nature laughs at us."

"I mean to accomplish my vow, anyhow," he said grimly.

Again the girl almost shivered. She fancied what it would be to be the victim of this young man's will. In some ways he did not seem young to her; rather he appealed to her as one who had lived long and had grown old in experience. Still she controlled herself.

"You see," he went on, "everything worth doing in the world has been done by attempting the seemingly impossible. Every truly great movement, every great revolution, the establishment of every great religion, just meant attempting what the world called impossible. Besides, such an attempt makes the joy of

living. And I mean to accomplish—yes, I mean to accomplish!”

His eyes shone with a ruddy light. To Lady Beatrice there was something uncanny about him.

“I should like to hear about it,” she said, almost in spite of herself.

“I could not tell you—no, I could not tell you,” he said slowly. “And yet I should like to put a case to you. I should like to ask your opinion about it.”

The girl's eyes sparkled. “Dinner is nearly over,” she said, “and dad generally likes to smoke his cigar out of doors after dinner during summer. Perhaps you other men will like that, too.”

“And to-day is the first of June,” he said. “Fancy, my birthday will soon be here again.”

“And mine, too,” she said with a laugh.

A little later he was walking by her side, beneath the trees in the park.

“You don't mind my smoking?”

“I shall be sorry if you don't. I think men can always talk better when they smoke.”

Rossini laughed quietly, and the girl looked up at him, wondering at his merriment. She was a tall girl, but she felt very little by his side. He was bare-headed, thus revealing the great mass of raven black, wavy hair that surmounted his broad forehead. Moreover, his face looked even more striking now than when she had first met him two hours before. In a sense he was ugly—at least, she thought so. His dark skin and large features looked almost sinister. And yet there was nothing sinister about him. His eyes had no evil in them. His tall, upright form suggested open air and sunshine.

"I wanted to put a case to you," he said, lighting his cigar with a steady hand. "Suppose a boy, a poor, unknown, ignorant boy, suddenly fell in love with a lady of high degree, and vowed to wed her. What would you think of the vow?"

"It depends, doesn't it?" she replied. "Such things are said to have happened. I have heard, too, that such things have been accomplished.

"How should you think he would set about it?"

"In many ways. Of course, there is the orthodox, melodramatic way. He should get her in his power."

"How could he, if she were rich, courted, and protected, while he was poor, ignorant, and alone?"

"I really cannot answer at once. For my own part, although such things are said to happen, I don't think they do."

"Think of Cardinal Mazarin, of Napoleon."

"Both Frenchmen."

"One an Italian and the other a Corsican; still, they succeeded."

"But does your humble boy come into daily contact with this lady of high degree?"

"No, he never sees her, and she knows nothing of him."

"Then it would be simply foolish to talk about it. The young lady might go to London for the Season, become engaged, and married without the boy knowing anything about it."

"I make nothing of that," said Rossini quietly. "Let us assume at the outset that the boy is strong and determined. Let us assume also that he possesses brains—inventive brains, inventive in the larger sense

of the word. Well, what would such a fellow do? He would keep himself posted as to the lady's whereabouts. He would know whether she were engaged. That would be easy enough."

"But if she were engaged, what could he do?"

"Oh, a strong man can do anything. He could easily get his rival out of the way."

"What! if he were poor and obscure?"

"Well, you see, such a youth as I have in my mind would not remain poor and obscure. Little by little he would obtain power. Oh, yes, he would quickly deal with rivals if they existed."

"Ah, but," said the girl quickly, "if he were that kind of man, there would be a weak place in his armour. Besides, if he really loved this lady, he would give her up for the sake of her happiness."

"But if he believed she could only be happy by wedding him?"

"The lady has relatives?"

"Oh, yes. I said she is well protected. Of course, I am only putting a case to you—that is all."

"Well, then, her relatives would protect her. Marriage on her part would be out of the question. How could she ever think of it? The whole thing would be impossible. For example, she might go to Berlin, to Vienna, and be married there."

"No," said Rossini, "such a woman as I am thinking of would be married from her father's house. You see, my youth could come in at the last, and do with the would-be bridegroom what he desired. My boy grows to be a man of resource, a man who never forgets anything, a man who is determined to make circumstances bend to his will."

"You remind me of the old query," replied the girl. "Suppose two irresistible forces meet each other, what happens? Well, nothing happens. I think this would be so in the case you have imagined."

"But something would happen," said Rossini; "it would happen that my man would have his way."

"You said just now that human nature is always laughing at us," said the girl. "It seems to me you are assuming that the lady of high degree, as you call her, is an automaton; you are imagining that she has no will, no personality."

"Her will, her personality, is not as strong as his."

"That may be, but a woman's heart laughs at strong wills and strong personalities. No, no, Mr. Keverne, I think your case is weak."

Rossini laughed quietly.

"Oh, I trust a woman's wit and woman's heart, rather than the strong man's brains," she laughed; "besides, I assume he is not a villain."

"No, he is not a villain."

"Well, then, he would not seek to wreck the life and happiness of this woman, even if he has the power, for it would wreck her life to marry a poor man."

"But he is not poor, he becomes rich."

"Even yet it is not possible. No, your case might do very well for a melodrama, but it does not happen in real life."

"One day," said Rossini, "I remember being in the company of a great man. He quoted some words of Cardinal Mazarin, who was an Italian peasant, but who became a cardinal, the first Minister of France, and husband of the Queen of Louis XIII."

"Yes," said Lady Beatrice, "what were they?"

"Someone remarked to him one day that something could never happen. He replied: 'Everything happens.' I believe him. It is only a matter of being able and willing to pay the price. You do not believe it?"

"No," said the girl; "frankly I do not."

Rossini looked at his companion, and his eyes gleamed with a strange light. Yes, she was very beautiful, and she possessed that air of nobility which only generations of refinement, culture, and association with great and far-reaching events can give. He reflected that her fathers had helped to fashion the life of the nation. She was heir of an old name, she was in some way linked with the best life of the nation. Was she right?

"But the man I have in my mind would make you believe it!" he said quietly.

"That's because you believe you will accomplish the thing upon which you have set your mind."

"Perhaps," he said quietly. "But here is Lord Penwithen coming."

"Beatrice, my dear," said Lord Penwithen, "I really must take you in; the dew is falling, and the grass is damp."

"Is it, dad?" said the girl. "Mr. Keverne and I have been discussing such an interesting problem that I had forgotten all about it."

"Besides," went on Lord Penwithen, "Sir Hugh wants a chat with Mr. Keverne."

"Some day, Mr. Keverne, we must continue our discussion," said the girl, with a laugh.

"That will be delightful," replied the young man,

and then he turned towards the young baronet who stood by his side. Both looked at each other steadily, while father and daughter made their way back to the house.

Presently Sir Hugh spoke.

"Well, Rossini," he said, "you have obtained your screw-jack."

"Nearly," replied the other.

"I wondered whether it might be you when I read about it in the newspapers," went on Sir Hugh. "I could scarcely believe it possible, even although I had some knowledge of your marvellous powers in learning."

Rossini was silent.

"Does anyone know who you are?"

"Not unless you have told them."

"Of course I have not done that. I saw that you did not wish to be recognised just now, and so I have not said a word. But your history seems like a fairy story."

"Not so much as yours."

"Oh, mine is a very simple affair. Sometimes I feel almost ashamed of it. You see, I had nothing whatever to do with it. My health broke down, I was forbidden to preach, and I had to go out of the country. While I was away, one of those strange series of events took place which landed me—where I am. I did nothing. Thus I have wealth and position simply through chance. You, on the other hand, have done everything for yourself."

"Yes," said Rossini a little proudly, "I did everything by myself. Yet no. That is not true. But for you, all would have been impossible."

"Nonsense. Such a fellow as you would find a way somehow. I happened to turn up; but I was not indispensable. If it had not been I, it would have been someone else."

"I owe everything to you," said Rossini quietly.

"And yet you never wrote me?"

"Yes, I did. As soon as I had anything to tell you, I wrote; but my letter was returned. You had left Polgooth, and there was no trace of you."

"What had you to tell?"

"Simply that I had ceased being a navy and had become a mechanic's labourer."

"Well, what happened after that?"

"Oh, I kept on working, practically night and day. Then one day the engineer of the railway was taken ill, and no one was able to interpret his plans."

"And you did?"

"Yes. I did. That led to my being made a foreman, and presently manager for a large railway contractor. Of course, I kept up my studies, and my railway work gave me experience. Then this lighthouse affair came on—and, well, that is all."

Sir Hugh could not help gazing at the young fellow with astonishment. He had accomplished marvels, and yet he spoke of his career as though it were the most commonplace thing imaginable. He pictured him as he was the first time they met. He saw a gaunt, ungainly, shock-headed, ragged youth. Now he stood in the presence of a man who would be noted anywhere, the invited guest of a peer of the realm; and the change had been made in less than seven years.

"Yes, you have your screw-jack," laughed Sir Hugh. "Well, what are you going to do with it?"

"I cannot tell that even to you," he said quietly.

"That was your secret years ago, I remember."

"It is still."

"You are not married?"

"No, not yet."

"And yet you could marry if you would. You have a position, and you must have money."

"Yes, I could marry if I would. In a year or two I shall be fairly rich, I suppose."

"And some of the best homes in England are open to you."

"People are inclined to make a fuss of one who has done something which others have failed to do, and which gets talked about in the newspapers," replied Rossini. "And you, Mr. Henwood—that is, Sir Hugh—you are not married?"

"No, not yet."

"And yet you could?"

"I do not know. That is, I do not know if I could marry the only woman I should care to marry."

"And she? Have I ever heard of her?"

"Ah!" said Sir Hugh, "that is my secret."

"You are not sure she would have you?"

Sir Hugh was silent.

"Because," went on Rossini, "if I made up my mind to win a woman, I *would* win her. Nothing should stand in my way—nothing."

"Look here, Keverne, forgive me for mentioning it, but you promised me that you would read a certain book through once a year. Have you done so?"

"I never failed in my word yet," replied Rossini.

The young baronet looked at the other's face, as if trying to read his thoughts, but he utterly failed. He

opened his lips to put another question, but he refrained. He realised that the old Rossini was dead.

"Are you staying here long?" he said at length.

"Only to-morrow. I must get back to work."

"I suppose you have many things on hand?"

"Yes, one thing leads to another. If I were ten men, I should still have more work than I could do. And you?"

"I shall be staying in the neighbourhood. Lord Penwithen wants me to stand for this constituency at the next election. I came here to thoroughly go into the matter. Shall we go back to the house?"

"Yes," said Rossini—"at least, not now; I want to be quiet for a minute. You don't mind, do you?"

"Of course not. I say, Keverne, we were friends nearly six years ago."

"You were my friend," replied Rossini. "I owe everything to you."

"That's all nonsense; but we are thrown together again, and——"

"Do you wish us to be friends still?" said Rossini, speaking eagerly for the first time during the evening.

"I do; I sincerely hope so, too."

"I shall never cease to be your friend, Sir Hugh. I do not believe you will ever cease to be mine."

The two men clasped hands, and then Rossini went away alone to the spot where he had crept on the day he had been driven from Lady Beatrice's presence, and where he had made his vow.

Presently he returned to the house again. As he drew near, he heard the laughter of girlish voices.

"Where are the men?" said one.

"In the billiard-room and in the smoke-room—that

is, except Mr. Keverne. Sir Hugh Henwood tells me he has gone for a walk in the woods by himself." It was Beatrice who spoke.

"What a wonderful looking fellow he is!"

"He is wonderful. He is a man who can do anything."

"And most men can do nothing."

"That's why you haven't married?"

"That's partly why I have married neither of those men we have been talking about. I never could marry a man who has done nothing; but, on the other hand, one can't help respecting the man who can bend everything to his will."

"Ah!" said Rossini, as he found his way into the house.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY OF THE VIOLIN.

ROSSINI found his way into the conservatory, the influence of the conversations he had had with Lady Beatrice and Sir Hugh Henwood still strong upon him.

"Now or never," he said, as he paced among the flowers and plants. "I cannot woo as other men woo. It may be that I shall never be invited to this house again. I am here because I am a sort of a lion. People—she especially—wanted to see me. I am regarded as a sort of prodigy. If I am to take the fortress, it must be by sudden assault."

He continued to walk among the exotic shrubs, heedless of the aroma they cast about him, heedless of the fact that he was scarcely polite to his host by remaining there alone. He was in deep thought. He felt that the crisis in his life had come, that the hour for which he had been struggling and fighting for nearly seven years had nearly come.

"Now or never," he repeated, "now or never. I have always said that the hour should be on her birthday, and mine; but I must not wait even for one short month. There is no time to wait."

He seemed to be making plans to map out the events which he intended should take place. A few minutes later, he had entered the drawing-room, where a number of people had assembled.

"Do you sing, Mr. Keverne?"

It was Beatrice who spoke.

"Only poorly, I am afraid. I play the fiddle a little."

"Do you? We have some violins in the house, but I suppose none of them would suit you?"

"I always bring my own with me."

"Do you? That is delightful. Shall I not send for it?"

"I will fetch it, if you really wish me to play."

"Oh, yes, please. There is no instrument I love so much."

A number of other voices joined in this cry. Evidently all present were eager to hear the performance of the man who had been the wonder of the engineering world. During the evening, scores of stories had been rife about him. Some said one thing, some another. One had it that he was of a noble family in Italy, but had been discarded by his parents; another, that he had run away from his home as a boy and had vowed never to return until he had made a position for himself equal to that which his father had bestowed upon him. Another still, that his parentage was unknown, and that he was found in a field by some worthy cottagers. None of them came near the truth, but all of them intensified the interest that was felt in him. As for Sir Hugh Henwood, he said nothing. He knew that Rossini desired that nothing should be known, and he respected his wishes. He was as keenly interested in his old pupil as ever, and marvelled, not only at the way in which he had made a great reputation in the world of science, but at the way in which he could adapt himself to such surroundings. True, his manners were somewhat unconventional; but there was nothing awkward about him. If he had not known otherwise, he could have

imagined him to have associated with people of position all his life.

Thus, when Rossini returned with his old violin, all were eager to hear him. What could this young engineer, who had spent so much time in studying his profession, know about one of the most difficult of instruments?

"I have some violin music here," said Lady Beatrice; "perhaps you know some of it. I shall be pleased to accompany you."

"Thank you; but I'm afraid it will be of no use. Besides, I know nothing of the theory of music."

A silence fell upon the company. How could a man knowing nothing of the theory of music think of offering to play to them? Still, he was no ordinary man. He was capable of anything.

He took an old, battered instrument from a battered case. No one knew that, years before, this same fiddle had been played in nearly every public-house and beer-shop for miles around. No one dreamed that it had been the property of a vagrant tinker who had played it at the village feasts, while tipsy men and farm servant-maidens had danced to its music.

"Your violin seems to have seen service, Mr. Keverne."

"It has."

"It looks old, too."

"It belonged to my father, and to his father before him."

"You treasure it, doubtless?"

"More than almost anything else."

He passed his fingers lovingly over the strings, as he tightened them. Lady Beatrice gave him the keynote

on the piano, remarking as he did so on the pallor of his face and the brightness of his eyes.

When all was ready, he drew his bow across the strings and began to play. Had a great violinist been present, he could doubtless have found many things in the performance to criticise. He would have urged that certain faults must be corrected and that many points of technique should be attended to ; but even he would have been moved. Scarcely a dozen notes had been played before Rossini had forgotten his surroundings. He was a boy again, back in the old hut at Maji-pies. In his mind he had gone back nearly six years. He had been to the birthday *fête* and been driven away as though he had been a pestilence. He felt as he had felt that night when his eyes were opened to a new world. Ignorant as he was of the theory of music, having learnt only from Josiah Yelland, who had come to teach him in his lonely hut, the fiddle was almost a part of his being. It had been his one uplifting and solacing influence in childhood. He had played it on the night his mother was buried, it had been his companion through the years. Even when he was working out his calculations for building the lighthouse, he had often stopped and dreamed for a few minutes over his fiddle, and somehow the sounds he drew therefrom strengthened his brain and cleared his vision.

Thus it was that he had forgotten even the presence of Lady Beatrice—that is, the Lady Beatrice to whom he had spoken that night ; as for the other members of the gathering, they did not exist to him.

He found himself putting into music that twenty-ninth of June, nearly seven years before. He fancied himself on the way to the *fête*, walking by himself

through flowery lanes. The birds were singing, the winds were making music amongst leafy boughs and scented flowers. The smell of new-mown hay came to him, the unripened corn swayed in the summer wind, while the great dome of the blue sky was overhead. It was all plain to him, and he made his listeners feel it. Then came the shouts of rejoicing, the laughter of hundreds of voices. One could almost hear the laughter as he drew his bow across the strings. After that came a change, for his mood had changed. He had been driven away, and he sat alone, brooding among the willows by a running stream; there also he made his vow.

Then night came on; the moon sailed high in the heavens, the birds had gone to rest, the sound of the river was far away, the wind sighed. A great longing, a great despair, had seized him, and again the instrument interpreted his feelings. After that a quietness came on, but through the coming stillness he felt as though he were sobbing himself to sleep.

He stopped. All the time he had been playing with his eyes closed; now he opened them, to see the whole company gazing at him in astonishment. He saw that tears had welled up into Lady Beatrice's eyes. He had not played in vain, his hand had not lost its cunning. He heard a great sigh around him.

"Wonderful, wonderful!"

He heard this on all hands. Even those who, as a rule, cared but little for music were almost carried away by it, while to such as Beatrice, who loved it dearly, it seemed like the revelation of a new world.

His presence had dominated all the others. There seemed to be no one else of interest in the room. It

was not a performance of some piece of music which they had heard, he had created an atmosphere of music. His father's old fiddle had helped him more than he knew.

"Mr. Keverne," said Lord Penwithen, "I congratulate you. It was simply marvellous. Who was your teacher?"

"I never had a teacher."

"Never had a teacher!"

"Well, perhaps I am wrong. A village wastrel taught me what little of the theory of music I know. But I do not remember the time when I could not play. The fiddle, and the power to love it, was the one inheritance I had from my father."

Lord Penwithen wanted to ask him further questions, but he felt it would not be courteous on his part to do so. Besides, Rossini was not a man with whom one could take liberties. He was not some *parvenu* whom one could regard as an inferior.

"Please play again."

For reply, Rossini put the fiddle in the case.

"I am afraid I cannot," he said. "I feel as though at present my friend here has nothing more to say to me. She has told her story and wants to be quiet. Do you think fiddles have souls, Lady Beatrice?"

The girl, who had never uttered a sound after the moment he had played the first note, looked up at him in astonishment.

"I sometimes think mine has. No one ever speaks to me like my sweetheart here. When I die, I shall give commands that she be buried in my coffin."

"Why?" asked someone.

"I should feel that it was sacrilege for anyone else

to play it. You see, I have been told that my grandfather made it, and that during his life no one but he ever touched it. After his death, no matter how—that is, my father always guarded it carefully, and would allow no one but me to place hands on it. Since I have had it, I have guarded it just as carefully. In my heart of hearts I do not call my friend here 'it,' I call her 'she.' She is my sweetheart. I tell my secrets only to her."

He locked the box carefully. "I will take her back to my room, if you don't mind," he said.

When he returned, he found that they were still talking of his marvellous performance. "It was like nothing I ever heard before," they said again and again.

Moreover, his music had cast a spell upon them; they spoke in subdued tones, as though they were in a church. It was impossible to be flippant after a man had laid bare his soul through the medium of music.

"Do you sing, Mr. Keverne?"

It was the first time Lady Beatrice had spoken, the music had stirred her in a way she could not explain.

"Only badly, I am afraid."

"But you do sing?"

"A little, only a little."

"Please look over my songs here, and if there is one among them that you know, I should be glad if you would sing it."

He did as he was bid, and presently placed a song in her hands.

"As I told you before, I know little or nothing of the theory of music," he said. "My time will be all to pieces; it is possible I may sing wrong notes, too. I think it is very hard to sing someone else's music."

"Is that your own composition which you played?"

"Yes, and no. It came to me, that's all. It's a memory, an experience, a vow. Some I think I composed, the rest the fiddle supplied."

The girl almost shuddered as she opened the song he had selected. The man seemed to be playing on her nerves.

She played the prelude to the song, and then almost stopped as he commenced singing. Again a silence fell on the room, and all listened to Rossini as he sang. Technically, it was a poor performance. As he had said, his time was wrong, while many of his notes were not written. And yet he held everyone spellbound. As they had expected, he had no dulcet, tenor voice; rather it was a baritone, strong and rich and deep. Some might have said that the song was not suitable to such a voice; nevertheless he sang as he had played—the song seemed to express the feeling of his heart.

It might have been some knight of romance singing a song about the lady he had dreamed of. There seemed conviction in his eyes, strength in his voice. That which he sang about would surely come to pass. It was an ordinary sentimental song, yet no one thought of it as such. This tall, strong man was singing about the woman who was one day to be his wife. There was a triumphant tone in his voice as he entered into the spirit of the song. He would not dream of her tall and stately, he would not think of her as men thought of the women they were to love. When she came to him, all would be well. She would be his queen. And yet, as he sang the last verse there seemed to be a note of warning.

But she must be courteous, she must be holy,
Pure in her spirit the maiden I love ;
Whether her birth be noble or lowly,
I care no more than the spirits above.
And I'll give my heart to my lady's keeping,
And ever her strength on mine shall lean,
And the stars shall fall, and the angels be weeping
Ere I cease to love her, my queen, my queen !

This time, instead of silence, great applause greeted him when he had finished. They had forgotten the technical errors he had made, in the triumphant strength of the singer. As it was remarked again and again, here was a man who could accomplish anything, a man who would sweep away all difficulties.

"Forgive me," said Rossini, "I ought to be ashamed of myself for consenting to make an exhibition of myself. I thought so much about the words that I am afraid I forgot the way the man who wrote the music intended it to be interpreted."

At this there was general dissent, but Rossini noticed that Beatrice did not say a word. One man present, however, came to him and shook him by the hand. He was an Italian count, and a great lover of music.

"Ah, Mr. Keverne," he said, "I am told that you are a great engineer—that you have, in fact, worked wonders in your profession for one so young. But give up your engineering—give it up, I beseech you! The great God intended you for something better."

"What, Count Piozzi?"

"What? The only thing on earth which is really divine. Music! Music interprets everything. Sorrow and joy, passion and peace, beauty, and above all, religion. Music interprets them all."

"I think you are right."

"Aye, and you have it in you. You have it in you. Tell me, have you Italian blood in your veins?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Why, you have the passion, you have the soul of an Italian. Keverne, Keverne. No, that is not Italian."

"But my Christian name is."

"What is that?"

"Rossini."

"Rossini! I command you to give up engineering. I command you! In the name of music, in the name of the great lyrical composer to whom you are related, I command you! You cannot play, you cannot sing—as you ought; but oh, man, you have it in you! That violin piece—it was full of error, full of weakness; but it was divine. I know. The birds sang, the flowers bloomed, the brooks babbled; I saw all, heard all; I felt the passion, the despair, the revenge, the victory, too. I felt it all. But you murder music—yet. You must give your life to it! You must, you must. Construct bridges, build breakwaters, lighthouses! What is it? To deal with mud, dust, dirt!—that is all. But music! Music is divine, *Cielo!* there is nothing else!"

"Dante did not say so."

"You know Dante?"

"I have begun to know him, that is all."

"In his own tongue. *Parla Lei Italiano?*"

"*Un poco solamente.*"

"Ah, but you do know it a little. You must come to Italy. You must visit Florence, where he lived and saw his Beatrice. You must visit Ravenna, where he died."

The party had broken up in groups and were talking together; no one was near them but Lady Beatrice, who had heard every word.

"Dante was able to love Beatrice without music," said Rossini, looking askance at Lady Beatrice.

"Yes, yes, but he married another. A poor, commonplace thing. Ah! but Dante would never have done that had he been a musician as well as a poet. He could not, I tell you, he could not."

Rossini laughed. "What do you think, Lady Beatrice?" he said. "Count Piozzi here says that Dante would never have married Gemma Donati, but have remained faithful to his love for Beatrice, if he had been a musician as well as a poet. What do you think?"

"I do not think Dante ever loved Beatrice at all," said the girl. "That is, as men love women. She was simply a dream, a poem, an inspiration. She was not human to him, she was a saint, an angel. He only saw her from afar. Had he loved her, as some say, he would never have married another. Even as it is, that part of Dante's life always saddens me."

"Why?" asked Count Piozzi.

"Because it makes one think of Dante as a man rather than as a poet. Having seen Beatrice, and loved her, he should have loved her for ever. He should never have even thought of Gemma Donati. Beatrice should have been the one woman in the world to him. There should never have been another."

"Do you not think a man can love more than one woman, then?"

"Not really and truly."

"But a woman can love more than one man?"

"I do not know. A woman is different from a man. She always looks for a protector; but a man should be strong. He should remain true to his one true love. That's why I like the song you sang, Mr. Keverne. I

know life isn't like that; but it ought to be. Perhaps if we lived in a primitive age like Dante, we might be more natural."

"Primitive age!" cried the Count. "Florence in the days of the Medicis primitive! Why, it was the time when life was at its flower. The arts, poetry, music, learning, were all in their glory. Call the days of the 'Vita Nuova,' the 'Divine Commedia,' primitive! Ah, lady, but you do not know Italy. When I am in Florence now, I grieve. Yes, yes, we have tramcars, electricity, machinery, ah, yes! Oh, I love my city, *cara mia*—forgive me, but I am an old man—and when I look on the hills around Florence, and cast my eye away to the distance, and see Vallombrosa, I rejoice. '*Bellissima, bellissima!*' I say, but Florence is only a copy now. Our statuary, our pictures. What are they? Only copies of what once was. No, no, Lady Beatrice, the times of the Medicis were not primitive, rather they were over-ripe. The progress made since? Machinery! The discovery of steam, electricity! It is not progress. It only makes smoke, it makes *fango!*"

The Count would have continued in this vein, but someone claimed his attention, leaving Rossini and Lady Beatrice together.

"I want to continue that conversation which we had this evening," he said.

"What conversation?" asked the girl.

"About the poor lad who made a vow concerning the lady of high degree. You promised me you would."

"Yes; well, to-morrow we may have an opportunity."

"No, to-night."

She looked around the room; on every hand people were talking.

"Yes, I know. It is impossible to discuss it here. I want to make a daring proposal, Lady Beatrice."

"Yes, to whom."

"To you."

"To me?"

"Yes, it means much to me. More than you can think. I want to ask you a favour, a great favour. I know it seems like madness on my part; for you never spoke to me until to-day. But you must grant my request, indeed you must."

The influence of the man was strong upon her. The memory of what he had played on the old violin haunted her. She heard again and again the birds singing. She heard the cry of despair. She wanted to know more about him; being in his presence had a strange charm for her.

"I want to tell you something," he said quietly. "I want to tell you something to-night. Will you hear me?"

Again she looked around on the guests.

"Yes, yes, I know," he said, "I know that you cannot leave your friends. I know, too, that we cannot talk freely while they are here. But they will be going soon. Give me an hour after they are gone."

"What do you want to speak to me about?"

"That concerning which we spoke after dinner. I want to tell you about it. It is not fancy; it is real. I must tell you."

The man had cast a kind of spell upon her. She forgot that he was but a stranger to her, forgot that he was said to be of humble birth. All that was nothing now. He was a strong man who interested her more than anyone she had ever met; he was a man whose presence charmed her. She remembered his

wondrous music. Never before had she heard such sounds drawn from an instrument. Besides, she wanted to hear what he had to tell her. Who was this poor lad who vowed to wed a lady of high degree? Who was this woman? She wanted to know, and in her excitement she scarcely realised what she was saying.

Still something held her back. "I am afraid it is not possible," she said.

"Please," he said. "More depends on it than you think."

"I am at a loss to know why you wish to tell me, especially why you wish to tell me to-night," she said.

"You refuse, then?"

"Would not to-morrow do?"

"No, to-morrow would not do."

She lifted her eyes to his, and then, in spite of her judgment, the man was master. His great, black eyes made her promise.

"Very well," she said. "The guests will soon go; and after they are gone, I will wait for a few minutes here in the drawing-room."

CHAPTER XI.

ROSSINI'S WOOING.

ROSSINI stayed a few minutes in the smoke-room, then went to his bedroom and locked the door. He had succeeded beyond his expectations. That night he would see Lady Beatrice alone.

He did not know how angry she was at her promise; for she was angry. Directly he had left her, she felt that she had done a foolish thing. Not that she ever thought of his attempting to extract any foolish promise from her; and, angry as she was, she did not altogether repent. She was young, and young life always loves the mysterious.

She did not think of going back upon her word. In a few minutes he would say what he had to say, and then she would bid him "Good-night." After all, it was probably of no importance.

A little later, the great house was nearly silent. Now and then the sound of laughter came from the smoke-room, but evidently nearly all in the house had gone to bed. She sat in the drawing-room, and having drawn a chair close to a lamp, tried to read. But she could not fasten her attention on the story. The romance of the young engineer was more interesting to her than the one on the printed page. What did he wish to tell her? And why had he chosen her as his confidante?

Presently her imagination caused her to have strange thoughts. Had he committed some crime, and longed

for someone to whom he could confess it? Or was he going to tell her the story of his life? In a way, although she had seen him that day for the first time, she felt that she had known him for years.

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked on, and she wished he would come. After all, it was not pleasant sitting there alone, even although she heard her father's laugh in the distance. Probably the men in the smoke-room would not go to bed for some time yet. She had heard her father say that he meant to have a good talk with Sir Hugh Henwood that night about the political situation in that constituency. What a fine fellow Sir Hugh Henwood was! clever, interesting, and handsome. True, he was not so striking in appearance as Mr. Keverne, nor did he command attention in the same way; but she liked him, nevertheless. On the whole, she was glad he was to be their guest for a few days. On the other hand, Mr. Keverne was soon to leave them. What a wonderful man he was! She was glad she had persuaded her father to invite him. Moreover, it was natural for Lord Penwithen to do so, seeing that the Admiralty was going to give him another commission of great importance. But what did he wish to say to her?

The door opened, and Rossini entered. He was covered almost from head to foot by a long summer overcoat. At another time she would have wondered at this, but now she was almost frightened by the strange look in his face.

"Thank you, Lady Beatrice, for being so kind to me," he said. His voice was almost hoarse, and she thought she detected a tremor in it. In spite of herself, fear came into her heart. She thought he looked taller than ever in

the long dust-coat; and as she looked at him, she thought no more of Sir Hugh Henwood. Rossini's presence had driven everyone else from her mind.

He took a seat at some distance from her. There was nothing of the confidence in his demeanour which he had manifested an hour before. He seemed to hesitate in his movements. Neither did he speak for a few seconds. He might have been a man who had been fighting some battle in his own heart.

"I wanted to tell you a strange story," he said. "I want also to make a confession to you."

She did not answer, but her heart beat painfully as she waited for him to proceed.

"I told you that I had made a vow to accomplish some impossible thing years ago," he said, "and then I put a sort of imaginary case to you."

"Yes," she said, "but that was surely not a sufficient excuse to wish to see me in this way?"

"Yes," he replied, "for you have something to do with it"

"I!"

"You, Lady Beatrice. Let me tell you a true story."

He hesitated a second, while she waited for him to proceed.

"Seven years ago," he said presently, "there lived in a certain parish a poor, ignorant waif. He was almost as ignorant as the cattle he drove. He lived alone. No one had taught him any good—no one. His father was a drunken vagabond, who had died when he was a child. His mother was also a drunkard. She died when he was fifteen. Both of them had neglected him, starved him, ill-treated him. When they died, he was better situated than when they were alive. But there

was nothing to lift him out of his degradation. The neighbours looked upon him as hopeless. Some thought him mad, others said he was a fool, or what they termed half-baked. Perhaps he was. Nothing stirred his life. Then one day, when he was nineteen, something happened. A great lord had sent invitations to all the people who dwelt on his estates, to be present at a *fête* on the occasion of his daughter's birthday. This boy received no invitation, however; no one thought of him, the great lord did not know of his existence. But he went. He had saved a few shillings, and with them he bought a suit of clothes, which made him look almost worse than he looked in the rags he generally wore. He wore these and made his way to the *fête*. When he came near the great house, he heard shouts of rejoicing; music, merriment, revelry were everywhere. • The boy, however, thought little of this. His eyes were fixed on the entrance door of the great hall, from which emerged the lord of the estates and his daughter, whose birthday was being celebrated. They came out on the lawn, the hand of the daughter resting on her father's arm. The boy drew nearer and nearer, like one fascinated. He did not think of the man who was owner of everything, he thought only of the young girl by his side. He had never seen anyone like her before. To him she was a beautiful creature from another realm. She made him feel that there was another world than that which he had known. In his heart of hearts he fell on his knees and worshipped her. He loved her with a mad, blind love. He knew nothing of her, save that she was infinitely above him. She was as pure as a saint, as lovely as an angel. All his heart went out to her. Up to that moment no

thought of love ever came into his life. Now he worshipped. He would gladly have died to have won a smile from her, so fair, so kind, so gentle was she. He saw that her face was wreathed with smiles. She was a part of that glad day. The singing birds, the flowers, the blue sky above were no more a part of the day than she. Fascinated by the vision of her face, and not knowing what he was doing, the boy, tall, gaunt, and repellent, crept nearer and nearer, till he came so near that he could have touched her with his hand. But he did not do it. No such thought entered his mind. He simply worshipped from afar. As he stood gazing and wondering, the girl turned and saw him, and then she started back with a look of terror. 'Oh, dad, what an awful creature!' she said. 'Tell him to go away, dad! tell him to go away!' Had he been a mad dog, a viper, she could not have shrunk away with greater disgust. The boy saw that she loathed his presence."

He ceased speaking, while Lady Beatrice looked at him with a great fear in her eyes. Little by little the meaning of his story had come to her, until she felt her face become alternately flushed and pale.

"Were you that boy?" she gasped.

He threw off the dust-coat with which he had enveloped himself, and stood before her, clothed as he had been clothed seven years before.

"Do you recognise me?" he said, as he slouched towards her, and again the girl felt like shrinking from him.

"I am so sorry," she said impulsively; "I was but a child. I did not realise what I was doing."

"The boy did not wait to be ordered away," said

Rossini. "The girl's face was enough for him. He went away maddened, and yet he still worshipped her. He loved her with a mad, unreasoning love. From that moment life became new to him; he felt as though something snapped in his brain and in his heart. The world was a new world. For a moment everything was possible. Sitting down by the trout-stream which runs through your park, he made a great vow, a vow as seemingly impossible of fulfilment as ever man made. He vowed that he would rise to her position, and that he would win her for his wife."

Rossini stood before her as he had stood seven years before. Unconsciously his shoulders had taken on their old stoop. He had grown but little in height since that day, and so the badly fitting clothes made him still look like a great, overgrown clown. The same wild look was in his eyes; moreover, the same expression of wonder and worship was there. "Yes," he went on, "I vowed that I would make you my wife, and that I would not degrade you in doing so. Throughout the day I kept on repeating it; then when night came on, I went back to my hut, where I lived alone, and took off these clothes, vowing I would never wear them again until I stood before you, having won a position worthy of your love."

"You fear me, don't you? I do not wonder. I fear myself every time I look at these things. There"—he threw on his long dust-coat again. "Need I tell you the rest? I have never ceased thinking of you through all the years. I have worked night and day with you in my mind. And have I not succeeded?" There was a touch of triumph in his voice now. "Seven years ago I could scarcely write my name. I was more ignorant

than any farm-servant in the parish. Well, you know what I have done. I heard of Sir Hugh Henwood. He was then the minister of a small Congregational church at Polgooth. He set me tasks, hard tasks, but I did them. He told me I learnt more in nine months than any other man he knew could have learnt in nine years. I became interested in engineering, and I walked from here to Plymouth and obtained work as a navvy. I went to technical classes at Plymouth, and each teacher said I astounded him by the progress I made. But I did it all for you, all for you. The months sped on, until three years had passed from the day I first saw you; then one day I was walking along Plymouth streets, fretting at the slowness of my progress. I was blind to all that passed, and I remember clenching my fists and declaring that I would succeed whatever might happen. In my forgetfulness I struck out as against an imaginary foe. I heard an angry voice, and coming to myself, I saw you and your father. In my madness I had struck him. Do you remember?"

"Yes, yes! Was that you?"

"It was I. I was still a labourer, but I was nearing success. It was sure to come. I had made up my mind that it should. This evening you suggested a difficulty when I stated a supposititious case. You said that the lady might marry another man. Do you think I would have let another man marry you? Do you think I should not have known if you had become betrothed? I knew the position of your family in the West of England, and that your marriage engagement would be the talk of the whole countryside. Had you become engaged to another man, that man would never have married you."

"What would you have done?" said the girl, frightened.

"I do not know ; but you would never have married him. There is but little more that I need tell you now. Mr. Groster, the engineer, who had constructed a new bridge, was taken ill, and no one could interpret his idea. I need not enlarge on this. Delay meant great loss of money, and Mr. Groster was suffering from a malady which promised to keep him away from the bridge for many weeks. Things were at a deadlock until I, who for months had been trying to grasp the principle on which he worked, offered the directors who were there that day, to carry out what Mr. Groster had in his mind."

"And did you do it?"

"Yes, I did it. It was something which I determined to make happen. I did it. After that all the rest has been easy. Now I am no longer poor, I am no longer obscure."

He ceased speaking, while the girl looked up at him. He was standing erect now, his massive frame making her, tall and well-grown as she was, look diminutive. His great mass of hair hung in tangled confusion over his large, well-shaped head. His eyes shone like fire.

"Now you know why I wanted to speak to you to-night," he said. "I could not help it. I made up my mind to ask you, when I ceased playing my old fiddle. What I played to-night, I played on the night of your birthday, seven years ago, when I sat alone in my hut. I worshipped you then, I worship you now. Lady Beatrice, can you give me any hope?"

"That I shall marry you?" said she, like one aghast.

"Yes, you must, you must. I vowed it long ago. You must. Can't you see? You caused me to be re-born, you strengthened me to conquer difficulties."

"Oh, you cannot understand," said the girl.

"Yes, I can. You are thinking of our relative positions. I know that you are the child of one of the oldest houses in England. I know that you have the world at your feet. But think, no man can give you the position I will give you. I mean it. Do you want riches? In a year or two I will be rich. I have calculated everything. I am rich now, as some call rich, but in two years I will be rich even from your standpoint. Do you want to be the wife of a famous man? I will be famous. I have won some fame already, but I will win more. Other scientists have obtained titles, perhaps I will. Or, if you wish, I will go into Parliament, and in a year or two I will gain the ear of the nation. Don't you believe me? Oh, but I can do it, and I will, I will!"

The man's great strength dominated her again, the girl felt the truth of what he had said. Here was a man to whom nothing was impossible. And, yes, she admired him; more, she was fascinated by his presence.

"I know you admire a brilliant Parliamentary career," he went on; "and you know, too, the difficulty in climbing the Parliamentary ladder. It is not really difficult. The House of Commons is simply crying out for men who have brains to think, and language to express their thoughts. Let me tell you a story. I was in a certain town in England the other day, and a Cabinet minister came there to speak. I was invited to the platform. That Cabinet minister failed to convince or arouse the audience. And yet the subject on

which he spoke was one on which he was supposed to be a specialist. His words fell flat. His arguments were unconvincing. I was asked to move a vote of thanks to him. I had never spoken in public in my life, but I consented, in order to test my power. In five minutes the audience was in a tumult of wild enthusiasm. What he failed to do, I did. When I had finished, that Cabinet minister begged me to enter Parliament. 'You can be anything you like,' he said. And I will, too, if you wish."

The girl believed it. Her heart beat loudly as he spoke. Here was a man of whom any woman could be proud. Not a well-bred mannikin, but a man—a strong man, to whom nothing was impossible; and there was nothing she so much admired as a strong man.

"Do not think of me as a braggart," he went on, "Ask those who know me best, and they will tell you that I am a silent man—that I keep my own counsel and make but few promises; but you know why I speak thus to you. You, for seven years, have been the dream, the hope of my life. I have hidden nothing of the past from you, that is why I make promises. I love you, I love you. Tell me, Lady Beatrice, may I hope? Nay, you must tell me, else all life is a mockery."

"Oh, I am bewildered!" said the girl. "I cannot think."

"Yes—forgive me. I know all this must seem madness to you. Thank you for hearing me patiently, for you have been patient. Besides, I will not press for an answer now—yes, I will! Give me a conditional promise. Wait for me two years; and if in two years from now I am not on the high road to fulfilling the promises

I made to you, I will ask nothing from you. But if I succeed—then will you promise?”

She longed to promise him, but she was afraid—afraid of the influence he had over her, afraid of his tremendous power of will. She felt but a child by his side, he seemed to sweep aside the will of others.

“I am tired—frightened,” she said. “I cannot promise now—not now.”

“But when?” he asked.

She looked up into his eyes. They were not masterful now, but pleading. If his influence over her was great, so was her influence over him. For years he had worked and struggled for her; and now that they stood face to face, she seemed the one thing in the world to live for.

“Tell me,” he said; “do not make all my years of struggle a mockery.”

She saw his lips tremble; she, Lady Beatrice, had conquered the strength of this strong man. Her heart glowed at the thought of what he would do for her. She never felt towards another man as she had felt towards him. All her other suitors were but pigmies compared with him. And oh, how he must have loved her! At that moment she thought nothing of difficulties, nor of what her father would say. For a moment she felt like promising him all that he desired, and telling him that there was no need to wait longer. But only for a moment. Something which she could not understand forbade her.

“Father told me he was going to ask you to come here for my birthday,” she said presently. “If you can come then, I will give you my answer.”

“Thank you, Lady Beatrice,” he said; “thank you.”

"But I promise nothing—nothing now," she said.

"Yes, but you will, you will," he replied. He bent over her hand and kissed it, and then walked away to his room without another word.

When morning came, he was the old Rossini again. He came down to breakfast, and was as cool and collected as if nothing had happened. He met Beatrice with a grave smile, but neither by word nor look did he give a hint of what had taken place between them the night before. Throughout the day he did not seek her society. She felt almost hurt at this, although she almost feared being alone with him. The only difference in his behaviour towards others was that he entered into their discussions more freely. He argued the political situation with Lord Penwithen, and showed a knowledge of public affairs which surprised the man who had spent his life in the public service. He discussed with Sir Hugh Henwood his chances of winning the next election in the Penwithen constituency.

"You surprise me, Keverne," said Sir Hugh presently.

"Why?"

"I thought you had no interests outside engineering."

"Oh, one's life enlarges as one grows older. Probably I may be a candidate for Parliamentary honours myself some day."

"You would be a wonderful success if you did."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. I have often thought of the words you said to me seven years ago: 'I c'n do anything I've a mind to, ef I set my mind on it' You could, too. And yet I almost hope you'll not go into Parliament."

"Why?"

"Unless a man feels a call in that direction, I can think of nothing more miserable. To be a mere voting machine is terrible; but to be a party hack, or one who stumps the country for Parliamentary fame, is worse."

"Then what are you thinking of going into Parliament for?"

"For the same reason I went into the ministry. Because I believe God wills it. Even as it is, I am in a strait betwixt two. I am often tempted to take another church. But for my doctor's express command, I should. He says that the work of a church, the continuous preaching year in and year out, besides all the duties such a work entails, would kill me. If I go into Parliament, I shall go there to attain the same ends."

"And they?"

"To try and uplift the life of the people; to make it easy to do right and difficult to do wrong; to sweep away abuses; to obtain religious equality for all sections of the community. If I did not believe I could help towards this, I would not touch it. Otherwise it would be sacrilege."

Rossini was silent.

"Do you ever go to church, Keverne?"

"Yes."

"Which church?"

"To the Independent church."

"But why to that?"

"Because you belong to it. I have had no other reason."

"And, as you told me last night, you read the New Testament once a year?"

"Yes."

'Well?' and Sir Hugh looked at him steadily.

"I don't know," replied Rossini; "but it is a wonderful book."

"And those two passages which we repeated together one night?"

"I don't know," said Rossini again.

The following day he left Penwithen Hall. He was not as jubilant as he expected to be; nevertheless, the same look of determination was upon his face. He said "Good-bye" to Lady Beatrice courteously, but he showed no sign of emotion, even although he looked steadily into her eyes as he spoke.

When at length he was in the railway carriage, he sat for a long time engrossed in deep thought.

The following Sunday morning he made his way to the little church he had frequented during the time he had been living in the neighbourhood where Black Rock Lighthouse was being built. On his way he passed a tall, respectably dressed, but somewhat morose-looking man.

"Good-morning, Fletcher."

"Good-morning, sir."

"I shall be on the lighthouse to-morrow, to see that all is finished satisfactorily."

"I think you'll find everything to your liking, sir. I've kept a strict eye this last week while you've been away."

"That's right."

"I wonder who conquered that man?" mused Rossini, as he walked on. "Was it his daughter Mary, or was it I?"

He entered the church. As he went to his pew, a young girl who saw him went pale and rosy by turns. She was the daughter of Reuben Fletcher, but no one

would have thought of her as a mechanic's daughter. Rossini watched her face often through the service. And this was scarcely wonderful. It was a wondrous face. He was not wrong, even after he had seen Lady Beatrice, in saying that she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. And yet the young engineer paid no heed to her after the service was over. One day during the following week he met her in the street, but he gave her only a careless, passing nod.

"He does not know. He does not care," she sobbed, as she found her way home. "And yet——"

No, Rossini did not know. He did not care. His mind was filled with thoughts of another, and it was with a fast-beating heart that he started for Penwithen Hall a week or two later.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW ROSSINI KEPT HIS VOW.

THERE were to be no great public celebrations on this twenty-ninth day of June, as there were on that day when Rossini first saw Lady Beatrice Penwithen. A few friends were invited, and that was all. Nor would the weather have been favourable for such a celebration. Midsummer though it was, the clouds hung heavily in the sky, and the rain fell in torrents. Even the flowers looked what the Cornish folk call "bedavered." The heavy rain had beaten them into the earth, and the leafy woods, which in the bright days glinted in the sunshine, now appeared gloomy and forbidding.

But Rossini heeded not this as he sat in the train which made its way across Saltash Bridge, Brunel's great triumph, and then through the undulating country which lay southward. He had left Plymouth by the first train, and hoped to arrive at Penwithen Hall for lunch.

"I wonder whether she will like my birthday present," he said, as he took a small jewel-case from his pocket.

There was no one in the carriage with him, and so he could examine it at leisure. He had bought it the day before in Plymouth for a sum which six years before he would have regarded as beyond the dream of avarice. He smiled as he thought of it; even to him his wondrous success was a marvel.

He opened the jewel-box and took therefrom a

ring. The jeweller who sold it told him that, for the quality of its stones and the chasteness of its design, it was the finest he had ever seen. And Rossini had bought it. Did he not intend giving it to a peer's daughter?

When he arrived at the station nearest Penwithen Hall he found a carriage awaiting him. A few minutes later the horses dashed through the rain towards the great house. To Rossini the ordeal of going there was greater even than it was a month ago. What would she say? Was it possible that she, Lady Beatrice Penwithen, would, after what he had told her, be his wife?

He noticed the lanes where he had slouched bare-footed as a boy. Away in the distance he saw the woods where the hut in which he had lived still stood. Everything was familiar, and yet everyone seemed different. He wondered what those men who had served him so obsequiously would say if they knew that seven years before he had come among them a ragged outcast? He called to mind the time when he had dreaded to go to the station. He was the butt of all their jokes. Everyone thought they might laugh at Zinney "Vearn"; and they had laughed at him, from station-master to porter. To-day they had touched their caps to him, and vied with each other as to who should take his luggage to the carriage, and humbly thanked him as he threw them two silver pieces.

"The great engineer what's stayin' with Loard Penwithen. 'An'some fella, edna, then?"

"Iss, I'd like to 'ave the brains 'e've got."

"Made 'eaps of money, I d'ear."

"Nothin' to what 'e will maake."

Thus they spoke of him, and no one suspected that

this was he at whom they had laughed on the day of Lady Beatrice Penwithen's birthday *fête*.

In truth he felt he was not the old Rossini Keverne at all. He was another man. The past was but a dream, the present only was a reality.

He arrived at the Hall just before lunch, and met Lady Beatrice almost immediately. His heart beat wildly as he saw her. He admired her graceful movements, her slight, lissom figure. Still a child in many ways, but with all the pride of her race in her eyes. He noticed how pale she was. Why should that be, on her birthday?

Nay, more, he thought, in spite of the proud expression in her eyes, there was also a look of fear. What did that mean?

Sir Hugh Henwood and many others were there. Sir Hugh was now the accepted political candidate for the district, and believed he had a fair chance of unseating the present member. He would have Lord Penwithen's influence, and it was understood that Penwithen Hall was to be his home during his visits to his constituency. Rossini noticed, too, that Lord Penwithen seemed to regard Henwood with special interest. There was a certain familiarity of speech and a friendliness of demeanour which the young man did not quite understand.

Lady Beatrice did not sit by Rossini during lunch; instead, she had Sir Hugh Henwood as her neighbour. This disturbed the young engineer somewhat, but he felt the little jewel-case in his waistcoat pocket, and then his eyes hardened with a look of resolution.

"She promised that she would tell me to-day," he said to himself again and again, and he asked himself

what he would feel like if he were the accepted suitor of the heiress of all the countryside which stretched out before him.

During the afternoon the sky cleared, and then, seeing her go out on the lawn alone, he hurried after her.

"At last!" he said, as he came to her side.

The girl looked up at him, but she did not speak.

"You know why I have come," he said. "You promised you would tell me to-day. Besides, I want to give you your birthday present, which, I trust, may be something more than a birthday present."

Still she did not speak. She could not, her heart was fluttering too wildly.

"Look," he said, taking the case from his pocket and touching the spring, "will you accept my gift, Lady Beatrice—will you?"

The girl trembled as she looked at the man by her side, and then at the ring he held in his hand. She knew what it meant.

"Don't, don't. I am afraid," she whispered.

Her answer angered him. "Why, are you afraid?" he said. "Am I such an ogre!"

"No, no, I did not mean that. Only I came out to be alone."

They were walking side by side along the pathway through the woods. The trees had scarcely ceased dripping, after the rainfall, the stream in the near distance was swollen by the heavy rains.

He hesitated a second. "I want to show you something, Lady Beatrice," he said. She walked by his side until they had come to the bottom of the valley, where the muddy stream ran.

"You see that clump of willow bushes?" he said. "Seven years to-day, I went there. I sat there for hours. It was there I vowed to win you as my wife—to conquer all difficulties, to sweep aside all obstacles, never to rest until I had won you. You must promise me. Don't mistake me," he went on, as he saw the angry look in her eyes; "not because of my vow, but because of the love that caused me to make it. Nay, it was more than love, it was wild, unreasoning worship. I cannot take 'No' for an answer, I simply cannot. How can I?"

By this time he was gaining his old ascendancy over her. Again he was the only man in the world to her—the man who could do anything, the man before whom all things yielded.

"Do you really mean it?" she said.

"Mean it!" His eyes flashed fire. "Mean it! Is there any need to ask that?"

"No, no; but—but I do not think you understand. My father——"

"Forgive me. Yes, I think I understand. I have not been accustomed to the ways of those who live in your world; but I can easily arrange all that. I will go to your father and ask him——"

"No, no; you must not do that."

"Why?"

"Because—oh, you frighten me!"

"But I love you. You believe that? You do not doubt that?"

"No."

"And you care for me?"

"Yes—that is——"

"Is there someone else?"

She was silent.

Rossini laughed. "You know what I told you about a rival," he said. "We will not trouble about him, if you please. I have lived seven years for this hour, and I am not going to be displaced by a rival."

She was angry with him. All the pride of her race rose within her. She longed to tell him to leave her, but she could not. The man conquered her by the strength of his personality and will. Yes, she loved him, but she was afraid of him. Thus her love was not perfect, "for perfect love casteth out fear."

"Do you love this other man, this rival?"

"Yes—no, no; I do not love him," and the latter part of her answer was true. At that time the man by her side was everything to her.

"Lady Beatrice," said Rossini gently, "I do not wish to force your answer. I can wait, even although you promised to tell me to-day. And yet you do not know the joy it would give me if you would take this ring. Will you wear it, then, as the gift of one who has loved you for seven years? And then perhaps you will at some time allow me to place another ring on another finger."

He held out the box to her, which she took like one in a dream.

"I promised to tell you to-day," she said; "but not now—not now. Wait till after dinner to-night. Will you?"

There was a look of pleading in her eyes.

"Wait!" he cried. "I would wait till I was a decrepit old man, if at the end of my waiting I knew that I should have your love."

The girl's heart gave a great leap of joy. It was

wondrous to be loved so. She almost longed to tell him to put the ring on the finger, so much did his presence and his ardent words move her; and yet she hesitated.

"To-night, then," she said, and he saw her eyes soften as she spoke. "And now I would be alone a few minutes."

He strode away, a conqueror. He knew he had won his battle, although no promise had been made. He, too, wanted to be alone and to think of the future of his life. Yes, he was sure she would want him to go into Parliament. Well, he would go. Perhaps she would not want her engagement to be known until he had risen in Parliamentary life. Perhaps, too, she would not desire even her father to know what had passed between them. But that did not matter. He would soon win the Parliamentary position that she desired. At that very moment a great question was before the country, which agitated the minds of men sorely. He would make himself master of it; he would speak on it; he would gain the ear of the nation. That night she would promise to be his wife. The look in her eyes had told him that.

He strode across the park joyously. The sun had come out and the birds were singing gaily. He could not help rejoicing.

"I say, Keverne."

He turned and saw his old friend, Sir Hugh Henwood.

"What a fellow you are, Keverne! Here have I ever since lunch been wanting to speak to you, and yet here you are tramping alone, like the misanthrope you are."

Rossini laughed aloud. Sir Hugh did not know.

"I wanted to tell you something, Keverne," said the young baronet, becoming grave.

"What—about your prospects as a politician?"

"No, about something of far more importance."

Hugh Henwood's voice told how deeply in earnest he was.

"I want to tell you something," he said. "I feel I must unburden my heart to someone, and I know I can depend on you, can't I?"

"I hardly need answer, do I? In a sense you have been the one friend of my life. At any rate, you were my one friend when I most of all needed a friend; and, as I used to tell you, I never forget, never. Besides, there is no man on earth who—but there is no need to talk about that."

"I understand, Keverne. That's why I feel I can talk to you freely. You remember when we met here a few weeks ago?"

"I remember."

"You asked me if I were married, and I replied that I did not know if the only woman in the world I could marry would care for me."

"Yes, I remember."

"You asked me if you had ever seen her, and I replied that that was my secret."

"Yes; but, Sir Hugh, surely there is no difficulty, is there?"

"Yes, there is. Keverne, I may speak freely to you, but all my life is gone out to a young girl. I love her devotedly, passionately—love her like my own life. I am afraid you cannot understand me. You are one of those self-contained fellows who cannot feel what I

feel. I, on the other hand, am not self-contained, and I tell you that unless I am successful in this—well——”

“Is it really as bad as that?”

“It is really. You knew me as I was when at Polgooth. Up to that time I had been at college, and had made no matrimonial engagement. During the time I was there I saw no one for whom I cared a straw. Then my health broke down, I had lung trouble, and I was ordered out of England. For years I travelled, and my life was too full of other things to care for women. But some months ago, in London——”

“In London?”

“Yes, she was in London. I loved her from the first moment. That love has been growing ever since. Man, I tell you that, humanly speaking, this world will be black if I cannot win her love. I should pray to die if she says ‘No.’”

Rossini looked at Henwood, and he saw that he spoke truly. His face was pale and drawn with pain.

“I am older than you,” went on Henwood. “I am turned thirty now, and am no longer a boy. It is no passing fancy, and I tell you I shall never have another day’s happiness if she refuses me.”

“Well, she will not refuse you. You are not the kind of fellow to be refused.”

“You don’t know. She is rich, high-born, courted.”

“Have you spoken to her?”

“Yes.”

“Well, what does she say?”

“I believe she loves me; indeed, she as good as told me so; but she seems afraid to promise.”

“Why?”

“I hardly like telling you, for it seems as though I

were betraying her secret. She says she is in a way promised to another."

"And she loves this other?"

"No. I do not believe she does. And yet I cannot feel sure. But the fellow, whoever he is, seems to exercise a kind of mysterious influence over her. She is afraid of him, afraid of what he would do if she refused him. Indeed, I gathered that although she did not love him, she felt that she could not refuse him."

"And you do not know who he is?"

"No, I have no idea. She would give me no clue. That's why I wanted to see you. You are the man who can help me, if any man can."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Find out who he is. You can do it; you are one of those fellows who can do anything. Having found out who he is, discover the secret of his power over her."

"And then?"

"This. You are my friend, Keverne, and you can conquer him; you can make him relinquish his hold on her. For she does not love him, I feel sure she does not."

"How can I do it?"

"Just the same as you can do anything else. Oh, I know it is a delicate and difficult task; but, Keverne, you said you were my friend and would do anything for my happiness."

"Yes," said Rossini quietly. "Do you know what was the first prayer I ever offered to God?"

"No, I do not know that."

"I prayed that you might have everything you desired."

"Did you? Well, my dear fellow, I want to win the only woman in the world to me. I want to make her happy. I have obtained her father's consent. It is only this one man that stands between us—a man who has by some means obtained power over her."

"I'll do anything in my power," said Rossini presently.

"Thank you, my dear fellow. I felt sure you would."

"But there are certain things you must tell me. I must know her name. Who is she?"

"Have you no idea?"

"None whatever."

"Lady Beatrice Penwithen."

Rossini made no sound nor motion. He walked quietly on, as though Henwood had not spoken, and yet he felt as though an icy hand had gripped his heart.

"I thought you would have guessed," said Sir Hugh quietly.

Rossini hated him at that moment. All the past was for the time blotted out. Only the present had to be dealt with.

"And you have no idea who—who the other man is?" he said presently.

"Not the slightest."

"I see."

He felt as though the foundations of his life were slipping away, but he made no sign. With stern-set face he walked steadily on.

How terrible was the struggle, how hard the battle, none but himself knew. Seven years of fighting for a prize within his grasp, and now——

"I am afraid I cannot help you," he said.

"Can't you? Why?"

"Well, you see, such work is not in my line. Besides, I do not exactly belong to your circle, do I? Fancy Rossini Keverne, the ragged boy, who was ordered away from your house by Mrs. Rosecarrow, interfering in the love affairs of Lady Beatrice Penwithen! The thing is too absurd."

"But, Keverne—Rossini, I believe you could help me, I am sure you could."

"Yes," said Rossini quietly, "I could."

"Then will you not? For the sake of the prayer you offered; for the sake of the old times when—when—oh, Rossini, the loss of her would be death to me!"

An angry reply rose to his lips. If the loss of her meant so much to Henwood, who had known her only a few months, what must it mean to him who had struggled as few men struggle for seven years?

He looked at the man by his side. Never did he see such a look of dread anxiety. This was the man who helped him as a boy, who instilled into his mind what little of good he knew. They had knelt and prayed together the last time he was in his house; he, when he was a young minister at Polgooth, had led him to see the wondrous meaning of the Gospel which he preached. And he—yes, he loved this woman as truly as himself.

"Does it really mean so much as that Henwood?"

"It does. I am sure, too, I could make her happy. She as good as told me so."

"I must think it out alone," he said presently. "You see," he went on, "I never promise to undertake a thing without making up my mind to succeed. I must think it out alone. I will let you know before the day is over."

Without a word he strode away into the woods, and there for hours he tramped. Presently he fell on his knees and prayed.

Again all the past swept before his mind, all those seven years of wild passion and weary working. Still he kept on praying.

"I told him I would be his friend years ago," he thought presently, "told him there was nothing I would not do for him. But this—oh, God, this!"

"'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,'" he said to himself. "Yes, and this would be laying down my life. And yet—yet——"

He thought it all out again, and again he prayed. After all, the religious teaching which Hugh Henwood had given him as a boy was not in vain. He could not help thinking of the Greatest Life ever lived.

Presently he went back to the Hall and found his way to his room, where he sat down and wrote two letters.

The first ran as follows, and was written in a bold, steady hand:—

"DEAR LADY BEATRICE,—I have found out the truth of the words which passed between us a few weeks ago. Human nature laughs at us. We make our plans and think that nothing can hinder our desires from being realised; then we find out how foolish we have been. For love is stronger than human will or human ambition. Be happy with the man you love. He has not conquered you by fear, but by something nobler. He is the noblest man I have ever known, and he is worthy of you. Will you please accept my

present as coming from one who throughout all his life will pray for your happiness?

“Yours faithfully,

“ROSSINI KEVERNE.”

The second was to Sir Hugh Henwood.

“MY DEAR HENWOOD,—I have thought it all out and, as fortune would have it, I believe I know the man. Yes, I will manage it for you. You may count on the whole affair as settled. Please do not be surprised at not seeing me any more. I have received a message this afternoon which demands my instant departure. Still, although I have been able to stay only a few hours, I am glad I came, for by coming I have learnt how I can help my friend.

“I was never given to talking much about myself in the old days, was I? But for fear that you shall think your influence over me to be in vain, I may tell you that I am trying to learn the secret of the life of Him who was your inspiration in the old days, and who, I believe, is still the guide of your life.

“Be happy, my friend. I shall watch your career with joy. Some time, perhaps, I shall visit your home and see your happiness. But at present I see nothing but work.

“Always your friend,

“ROSSINI.

“P.S.—Pardon my giving a word of advice. Do not let the sun go down before obtaining the promise which will mean your happiness.”

Half an hour later, Rossini was on his way to the railway station, while Lord Penwithen wondered why he

had left so hurriedly. Neither Sir Hugh Henwood nor Lady Beatrice knew he had gone. When presently he sat in the train that swept northward, there was a strange light in his eyes, and a feeling in his heart which he had never realised before. But those who saw him did not think of him as either a sad or a disappointed man.

BOOK II.—THE WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH ROSSINI KEVERNE REGISTERS HIS SECOND VOW.

THE carriage in which Rossini Keverne sat was nearing Plymouth. For more than an hour he had sat, regardless of the stations at which the train had stopped, regardless of the people who had entered the carriage, and then had left it when they arrived at their destination. The porters had shouted the names of the stations in their easy-going West-country manner, and had passed their pleasantries outside his carriage window. More than one had noted him and wondered at the strange look in his eyes. Some had gone so far as to ask questions about him, while others had formed conjectures concerning him. But he had remained oblivious to them all. Sitting there, in the Great Western Railway carriage, he had been living through the last six years again. Seven years before, he had gone to the birthday *fête* of Lady Beatrice Penwithen—gone as an uninvited guest. He, an ignorant, raw-boned clown, had been driven away from her presence as though he were a pestilence, and then he made a vow, that he, Rossini Keverne, known in the parish as “Zinney,”

would never rest until he had won this patrician lady's love, and won her as his wife. He had vowed, too, that in winning her as his wife, he would not degrade her—vowed that he would offer her a name and a position worthy of her. That vow made, he had devoted all his powers to accomplish his purposes, and, wonder of wonders, he had succeeded. In the face of difficulties he had climbed the ladder of fame and position, until he, the wastrel of Penwithen parish, was received into the best houses in England. He had bent circumstances to his will. It had become part of his life's creed that nothing was impossible to the man of determination, and he, as he had thought, had proved his creed to be true. Then he had paid his court to Lady Beatrice, the woman who had told him that the human heart laughed at the projects of men. He had conquered her, he had bent her will to his, and he had as good as extracted the promise from her that she would be his wife. Yes, the thing he had vowed had come to pass; he had removed insurmountable obstacles, he had laughed at the word "impossible."

Then, in a moment, his castle of cards had fallen. In a moment the toil, the struggle, the fighting, the victories of seven years, had come to naught. The human heart *had* laughed at him. He had discovered that the one man who had befriended him in those days when he was alone in the world also loved the woman whom he worshipped and vowed to win as his wife. That man, not knowing of Rossini's love, had told him that life's happiness was bound up in the love of Lady Beatrice Penwithen, and he had appealed to him to help him, Sir Hugh Henwood, to remove the obstacle which stood in his way. And he, Rossini Keverne, was the

obstacle. He who, as he thought, owed everything to Sir Hugh Henwood, stood in the way of his friend's happiness.

Moreover, he had discovered, as he thought, another truth. Lady Beatrice did not love him. He had conquered her, not by love, but simply by force of will. He could command her obedience, but he had not won her love. It had come to him that day that not her heart, but only her will, was his. Her heart was given to Sir Hugh Henwood—the man who had won his boyish love, the man who had been his friend. Thus, when that friend pleaded with him to help him to remove the obstacle which stood between him and happiness, Rossini had realised that the human heart laughs at men's vows and frustrates all our vainly concerted schemes. He, while vowing to possess Lady Beatrice as his wife, had renounced her. He had preferred the happiness of his friend to his own happiness; and thus, while his heart was all torn and bleeding, he pictured her walking hand-in-hand with the man for whom he had sacrificed everything.

It was then that Rossini Keverne fully knew what puppets men are—knew that the human heart can be governed by no known laws, and that what we determine one day we give up on the next.

And yet he was not altogether unhappy. He did not feel that he was a beaten or a disappointed man. What he had done, he had done of his own free will, only in a way which he could not understand; his will had not been his own, but another's.

When the train arrived at Plymouth, it was still early in the evening; so, giving his luggage to a hotel porter, he walked up on the Hoe, and pictured himself

as he was when, working as a common labourer in Plymouth, he struggled to obtain an education, and strove to obtain a footing on the ladder of life. From the Hoe, where the blue waves rippled on the sand beneath him, he turned and walked to the bridge where he had won his first great triumph. Yes, there the bridge stood—the bridge which many said created a new era in the engineering world—and he had constructed it. It was he who had grasped the great engineer's idea; it was he who had performed what baffled the others. Since then he had been fêted and honoured. The engineering papers had been full of his name. Poetical journalists had spoken of him as “the new star which had arisen in the scientific firmament.” Yes, he had won everything except the woman who had been the inspiration of his life; the woman he had sacrificed for another.

Well, what should he do? His strong, positive nature could not live on negatives; he must go back to his work. But more. He must drive Lady Beatrice Penwithen from his mind and heart. She was to be the wife of Sir Hugh Henwood, his dearest friend; thus, for his sake, for her sake, for his own honour's sake, he must drive her from his mind.

While he was in the railway carriage, he thought he had fought his battle and won it. Now he found he had not. It is true he had sacrificed his love, but he had not driven it from him. He loved her still, and it was not honourable, it was not loyal to his friend, to let that love burn there.

He must cast it out; he must conquer it.

It was then that he found what his sacrifice meant. By a supreme effort, he had made the great renunciation, but to drive his love from him—that was something

greater. It meant a harder battle, it meant a more terrible struggle.

"Love must die, unless it is fed," he said. "If I refuse to think of her, save as my friend's wife; if I never cherish a thought about her, save as one who can never be anything but a stranger to me, then my love must die, simply of starvation."

But the thought of it was terrible. To think of her only as the wife of another, and, as years went by, the mother of another man's children, was maddening.

"You cannot do it!" his heart cried out.

"But I will do it," he said, as if in answer.

Night had now come on. The midsummer air was soft and balmy. The birds, which were nestling among the leafy bushes, had gone to rest, and made no sound, save now and then to give a faint chirp. Below him in the deep valley a river made music as it found its way to the sea, while the cattle, lying in the rich meadows which stretched down to its banks, chewed their cuds in lazy content. Above, in the azure sky, the stars crept out one by one, until the moonless heavens were bespangled by their glory.

Rossini looked upwards, and the spirit of the night entered his soul.

"Great God, it is Thy will!" he said. "Thy ways are past finding out; but I have sought to do Thy will. Wilt Thou help me, for I feel how weak I am?"

And still no sound reached him, save the occasional faint twitter of the birds, the ripple of the river, and the murmur of the distant sea.

"Yes, I will do it," he said aloud. "I will remember that she is to be my friend's wife, and I will drive her from my mind and heart. She shall be nothing to me;

I will never think of her save as the wife of my friend. And if ever an unworthy thought comes to me, I will drive it away as a sin. Yes, by God's help, I will!"

Thus Rossini had registered another vow.

Seven years before, he had vowed that he would win her as his wife; that she should be always in his thoughts; that he would think only for her, work only for her, live only for her. And now all had changed, and he had vowed that which meant utter destruction to all which had aforetime been dear to him.

Thus man proposes, and God disposes.

He was quite calm when he reached the hotel. It was the hotel to which he had come to see Sir Michael Tresize on the night after his first great triumph at the bridge. Then he had come to visit a great man—he who was a nobody; now he entered as an honoured guest.

"I have seen that you have a good room," said the manager, who saw him enter. He had stayed there more than once during the last year or two, and so met with a welcome. Moreover, the manager regarded it as an honour to speak to the brilliant young engineer.

"Thank you," said Rossini quietly. "I am afraid I am very late; but if you have a little dinner——"

"Oh, certainly, Mr. Keverne; it can be managed easily, in a few minutes. I will see that you have all you want. By the way, an old friend of yours is staying here."

"Indeed! Who?"

"Sir Michael Tresize."

Rossini did not speak. He had no desire for company that night; his heart was too full of other things.

"I told him you had come here," went on the manager

smilingly, "and I know he is expecting to see you. Sir Michael gets fonder and fonder of Plymouth. He says that the Hoe is the finest place in the world. Why, here he is coming now."

They had been standing in the vestibule during the time they had been talking, and thus there was no escape. Sir Michael came up with outstretched hand.

"Ah! Mr. Keverne," he said, "there is no man I would rather see. Come up and have a chat, will you?"

"A starving man is never good at talking," said Rossini. "I have eaten nothing since lunch."

"Ah! it is grand to be young," said Sir Michael, "grand to have an appetite. I'll warrant that you never sit down to a meal without being hungry. At your age I never did. But now—— Still, thank God, I enjoy good health. But you look tired, young man. You've been working too hard."

"I have been rather busy," said Rossini; "but, as you've told me often, hard work never kills."

"No, but don't overdo it, that's all. Anyhow, you'll come up to my room presently, won't you? There are several things I want to speak to you about."

"Yes, I'll come up in about half an hour."

"That's right. Where have you been to-day, and what have you been doing?"

Sir Michael's question was like a knife in the young man's heart, but he showed neither by word nor look the pain he felt.

"I've just come from the bridge where you and I first met, Sir Michael," he said quietly.

"What, viewing the scene of your triumph! Well, that was a wondrous feat of yours, Keverne. I believe I was almost as excited as you were. But you've gone

far since then. I've marked you every step forward, my lad, and I am proud of you."

"Thank you, Sir Michael. Ah! there's my dinner. I'll join you presently."

"I suppose I must go and have a chat with him," said Rossini, with a sigh, as he sat down to his meal. "I am in no humour for gossip just now, and Sir Michael is rather prosy."

He did not recall the fact that, a few years before, he regarded it as the great honour of his life to be invited into the great man's room, and that this invitation meant a new era in his life. After all, the best of us have short memories, and success makes us all critical. Thus life is for ever a compromise. If it takes away with one hand, it gives with the other. To the youth who had as yet done nothing in the world, Sir Michael was a great man, whose society was fascinating, and whose every word was weighty; but to the young man who had tasted the sweets of praise and popularity, Sir Michael was simply a rich, prosy old man.

Nevertheless, after he had finished his dinner, Rossini found his way to Sir Michael's room. His heart was very sore, and his sky was very black; still, he showed no signs of his trouble. He was still the same taciturn, self-contained Rossini of other times.

Sir Michael rose eagerly to welcome him as he entered.

"Still a teetotaler, Keverne?" said the baronet, as he rang for a waiter.

"Still a teetotaler," replied Rossini.

"Ah, well, we won't argue," said Sir Michael. "I wanted to discuss two or three important matters of business with you."

For an hour or more they talked business. Sir Michael's connection with finance and railways was very extensive, and, as a consequence, the position which Rossini occupied in the engineering world caused them to have much to say to each other. But presently Sir Michael looked disappointed. Rossini did not enter into his schemes with the enthusiasm of former days.

"Are you well, Keverne?" he asked presently.

"Quite well, thank you. Why do you ask?"

"You look tired—jaded, my boy."

"Neither the one nor the other, Sir Michael."

"Then you are not happy."

Rossini was silent.

"And yet you have everything to make you happy. Do you remember the night when you first sat here? You have made tremendous strides since then. You are the envy of the engineering world."

"And what is that worth?" asked Rossini.

"Surely you've won a position that any man might be proud of."

"And, I repeat, what is it all worth?" said the young man.

"Come, come now," said the baronet. "At an age when nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand have not begun to rise in life, you have become famous. You have succeeded where those bearing great names have failed. You have won the approbation, not only of the crowd, but of the select and cultured, while nothing should be impossible to you in the future."

"What is possible to me in the future?" urged Rossini.

"What?" exclaimed the baronet. "Why, if you go on as you have begun, I can imagine you receiving

honours from the Sovereign of England. I can see you honoured everywhere; aye, and rich, too. Yes, and more. Although I regard you as before all other things an engineer, you can at some future time become a member of the British Parliament, and—who knows?—a member of the Cabinet.”

“And then?” said Rossini quietly.

“Then?” said Sir Michael. “Is not that enough? Is it not enough to have an honoured name and take part in the Legislature of our great Empire?”

“It seems to me that a man can be all that and still a miserable man,” said Rossini. “Bobbie Burns was right. After all, as far as I can see, the whole paraphernalia of worldly honours and riches is only so much thistledown. ‘It’s not in title nor in rank, it’s not in wealth of London bank, to make us truly blest.’ I know I’ve not quoted correctly, but I’ve got at the sense of it.”

Sir Michael looked at the young man keenly. “This is not like you, Keverne,” he said. “On former occasions you have rejoiced in your profession—rejoiced in conquering difficulties, rejoiced in climbing the ladder of fame.”

“As the years go on, one realises that it leads nowhere,” remarked Rossini. “You see,” he went on, “you can only sleep on one bed at a time, whatever you are, and however much you possess.”

“Who’s the woman?” said the baronet, with a laugh.

Rossini never moved a muscle of his face. He looked steadily at Sir Michael and said slowly: “There is no woman, Sir Michael.”

The baronet laughed heartily. “Ah!” he said, “I’ve got to the bottom of the whole business. Why, my boy,

before I was your age, I had fancied myself in love half-a-dozen times. Of course, these loves meant nothing; no love does, I am inclined to think, until one reaches five-and-twenty. When I met Lady Tresize all other women became as nothing. Well, evidently you are not a lady's man. I have been told that you never look at a woman, and that all your life has been given up to your work. Engineering has been your wife, eh?"

"Yes, and will continue to be," said Rossini.

"Ah! there you are wrong. No man's life is complete without a wife. Certainly no man is happy unless he has a wife, to love, to help, and to inspire him."

Rossini laughed quietly. "You speak like one who has had much experience, Sir Michael," he said.

Sir Michael laughed. He was in a communicative and garrulous mood.

"That may be," he said. "As I told you, when I was a boy, I had several love affairs before I was five-and-twenty. Every boy has, I fancy."

"No, not every boy," replied Rossini. "But tell me, Sir Michael, do you think any man can really love more than once?"

"Of course he can," replied the baronet. "Why, when I was eighteen or nineteen, I fell madly in love, or thought I did, with the daughter of a neighbouring squire. I almost worshipped the ground she walked on. Moreover, I thought I was the favoured suitor. This lasted for years. Then one day I heard she was to be married to Squire Dingle, a man old enough to be her father. But did I love my wife any the less because of that? Not a bit of it. As I told you, when I saw her, every other woman became as nothing."

"And how long did it take you to get over your dis-

appointment?" asked Rossini; "for I presume you felt very bad."

"Bad, my boy?" said Sir Michael, with a laugh. "Why, I even contemplated suicide. But that was only for a day or two. I said: 'There's as good fish in the sea as ever was caught.' I did not go mooning around. I went into Society, and presently a new affection displaced the old. For my own part, I can't understand these young fellows who go mooning around because one woman fails to see their value. I dare say if I kept on brooding, I should have done something desperate; but I didn't. No man gets over a disappointment of that sort by trying to drive her out of his mind; he gets over it by getting in love elsewhere. That's my experience. Ha! ha!" and the old man laughed merrily. "As I've heard you say more than once, Keverne, 'Life's positive, not negative.'"

Rossini tired of Sir Michael's conversation. Moreover, it was painful to him. The older man, in recalling the memories of his early days, wounded the heart of the young man who that very day had deliberately renounced the one great passion of his life. He found an excuse for leaving his friend, therefore, and went to his room. But he could not sleep. Try as he would, he could not drive from his mind the scenes through which he had passed that day.

"No," he said, as presently the morning light streamed into his room, "my only solace must be in work. I will think of that, and only that. Perhaps God has designed that only by work shall I drive her from my mind."

Early the following morning he continued his journey northward.

"Work! work!" he repeated again and again to himself. He thought of all he had promised to do, as well as the enterprises which were yet incomplete. "I will go to the lighthouse to-night," he said to himself. "After all, that is my first real achievement. That is the work I did by myself. Perhaps it will enable me to forget. It was there I did what others failed to accomplish."

The sun was setting as he arrived at the port nearest to Black Rock Lighthouse; nevertheless, he determined to visit it. Away in the distance he saw the black rock, surmounted by the massive structure which he had planned; and as he looked, his eyes flashed with pride. Yes, there was joy in conquest, after all. Other engineers had made attempts to build a lighthouse there, and had failed; but he had succeeded. Storm after storm had beaten upon it, but his work had defied them.

He called to mind, too, the time when a number of men had defied him, and when he was there alone with them they had threatened to kill him if he would not concede to their wishes. He remembered that things looked very dark with him, when Mary Fletcher, the daughter of the leader in the rebellion, came and saved him. She had defied her father, and had dared the anger of the others in order to save him.

He gave but little thought to her, however; after all, there was but one woman in the world for him, in spite of Sir Michael Tresize's experience.

Nevertheless, his heart quickened somewhat when, on leaping from the boat to the rock, he saw a woman's dress. A minute later he stood face to face with Mary Fletcher, the woman who had saved him months before.

He saw, too, that a look of terror was in her eyes, while her face was as pale as death.

"Mary—Mary Fletcher, why are you here?" he asked.

"Oh, thank God you've come, Mr. Keverne!" she gasped, and Rossini knew that something dreadful had happened.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCENE ON BLACK ROCK.

"WHAT is the matter, Mary?" he asked. He saw that the girl was trembling violently, and that she could scarcely control herself. Moreover, night was almost come, and although it would not be really dark, because the moon had risen high in the heavens, he felt sure that it could have been no light matter that had brought a girl across several miles of water to this lonely rock in the sea. Besides, the tide around Black Rock was very treacherous, and only those who knew the currents well were safe in trying to land.

"Hush!" she whispered; "they will hear you."

"Who will hear me?"

She looked around fearfully.

"Which way did you come?" she asked.

"Straight from Port St. Mary. Why do you ask?"

"You did not come around Hell's Mouth?"

"No, there was no need. The sea was so smooth that I rowed straight to the jetty."

"Then they did not see you," she said in tones of relief.

"Who did not see me?"

Again she seemed afraid to answer him. Casting fearful glances, first on the one side and then on the other, she said: "Did you hire a boatman?"

"No, I rowed myself."

"So did I; I took our own boat!"

"What! did you row yourself?"

"Yes, I was afraid anyone should know. Oh, Mr. Keverne, you must be very careful."

"Tell me what the trouble is?" he asked impatiently. "Who are here on the rock? Where is the lighthouse-keeper?"

"I'm afraid he's been murdered!"

"What?"

"Either he has been murdered, or else——" and again she looked around fearfully.

They were standing beneath the shadow of a great rock which rose so high above them that they were not only hidden from anyone who might be near, but they were also unable to see what was taking place on any other part of Black Rock.

"You'll not be hard on my father, will you?" she asked fearfully.

Rossini's eyes hardened. His mind swept back to that other occasion when those men, with Reuben Fletcher, Mary's father, at their head, made certain demands on him and threatened to kill him if he did not yield to them. He remembered, too, that Mary had come to his aid, and that Reuben Fletcher was mastered. He had often wondered since what they would have done if Mary had not come, and he had wondered, too, whether the man had been really conquered, or whether he still cherished some kind of vengeance in his heart.

"You mean that your father has been hatching another plot against me?" he said.

"Don't tell him that I told you," she said hoarsely. "He has no idea that I found it out; if he did, he would kill me. Even now——"

"Your father is here now?" he said, when she hesitated in her speech.

"Yes, he's on the other side there with four others. It's to take place at midnight. What time is it now?"

Rossini Keverne became a dangerous man at that moment. The old look of grim determination settled upon his face, the savage in him was aroused. Although Mary Fletcher had only hinted at the truth, he knew pretty well what was happening.

"You mean," he said, "that your father has never forgiven me for getting the better of him in that affair when you came to my aid. That ever since he has been nursing a scheme of revenge, and that this scheme is to be carried out to-night. I see. What do they mean to do? Oh, yes, I understand—they mean either to undermine or blow up the lighthouse."

"How did you know?" she asked.

"I am right, am I not?"

"Yes. I have seen for a long time that father had something on his mind, and I did not like the way he was constantly meeting those men. You remember them—Jack Brag, Jimmer Yelland, Frank Flew, and Ganger Blewitt. They were constantly meeting and talking. Then one day I saw him reading in the newspaper something that was written about you. The papers said that you had done what all other engineers had failed to do, and that the Black Rock Lighthouse would stand for centuries."

"Well?" said Rossini quietly.

"Well, he laughed and said that it would not last twelve months, and that instead of being praised up to the skies, you would be laughed out of the country."

Rossini's teeth became clenched, and his hands

clasped and unclasped themselves quickly. But he still spoke calmly.

"Go on."

"You'll not be hard on him, will you?" she asked. Now that Rossini was there, she seemed to be certain that her father would be again overcome.

"Go on," he repeated, "tell me the rest."

"He made me afraid," said Mary Fletcher. "I knew how much this lighthouse was to you, and I felt sure that he meant to—to——"

"Go on," repeated Rossini, as she hesitated; "I understand."

"For a long time I could find out nothing. He seemed to suspect me, and after saying what he did when he read those things about you in the newspaper, he never said a word to me."

"Did you ask him anything?"

"No. If I had, he would have been more careful than ever. You know how clever, how suspicious he is. I said nothing, but I watched."

A look of admiration came into Rossini's eyes, but all he said was: "What did you find out?"

"Nothing for a long time; but four nights ago, when coming home rather late from chapel, I heard father say to Jack Brag: 'We must all meet at the Smugglers' Cave to-morrow night and settle everything. But mum's the word; for if we are found out, we shall swing.'"

"Yes, and then?"

"I made up my mind that I would go to the Smugglers' Cave the next night and find out everything."

"Did your father see you when he was speaking to Jack Brag?"

"No, I slipped in at the back door. I am sure he never saw me."

"Good," said Rossini. "But you did not go to the Smugglers' Cave, did you? It is two miles from your home, there is no house near, and it can only be reached by boat, and no one could enter it by boat without those in the cave knowing."

"Yes, there is another way, Mr. Keverne."

"Only down the face of the cliff. No woman dare descend there."

The girl was silent.

"You do not mean that you went that way?" cried the young man.

"It was not so very hard," she said; "besides, it was the only way I could get there."

Rossini looked at her in wonderment. A month before he had told Lady Beatrice Penwithen that this girl was a heroine; but he did not believe then that she could have done this. The cliff pathway to the Smugglers' Cave was seldom attempted by the most daring climbers, and never except in broad daylight. A false step meant certain death, it meant a fall of more than a hundred feet upon the great jagged rocks that lay near the mouth of the cave. Nothing in her appearance suggested such a feat of daring. It was true she was a well-formed, strongly built girl, and in this respect presented something of a contrast to Lady Beatrice Penwithen, but there was nothing of the Amazon in her appearance. There was a look of quiet determination in her large, grey eyes, but they were not the eyes of a woman who reckoned nothing of difficulties. Besides, why should she have done so much for him, to whom she had spoken scarcely a dozen times?

"Then you reached the place in safety?" he said.

"Yes," she said. "If my father had known, I believe he would have killed me. He was terribly angry."

"Tell me," said Rossini, as he saw her pause.

Again she looked around fearfully. "Listen," she said; "I thought I heard a footstep."

Rossini climbed up a steep path, and then, hiding himself behind a rock, surveyed all the visible part of the island. There was no one near, and all was silent as death. The sun had sunk, and the sea, instead of reflecting the blue of the sky, looked dark and forbidding in the growing darkness. A mist was creeping over the waters like a grey mantle, and a chilly feeling had come in the air, although it was a midsummer night.

He looked at his watch. "Midnight," he said to himself. "There is plenty of time yet."

He descended to the spot where the girl was. He was perfectly calm now. He knew that danger was near—that within the sound of his voice were Reuben Fletcher and four men, who would not hesitate to murder him. But he was in the mood for battle. He almost rejoiced in the thought of matching himself against these men.

"There is no one in sight," he said. "You can speak freely—no one can hear while you speak quietly."

"They must be keeping out of sight," she said. "That was their plan, otherwise I should never have been able to remain here so long unnoticed."

He did not question her further; all the same, he was full of wonder at the girl's daring.

"They have carried out their plan so far," she said. "They arranged to come over here last night, and, if the lighthouse-keeper made any difficulty, to, as they said, 'do away with him.' And then they agreed to put dynamite into various parts of the lighthouse, and to connect them by a fuse. They agreed to have a long piece of 'safety' to reach to the rock from which they would leave the island, and they decided to light the fuse when they left."

A cold feeling came into Rossini's heart. He did not fear for himself, but he feared for the lighthouse. He knew that if a quantity of dynamite were to explode at the base of the building upon which he had bestowed so much time and thought, it would be shivered to the ground. And he thought that he had conquered Reuben Fletcher! This man, who had for months been so quiet, had been nursing this scheme of revenge. As for the other men, they were but tools in his hands.

"And they came last night?" he said.

"Yes, I watched them leave. It was nearly midnight; no one saw them but me."

"And you—when did you come?"

"I did not know what to do," said the girl. "My father had said that this was the time to do what they planned to do, because you were down in Cornwall, and therefore could get no inkling of their intentions. But I did not know in what part of Cornwall you were, or I would have written to you."

"Why did you not inform the police?"

For the first time she looked at him almost angrily.

"He is my father," she said.

"Yes. But if you would tell me, why not tell the police? Do you know what will happen? Every one

of those men will be sent to penal servitude. Your father will suffer worse than the others—he is the ring-leader.”

“No,” she said quietly.

“Why?” asked Rossini.

“Because—because——” But the girl did not complete the sentence; instead, she looked out through the rocks towards the darkening sea. “I have not told you all yet,” she said.

“No,” said Rossini; “you have not told me when you came.”

“I came last night,” she said quietly. “No sooner had they gone than I went to the little cove where we keep our boat, and rowed across in the darkness.”

He looked at her in astonishment, but he did not speak. Mary Fletcher made him wonder more and more.

“I was afraid that if I waited until morning, they would see me,” she said, “so I followed them in the dark.”

“But where did you land?”

“The night was bright enough to let me see where they landed, and so I went to the other end of the rock.”

“But the tides are terrible there.”

“Yes, I know. Still, the sea was calm, and, although it was very rough just there—well, I knew it was my only chance.”

“And you landed?”

“Yes, my plan was to hide myself through the day and to watch where they placed the fuse, and then, directly they had gone, to detach the ‘safety’ from the dynamite. It seemed all I could do. I thought

by that means I might save your work, and that—that—my father——”

Again she paused and looked eagerly around her. She did not look so fearful now as when Rossini had first landed. His presence had given her strength and confidence. Evidently she had great faith in Rossini's power.

“And have they been at work through the day?”

“No, they have not worked since six this morning. They worked all the night, but not since. Hark, I believe they are at work now.”

He listened. Yes, the sound of steel against granite was to be heard plainly.

“They are afraid,” she went on. “I think they have been drinking through the day, and my father is terrible when he has been drinking. He does not get wild, nor does he talk loudly; he is very quiet, but he is simply terrible, he will stop at nothing.”

“And have you found out where your father is laying his trains of powder?”

“No, and that was why I was so afraid when you came. I was not sure I could save the lighthouse.”

She did not seem to think of herself or of her own danger. She must have known that if the explosion took place while she was on Black Rock, her life would not have been worth a pin's purchase, and yet she never referred to it. Her great thought was for Rossini's work.

After this he asked her many questions—sharp, searching questions, which she answered readily, although she gazed around in fear. When they had finished speaking, he seemed to think deeply for a few minutes. The hard look in his great black eyes grew

harder—evidently he was making some resolve. Mary Fletcher watched him with dumb, doglike devotion as he thought, but he did not seem to heed her. Perhaps he was thinking how he could match his strength against the men who determined to be revenged on him for not yielding to them months before.

The sound of the steel borers against the granite of which the lighthouse was built continued to reach him, while the grey mantle of sea-mist which now covered the waters grew darker and darker.

He had no thought of fear, but he knew that it would be no child's play to match himself against these men. They were miles from the mainland, and no one would think of coming there that night. His only helper was this girl, whom he must shield from her father's anger. Whatever else happened, she must not be harmed. She had done one of the bravest deeds a woman had ever done in coming there that night, and he must protect her. But how?

He was perfectly calm, and, in a sense, a sort of grim joy filled his heart. He had told Lady Beatrice Penwithen that the truly great man was he who conquered men. That to calculate how to resist the force of storms was only a matter of mathematics and engineering. A man need be neither great nor strong to do that; to conquer men was another matter. But he would do it. They might be five to one; but he would master them, and his eyes grew bright at the thought of it.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Keverne?" asked Mary Fletcher at length.

"You must stay here," he said quietly. "I thank you very, very much for what you have done; and had

you not been one of the bravest girls that ever lived, you would not have done it. But you must stay here now."

"But what are *you* going to do, Mr. Keverne?" she repeated eagerly.

"I am going to them," he replied.

"You dare not, you *must* not!" she gasped. "They would kill you."

Rossini laughed quietly. There was no merriment in the laugh, but he seemed amused nevertheless. I have been told that brave soldiers have laughed when they have been commanded to charge the enemy, even though the command meant death to them.

"I am not so easily killed," he replied.

"But you do not know my father," she urged. "He has been drinking, and he will be maddened by it. He will be very quiet, but he will stop at nothing."

"Neither will I," said Rossini grimly.

"But let me go with you," said the girl.

"No, you must stay here," he replied.

"But, but——"

"Your father must not know that you have told me anything," said Rossini. "You know what you said just now."

"But what can you do? They are five, and you are only one."

Her fear for his safety had taken away her confidence in his powers. At first she feared what would happen to her father, now her only fear was for him.

"We shall see," he replied quietly. "For the present you must remain here."

She looked up at his face as though she would have

liked to disobey him ; but as she saw the look in his eyes, she dared not.

Without another word he left her and walked away towards the lighthouse, whence he had heard the sounds of the workers. His one thought was that he would conquer these men. He had no plan of action. What he did must depend on circumstances. All he knew was that he must preserve the work that had become so dear to him. His heart beat a little more quickly than was its wont, but not much. Rossini had nerves of steel. If it came to a matter of physical strength, he knew he would be conquered. If they had only been two, he would not have hesitated to do battle with them. He knew the men, and he would have mastered them. But five was another matter ; only a madman would attempt such an impossible thing. Besides, whatever happened to him, he must save the lighthouse. In his present mood his own life was not very dear to him, but his work *was* dear, and he made up his mind that it should not be destroyed.

Slowly he walked towards the men. Yes, there they were, at the base of the building, working away at their scheme of vengeance. He knew that Reuben Fletcher was the mind behind it all. He had been told again and again that this man never left what he believed to be an injury unrevenged—that in this sense of the word he never left a debt unpaid. More than once he had doubted whether Mary Fletcher were his child at all. It seemed incongruous that a sweet and pure girl such as she was could be the child of this dark-browed, sullen-eyed man. But few had a good word for Reuben Fletcher, although all admitted that he was the cleverest mechanic in Port St. Mary.

The sea-mist which had fallen enveloped these men in its dark folds, so that their forms, clothed as they were in corduroy, appeared but dimly. Once he thought of devising some plan to frighten them. All such men were superstitious, and he thought of appealing to their superstitious fears. But only for a moment. No, he would face them boldly and he would conquer them.

He stood quietly watching them while they worked. He was only a few yards away—so near, in fact, that had they looked up, they could, in spite of the gathering darkness, have seen him plainly. Above them loomed the walls of the lighthouse, around him and beneath him was the great, lonesome rock; beyond was the dark sea which sobbed and moaned, as it gathered itself into breakers, and then found its way into echoing caverns and over the great stones.

“Anything the matter, my men?”

They dropped their tools and looked up in amazement. Standing on a grey, lichen-covered stone just above them, there was something almost spectral in his appearance.

“Anything the matter, my men?” he repeated, in a steady voice.

“Who are you?”

It was not Reuben Fletcher who spoke, but one of the others.

Rossini descended from the eminence on which he stood, and took a few steps towards them.

“Is that you, Jack Brag?” he said. “Ah, yes, I see it is. Is anything the matter?”

Jack Brag did not speak; but Rossini saw that Reuben Fletcher left his work and was coming stealthily towards him.

CHAPTER III.

MIND AND MATTER.

TO say the least of it, the situation was grave. Rossini saw the look of murder in Reuben Fletcher's eyes; he saw, too, the steel borer which he carried in his hand. One blow of that steel borer, dealt by the hands of Reuben Fletcher, meant death—a blow which the man evidently meant to deal. As for the others, they were but tools in his hands, and waited to do his bidding. Physical opposition was therefore out of the question. Flight also was just as impossible, even if he contemplated it. The island was small, and he could be easily overtaken before he could reach the boat by which he had come. But Rossini never thought of flight. He had come to these men to master them, and he determined he would. It was a battle of mind against matter, of personality against brute strength.

"Ah, Reuben Fletcher," he said, still quietly, although his voice sounded somewhat unnatural; "what are you doing here?"

"That's my business," said the man.

"I have a suspicion that it is my business, too."

"Your business'll be settled in quick time," replied the man, gripping the steel borer with a tighter grip.

Rossini took in the situation with a lightning glance. Fletcher was only four yards from him now; the others were close behind him. It would be idle to pretend any longer that he did not know their purpose.

"Put down that borer, Fletcher!" He took a step towards him as he spoke, and the man insensibly lowered his weapon.

"I do not know whether you know it or not," he went on, "but you are playing a mad, deadly game."

"Yes, for you, my young bantam cock," replied Fletcher.

"Oh, no," and he answered quietly, "my game is harmless enough. I naturally came to see how things are going on here. But think a moment, Fletcher. You have known me some time now. Did it ever suggest itself to you that I was not a fool?"

The man lifted the borer again.

"Yes, talk," he said in reply—"you can always do that. But you'd better say yer prayers. Now, then, young cove, I'll give you just three minutes to say yer prayers, and then it's either heaven or hell for you."

"Three minutes? Now, that's sensible of you, Fletcher. I think you've just saved your necks by saying that."

"Our necks are all right, young codger. Say yer prayers to wance now, or I'll send you to hell, without giving you another chance."

"Yes, and what do you think would happen to you?"

"I'll take my chance o' that."

"Yes, and a poor chance, Fletcher. Do you think I came here without anyone knowing? Do you think if I'm not back at Port St. Mary in an hour, people will not come after me?"

"Why should they?" asked Fletcher. A look of doubt had come into his eyes, and although he could not tell why, the young man standing so calmly took away some of his nerve.

"As though your meeting in Smugglers' Cave could be kept a secret!" said Rossini; and although he felt little like it, he laughed as he spoke.

The man muttered an oath as Rossini spoke, but the steel borer was insensibly lowered again. "Nobody met in the Smugglers' Cave," he said.

"Don't be a fool, Fletcher. If there was no meeting there, how should I know it? It was yesterday week at midnight. You thought no one would know of it, but don't you see what a fool you are?"

Fletcher turned towards his companions with madness in his eyes and a savage oath on his lips. "If any of you have blabbed——" he said.

"There is no need for them to blab, Fletcher," went on Rossini. He felt himself gaining the mastery, and was almost enjoying the encounter. Physical fear he had none, and the battle of wills made his heart burn with a strange joy. "Do you think I have no friends in Port St. Mary? Do you think that no one has seen you fellows together, and heard you vow that you'd pay me out? Well, do you think you could go away together at midnight and not be watched? Why, it was a child's game. Then think what a silly plot you made. A more bungling, botched-up game I never heard of. Do you think you could bore holes in the lighthouse, and place dynamite and 'safety,' without being found out?"

"Who could find out?"

"Who? Well, the fact that I've found out shows how easy it was. Well, now think. Suppose you were to have your way. You can't blow up a place like this without an explosion. Do you think they wouldn't hear over at St. Mary? It is true you fixed it for midnight, but even there some people are awake at

that time. Well, what would follow? I'll tell you: Reuben Fletcher, and Ganger Blewitt, and Jack Brag, and Jimmer Yelland, and Frank Flew, would all swing."

He saw that the men were growing more and more uneasy. Given time, mind always gains the victory over matter, and Rossini was gaining time. After all, these men were only overgrown children; their thoughts, even in Reuben Fletcher's case, were only elementary, and they felt their ground undermined by Rossini's cold, cutting words. Still, that stubborn hatred of being beaten burned in their hearts. Rossini had fought and beaten them once before, and they had sworn to be revenged.

"You talk a lot, young master," said Fletcher, "but I tell you we mean business."

"Well, then, do it; but you'll swing, and your bodies will be burned by quickfime; and no parson'll say a prayer for you; and your children—well, God only knows what will become of them?"

He knew how to deal with these men. He had been amongst them for years. He knew that although they might profess atheism, they were superstitious at heart, and he knew that the thought of hanging struck terror to their souls. Besides, they were not sure how much he knew. To them his cleverness seemed unnatural. If he knew of their meeting at the Smugglers' Cave, he might have safeguarded himself in ways they could not understand. Every man of them would have given up the wild scheme but for Reuben Fletcher. It had been his scheme of vengeance, and he hated being beaten.

"If they caught us!" he snarled.

"As though you could escape!" said Rossini.

"Why, when the explosion is heard, it will be a signal to watch every cove and creek on the coast. You could not land without being taken; and do you think you could escape pursuit in a cockleshell of a boat?"

"Well, if we can't do away with the lighthouse, we can do away with you."

"Could you? Well, I have my doubts about that. But if you did, the result would be the same—you'd swing."

"You're a liar. No one knows you are here."

"You are quite mistaken. As a matter of fact, I've been talking with someone within the last hour. There are eyes watching us while we are talking."

The men looked around fearfully. "Where be they?" they asked.

"I tell you, everything is known. Even as it is, I shall have my work cut out to save you from the dock."

"All gammon!" said Reuben Fletcher; "all gammon! I know yer sort, my young cock bantam. If it's as you say, you'd 'a' told the police, and they'd 'a' come over and nabbed us. Who's watching us? There now, tell us straight!"

"It isn't the lighthouse-keeper; you've taken care of that."

Again the men looked around fearfully. The young man who stood so calmly before them seemed to know everything.

"'Ow did you know 'bout him, guv'nor?" one asked. "S'welp me, we ain't a-done nothin' to 'urt 'im."

"Then I may be able to keep him quiet. I don't know. But look here, if you'll take my advice, you'll be off and get back quietly."

"Yes, and be nabbed," said Reuben Fletcher. He

was beginning to lose his head now. "No, by gum, we'll carry the job through now, swing or not swing!" He gripped the steel borer more tightly, although he did not lift it. "'Ere," he continued, "you said you'd like to do for him, Jimmer Yelland. Now's yer chance. Give him one on his nut."

But Jimmer did not move.

"I've done with it, Reu Fletcher," he said; "an' if I'd known you was sich a fool, I wouldn't 'a' listened to you. I believe you've blabbed yourself."

Reuben Fletcher took a step towards the man, but as he saw the faces of the others, he hesitated. He knew now that his power had gone. The young engineer had beaten him again.

"Don't you see," he said, "as 'ow he's got us all in his power if we don't do for 'im?"

"I'd rather be in his power than swing. He turned out frumps last time; you know he did."

The battle was won now. Rossini knew it, and Reuben Fletcher knew it, too. All his plans were like a castle of cards, which this strong man had destroyed by one sweep of his hand.

"Look here," said Rossini, "I don't want to be hard on you chaps. Fletcher has just told you lies and poisoned your minds. As nothing has happened, people will not trouble to ask questions; so if you like, you can go back quietly. As for Fletcher——"

"Yes, mister, what about me?"

"As for you, Fletcher, you and I will have to work out this business alone. But first of all, you must bring me all your dynamite."

The men moved away to obey him, as if glad that the battle was over.

"You shall not do it!" cried Fletcher with an oath, trying to stop them. But they threw him aside. While he was the strongest man present, they obeyed him; but another and a stronger had come, and they preferred obeying him. It was but a repetition of history. Most men are but grown-up children, and they must have a master.

Still Fletcher continued to fight his battle. "It's all bunkum," he said. "He can't know anything. Besides, if he does, it can't make no difference now. And do you think he'll let us off? He ain't promised us nothing. You are just playing into his 'ands, that's what yer doin'. What's to 'inder 'im from sendin' us all to Dartmoor?"

The men hesitated as he spoke. After all, there was something in what Fletcher had said. But their hesitation soon passed. Rossini did not mean to let the power slip out of his hands.

"Yes, stop a minute," he said, "and listen while I put the case before you. This first. You and I are not the only ones that know what you decided to do at Smugglers' Cave. You were watched, and followed, and every word you said was heard. In fact, you had been watched and followed for a long time."

"If I know'd who did it," said Reuben Fletcher, "I'd just——"

"Yes, I've no doubt; but it's true. Your plan is no secret. What's more, you've been followed here. I'm not the only person on Black Rock besides yourself. At this very moment we're watched. Now, then, suppose you did all you meant, do you think it would not be found out? I tell you it would. And what then? Why, if you murdered me, you'd swing, every one of

you. Then what would be the good of your plans. You, Jimmer Yelland, you have three dear little children, who would be ashamed to hear their father's name mentioned. How could they help it? Who would like to be told that their father was hanged for murder? Now listen to the other side. You know me. You've never known me to break my word, and I promise this: Give me the dynamite and the 'safety,' and then if you give me your promise that you will behave like men in the future, nothing more shall be said about it."

"You mean that, guv'nor!"

"Honour bright."

"A bargain, guv'nor."

"But what about me, mister?" said Fletcher.

"As for you, Fletcher, you deserve hanging, for you are the ringleader in this affair. As it is, you and I must have it out together. For there must be no more of this sort of thing. For the present, you may go with the rest."

"And you'll be mum?"

"Yes, I'll be mum. Now bring me that stuff."

They became as obedient as dogs. A few minutes later the men had rowed away over the misty sea towards Port St. Mary.

"Oh, it was wonderful, wonderful!"

Rossini turned and saw Mary Fletcher.

"I saw all, heard all," she said. "It was wonderful."

Rossini laughed grimly. "Nothing of the sort," he said. "They were only children. But for your father I should have had no trouble at all. They were glad to get off so cheaply. As a matter of fact, I doubt if any but your father ever really meant to do anything. He is

a dangerous man, Mary. But for you, I would have kept him there. I am afraid he'll try and stir up those other fellows again. But there's no time to discuss that now. Mary, do you think you can pull your boat up by the jetty?"

"Yes, sir, but what about you?"

"I must give the lighthouse-keeper his liberty, and make things right with him, then you and I must row back to Port St. Mary. We must get to your house before your father."

"Why, sir?"

"Because he must not find you out of the house when he returns."

It was but a matter of a few seconds to set the lighthouse-keeper at liberty, and it was not difficult to explain matters to him. He did not know who had bound him, he said. Those who had attacked him had covered their faces, and he had no suspicion who they were. He had suffered no harm, he had only been terribly frightened. In a few minutes Rossini had calmed his fears; he had assured him that the men had gone away, and that he himself would return early the following morning.

The mist had somewhat lifted as Rossini and Mary rowed away. They were able to see each other quite plainly. The girl looked at him with a sort of awed admiration. To her he was no ordinary man, but one who made other men appear weak and common. She knew that the others had started before them, and that four of them would be able to row, while the fifth steered; nevertheless, she had no doubt that she would be able to get to her home before her father. What would be impossible to other men would be possible with Rossini.

Rossini did not speak. In spite of his nerves of steel, the experiences through which he had passed had tried him sorely. The last two days seemed a kind of dream from which he would presently awake. Yesterday he had been talking with Lady Beatrice Penwithen, she had almost promised to be his wife; to-day he was back to the old life again. Nay, it was not the old life. Nothing could ever be the same again. He rowed steadily. The boat was but a light thing, which under his powerful strokes fairly skimmed over the water.

"You are not afraid you'll overtake them, Mr. Keverne?"

"No. I shall row for the Children's Cove; it is nearest to your house. They will row around by way of Bantock."

"Why?" asked the girl. "Have they told you?"

"No, they will row there because there will be less chance of being seen. There are no houses there, and they will escape the coastguard. That will enable you to get to your home before your father."

She did not speak. This man seemed to the simple girl to be wondrous wise.

"Can't I help you, sir?"

"No, you had better steer. You can see the direction, can't you?"

"Yes, sir, I can see the light on Port St. Mary jetty. It's clearer now, sir, and—and I am sure I could help you."

He did not speak, but rowed steadily on. He had a kind of grim joy in the victory he had won, in spite of the fact that the future seemed dark. Presently the keel of the boat struck the sand. He felt sure that the others had not yet reached Bantock Bay, and

Bantock Bay was a mile farther away from Port St. Mary than Children's Cove.

He leapt into the shallow water, while Mary Fletcher prepared to follow him.

"No, Mary, sit in the stern of the boat," he said. He waited for an incoming wave, and then pulled the boat nearer the land.

"Will you give me the anchor?" he said quietly.

The girl obeyed without a word. It seemed like heaven to her to do this man's bidding. He threw the anchor on the sand and held out his arms.

"Let me carry you to the dry land," he said.

A few minutes later they were on the headland, walking to Reuben Fletcher's house.

"Mary," said Rossini quietly, "this is the second time you have saved my life."

"No, Mr. Keverne; I—I did nothing. You did it all"

"But for what you told me, I could not have got the upper hand of those men. It was you, Mary—all you. You saved my life, and more—you have saved my work. I thank you with all my heart. Sometime I may have a chance of repaying you."

The girl burst out sobbing; why, she did not know, but she did know that a wild joy filled her heart.

"Why do you cry, Mary? Are you afraid?"

"No, Mr. Keverne—only—don't laugh at me!"

"Laugh at you! No, Mary; you are the noblest, bravest girl I ever knew. If ever you want a friend, you'll let me be that friend, won't you?"

"Yes—oh, it's nothing—nothing! Why, I'd willingly——" The sentence was again lost in a sob.

"Why do you cry, Mary? You *are* afraid, or else you are sad?"

"No, Mr. Keverne—no; only I expect I've been frightened through the day, and——"

"Of course—I am very thoughtless. Please forgive me."

"Forgive you! Oh, don't talk like that, Mr. Keverne!"

They came to Reuben Fletcher's cottage. The house was quite dark. Evidently Rossini was quite right in his surmise.

"Good night, Mary; and thank you very much."

"Good night, sir, and—and God bless you and keep you safe, Mr. Keverne!"

The girl entered the lonely house. Her mother had died but lately, and she lived alone with her father. The silence of the place oppressed her. She threw herself on her knees.

"Oh, God, bless him and preserve him! Oh, great Saviour, save him from harm!" She sobbed out the words, while her body shook with emotion.

Presently, when she rose from her knees and lit a candle, a look of despair was in her eyes. "He does not know; he does not think; he does not care!" she said. "But oh, if God would only make me worthy for him to love me!"

It was true. Rossini did not think. His heart was full of gratitude towards Mary Fletcher, but nothing more. For the first few minutes after leaving Reuben Fletcher's cottage, he walked slowly and thoughtfully. Presently a plan seemed born in his mind.

"Yes; it will be interesting," he said, as he quickened his steps.

He struck into a lonely lane, which dipped into a valley. Above him waved high trees; on each side of him grew a thick hedge of hazel bushes. Presently he heard the low hum of voices and the stealthy approach of steps. Seeing a gateway, he leapt over it and stood hidden in the meadow behind the hedge.

Two men came along.

"The others are white-livered, Jack." It was Reuben Fletcher who spoke. "They gave in to him like a lot of measly children. But we'll be even with him yet, Jack."

"Clever as the devil hisself," remarked Jack Brag briefly.

"Yes, but I 'ave my plans. No man 'ave ever got the better of me yet in the long run, Jack."

Jack was silent.

"I tell you, I'll be even with him, and so shall you, Jack."

"The others say if he don't blab, they'll stand by him," replied Jack.

"A lot of white-livered, weak-kneed, thin-blooded cowards, with no more pluck than a dodderin' old woman. But you'll stand by me, Jack, and we'll be even with him. We're men, Jack. I've got my plans, plans as he'll never dream of."

"He found out this one. He could make us suffer for it. He acted fair."

"But why? 'Cause he was afraid. If the others hadn't been such cowards, we'd 'a' carried it through. My scheme this time shall not only mean payin' him out, but a fortin to us both, Jack."

"A fortin! 'Ow much?"

"A thousan' apiece."

"That's different," said Jack. "Tell me how."

They passed on, and their voices became indistinct. When they were out of hearing, Rossini laughed grimly. He even enjoyed hearing these men's plans, but his heart was very sore nevertheless.

The next morning early he started for the lighthouse again.

CHAPTER IV.

ROSSINI AS A REFORMER.

ALTHOUGH Rossini had laughed at the threat of Reuben Fletcher, it was by no means a laughing matter. The man was vindictive in the extreme, and notwithstanding he had again been beaten by the young engineer, he had no intention of being robbed of his revenge. Moreover, although, like the rest of his class, he was ill able to judge the true proportion of things, the statement he had made to his companion was not without foundation.

For Rossini Keverne, during the time he had lived in Port St. Mary, had not only aroused the admiration and obtained the friendship of many who lived there, he had also made enemies. It is true he had been the means of bringing a great deal of prosperity to the little town, for the building of the lighthouse had meant the employment of a great deal of labour; but he had made many enemies by fighting against the curse which had robbed him of both his father and mother. When the lighthouse was practically complete, the authorities determined to build a new harbour for Port St. Mary, and, as was natural, the work was given to Rossini; thus it came about that not only were a large number of skilled workmen required, but also a crowd of navvies found their way to the little town. Many of

these were of the worst type of humanity. Drunkenness increased by leaps and bounds, gambling was common, while wild, brutal orgies became frequent.

In setting himself to fight these things, Rossini had aroused a great deal of enmity. The keepers of low drinking taverns muttered their curses, while bookmakers looked on him as the most serious hindrance to their gathering a great harvest. Reuben Fletcher knew of this. More than once he had heard tavern-keepers and bookmakers say that they would give a big sum of money to any man who could get rid of the young engineer. Doubtless these threats were made under the influence of anger and drink, and, in all probability, far less was meant by them than Reuben Fletcher thought; still, he thought much about what he heard, and this was what he meant when he spoke to his companion as they found their way back to their cottages after what had taken place at the lighthouse. If he could bargain with these men to give him a big sum of money, he would be doing well for himself, as well as having revenge upon the man who up to now had proved too clever for him.

As for Rossini, we have seen that he regarded Reuben Fletcher's anger lightly. He was almost a stranger to physical fear, and anything like opposition would only make him more than ever determined to carry out the thing he had made up his mind to do. And Rossini had made up his mind to fight these tavern-keepers and bookmakers. He was not altogether unselfish in this, although a great deal that was noble came into his calculations. He knew that one of the chief causes of contractors failing to fulfil their contracts was the fact that it was often impossible to get men back to their work after pay-day. The men were in the

main paid on Saturdays, and then many of these same men failed to put in an appearance until the following Wednesday morning.

Up to this time, however, he had taken no organised steps to meet the evil, but lately he had felt that if he was to successfully fight against the men, who were not only enemies to his own interests, but enemies to the community, he would have to prepare his plans carefully.

Perhaps there were something like a score of low-class taverns in Port St. Mary. Their keepers grew fat on the earnings of the labouring class; and lately, since the large influx of labourers, each and all of them had become gambling-dens. This, as may be imagined, meant misery and want in the town, and gave Port St. Mary a bad name in the district. As Rossini found his way to the lighthouse on the following morning, the events of the previous night almost passed from his mind. Although his life and his great work had been in danger, he thought rather of Lady Beatrice Penwithen. After all, he had determined to be a great engineer, and to become famous in order to win her as his wife. And now, even in spite of his vows to forget her, he found himself recalling their last interview, when he had, as he thought, practically won his battle.

What was anything, everything, now? Of what use were fame, riches, and position, when he was destined to live his life in loneliness and lovelessness? For he would kill his love, he would be true to his friend Sir Hugh Henwood, and he would not sully his life by even dwelling on the thought of the love he bore for a woman who by this time had promised herself to another. And yet his strong, positive nature clung to life. That was

why he felt a kind of stern joy in fighting those men on the previous night. Life *was* a joy; even although it were a continuous battle, ending only with disappointment, it was still a joy to live and to fight.

The lighthouse rose bold and stately on the great Black Rock. The mists were now dispelled and the sun shone brightly upon the little island. He did not stay long; he only called to assure the lighthouse-keeper that he had no need to fear a repetition of yesterday's experiences. He would take steps, he said, to make such a thing impossible, and then he impressed upon the man the necessity for silence. His arguments were evidently convincing, for the man promised to keep his own counsel, and to bury, as far as he was concerned, what had taken place. Before noon he was rowing back to Port St. Mary again, and was making his way towards the new harbour. No constructive work had begun as yet. All the energies of the men were spent on preparing the foundations.

It seemed almost absurd that this boy—for he was even yet only a boy—should control the great crowd of men, as well as superintend all the operations which were taking place; for as in the case of the lighthouse Rossini was not only engineer, but contractor. The arrangement was not ordinary, but he had stated his preference for it, and the authorities had yielded to him.

Near a gang of workmen he saw a thick-set man who evidently occupied the position of foreman. He gave a glance towards two of the gang, but he gave no sign of the fact that he had met them on the previous night on Black Rock. These men looked towards him almost fearfully, but they went on with their work without a word.

"Jinks," he said to the foreman, "I want to speak to you."

"Yes, sir," said the man, giving the young engineer a suspicious glance. Rossini was not in love with him; he had never employed him before; but Jinks had been recommended to him as one who had had a large experience in harbour building, and one who had always got on well with his workmen.

"Perhaps we had better go into the office," said Rossini quietly.

Again Jinks looked at him suspiciously. He did not like the look in his young master's eyes.

"As we have only just begun this job, Jinks," said Rossini, "I may as well have a little talk with you about the work generally. During the last few weeks my mind has been occupied with other matters—so much so that I haven't found time to talk with you about my plans for building this harbour."

"Oh, you may take things easy," said Jinks. "I know my work, Mr. Keverne. I've been on these kind of jobs all my life."

"Yes, that's all right; but it's a weakness of mine to know of everything that goes on in connection with every job I have."

"My gov'nors have always trusted me," said Jinks.

"I am glad of that," said Rossini quietly. "For my own part, I will never keep a man a day on a job—that is, in a post of trust—if I lose confidence in him."

Jinks gave another look at Rossini. He tried to measure his man. Jinks prided himself on not being afraid of any man.

"This is a big job, Jinks," went on Rossini; "before

we have finished, we shall have to employ a large number of men, a very large number."

"I've been used to big jobs," said Jinks. "Why, afore I came here I had as many as seven hund——"

"Yes, that's all right; I had very good credentials with you, too, and that gives me confidence in saying what I wish to say. There are two or three things, Jinks, about which I wish us to have a very clear understanding—two or three things which I am going to insist on."

Jinks gave a start.

"First of all, there is the question of 'subs' to the men," said Rossini. "I know in lots of works it is the custom for one man on the job to advance men money in the middle of the week. Of course, you can see that, as a general rule, this is not good for the men. Those who advance money make a charge on the money they advance, with the result that the workmen are a shilling or two worse off at the end of the week."

"Do you mean to say," said Jinks, "that if a chap gits 'ard up, nobody's to be allowed to lend him five bob?"

"That's my decision," said Rossini. "I've made up my mind to be here every day, and so if any man finds himself hard up, he must apply to me. Moreover, I have determined to pay the wages myself, Jinks."

Jinks was silent for a moment, although his eyes became bloodshot.

"It's—it's——"

"Not ordinary? No, I know that; still, that's my will about the matter. Moreover it may seem hard, but I shall sack any man who lends money in this way, Jinks. If any man wants a sub, let him come to me;

and if he can give a fair reason for wanting it, I shall advance it, and not charge any interest on it."

"You mean that you don't trust me," said Jinks.

"Haven't I told you that I have had excellent credentials with you, Jinks?" said Rossini quietly. "But, then, I have a weakness for having things done in my own way."

Jinks muttered an oath. "I don't approve of engineers being contractors," he said aloud.

"No," said Rossini, with a smile. "I am sorry for that, but then it is not your affair, is it? It's a matter for the authorities. I can assure you they have safeguarded themselves by appointing a man to see that my work shall be well done and according to contract. So, having eased your mind in that direction, I think it fair to tell you that during dinner-hour I shall tell the men what I have told you."

Jinks ground his teeth with rage. In the past he had made many a pound by advancing money to men in the middle of the week, and then charging a large percentage on it. He had looked forward to a similar arrangement here; but although he was terribly angry with his young master, he did not feel strong enough to battle with him.

"You see, Jinks," went on Rossini, "as a respectable man yourself, you will rejoice in anything that is done for the welfare of the men. You know, as well as I, that work is often stopped because we can't get them on the job on Mondays, and sometimes Tuesdays."

"Men must have their pleasure," said Jinks sulkily.

"Exactly," said Rossini. "They have their Saturday afternoons, and they have their Sundays free; but we know that if they don't work on Mondays and

Tuesdays, they lose their pay—and, worse than that, it is generally because they are in some public-house spending what they have already earned. So I feel sure that you will try and help me to keep the men sober, and encourage them to take home their earnings to their wives and children.”

It was impossible for Jinks to disagree with Rossini ; moreover, he spoke so naturally and so pleasantly that he could do no other than nod his head, although he did so with many unpleasant misgivings.

“That is the first thing, Jinks ; but there is something else. If men fail to turn up on Monday mornings, I shall, after a fair warning, unless they can give some reasonable excuse for not doing so, get rid of them.”

“I’ve never found it pay to be hard on men,” said Jinks. “Besides, the working man isn’t like he used to be—he’s come to ’is own, as it were, and is terribly independent.”

“True, true, we must admit that ; and, on the whole, I am glad of it. We want to get the men to have more respect for themselves. In that way we shall help them and help ourselves. Up to now I’ve never had any trouble in getting men——”

“You’re young yet,” interpolated Jinks.

“Yes ; but I’ve had a good deal to do with them. Up to the present, then, Jinks, I’ve never had any trouble in getting men. I’ve always paid good wages, and I’ve always tried to recognise merit. I don’t think, therefore, I shall find any difficulty in getting men to work for me, even if I have to sack a number whom I can’t depend on.”

Again Mr. Jinks nodded, although he felt more and more uncomfortable.

"Then there is another thing, Jinks. There are two things which I absolutely forbid. The first is this: I am not going to have beer brought on the works; and, second, I am not going to have any betting or gambling. If any of those bookmakers come here during the dinner-hour, they must be sent about their business in double-quick time, and you are to put a stop to anything in the shape of betting or gambling on the works."

"You can't put a stop to a game of cawds on the works, gov'nor," said Mr. Jinks. "This 'plyce ain't no bloomin' chapel."

"I repeat that I'll have no betting or gambling on the works, Jinks."

Jinks was unable to contain himself any longer.

"I tell you what it is, gov'nor," he said. "You can't carry on a job like this on those lines. Men is men, and they won't stand it. You'll 'ave to get another foreman if you want to turn the plyce into a bloomin' chapel."

"Of course, if you want to go, Jinks, you must go," said Rossini quietly. "I will never persuade a man to stay with me who is not contented. I can get another foreman—or, for that matter, I could do your work myself. Not that I want to, for you are a very useful man, and, as I said, your credentials were very good."

"The men'll go on strike," said Jinks, evading Rossini's words.

"We shall see. Ah! there's the dinner-bell; and now I'll have a few words with them. I dare say I shall finish in ten minutes, and they can add the ten minutes to the dinner-hour."

He stepped out of the office as he spoke, and asked the men to gather around. Wonderingly they did as they were bid, and then Rossini spoke. He did not

speaking long. He told them of his desire to act in the best interests of the workmen, and then repeated to them what he had said to Jinks. As may be imagined, the effect was very marked. Some received his words gladly, but others looked darkly one at another. An onlooker would, at first glance, have said that it seemed almost absurd to see this lad telling men who were grey-bearded what he would have and what he would not have; but had he looked a second time, he would have altered his opinion. The men instinctively felt his power and yielded to it.

"I mean nothing but kindness to you," he concluded; "but those of you who know me at all know that I mean what I say. So I give you fair warning. Over what you do when you are away from these works I have no control, but while you are here I will have no drinking, no gambling in any form. If my orders are disobeyed, you must get a job elsewhere, for you will not work for me."

Someone tried to raise a cheer, but it was a feeble attempt, and when he left them he was followed by many dark looks and angry mutterings. He had barely got into the town when he heard someone calling him.

"Mr. Keverne."

"Yes, Mr. Williams," he said, "what is it?"

"I heard that you are wanting to put down the gambling and drinking in the place, Mr. Keverne. I only want you to know that I'm with you, heart and soul."

Mr. Williams was the minister at the chapel where Rossini sometimes went, and where Mary Fletcher sang in the choir.

"It'll be a terribly difficult business, Mr. Keverne,"

went on the minister; "but you have a great deal of power."

"I mean to use what power I have, Mr. Williams," said Rossini. "I've just taken one step this morning."

"What have you done?" asked the minister eagerly.

Rossini told him.

The minister looked thoughtful. "I am with you heart and soul," he said; "but I suppose you've counted the cost."

"What cost?" asked Rossini.

"The hatred of a certain class of your men, and the enmity of the publicans and the bookmakers."

"Yes," said Rossini, "I have reckoned that all up, and am prepared for it. But that is not all, Mr. Williams; and here you can help me. The great curse of Port St. Mary is some twenty or thirty of the low drinking-taverns in the town. I want to get certain facts about these places, statistics which can be proved up to the hilt, and then we can go to the licensing magistrates at the next licensing-session and get them to refuse to renew the licences."

"You mean that, Mr. Keverne?"

"Else I should not have said it."

"And you'll stand by your determination?"

An angry look flashed from Rossini's eyes, but he only replied: "Yes, I shall stand by what I have said."

There was a joy that was almost savage in his heart as he spoke. Hitherto he had only thought of these things in a general sort of way, and although he had done enough to make both publicans and bookmakers regard him as their enemy, he had not taken the interest he was taking in it now. He rejoiced because the work

offered an escape-valve for his feelings. He would fight the organised forces of wrong in the town. Yes, by fighting the cause of righteousness he would be able to kill a love that meant disloyalty to his friend.

"Well, as I said, I'm with you, Mr. Keverne," said the minister.

Before the day was over, nearly everyone in Port St. Mary was talking about what Rossini had said to his workmen, and ere long rumours were afloat concerning what he meant to do in relation to the licences.

Publicans and bookmakers met and talked the matter over; and as they talked, they swore that before the next licensing-day came, Rossini would have no further desire to meddle with their business.

"Won't the work be stopped if anything happens to him?" one asked.

"Stopped!" another replied. "If anything happens to him, well another contractor'll have the job. This isn't like the lighthouse—he's not the only man who can do this."

Presently Reuben Fletcher took part in their talk, and as much drink as he desired was supplied to him. The man spoke but little, but he listened with great care to all that was said.

"You are not afraid, are you, Reuben?"

"Afraid! All I want is the chance. But we must be careful. Mum's the word, for he has a way of finding out everything. I know that."

After this there was much bargaining and much more talk, and much more drinking. Perhaps they imperilled their plans by plying him with drink so freely, for although it was said that Reuben could carry more drink than any man in Port St. Mary without showing

it, he was led to speak more freely than those who employed him desired.

One night a young girl was sitting with Mary when he returned, and as he entered the room he heard the girl say—

“I hear Mr. Keverne has discharged six men to-day for breaking rules.”

“He won't discharge many more,” he said quietly. But as Mary saw the look in his eyes, a great fear came into her heart for the man she loved, and she determined to discover all that was in her father's mind, and, if needs be, watch him night and day.

CHAPTER V.

REUBEN FLETCHER PLANS REVENGE.

SEVERAL weeks passed away, and Rossini never heard a word as to whether Sir Hugh Henwood was engaged to Lady Beatrice. He had examined the newspapers daily, but had found nothing. Either it was determined not to make the engagement public, or something had hindered a final settlement. He had given her up because he believed she loved his friend, and yet as the days went by and he heard nothing from her, he was sometimes led to wonder if he had done right. He did at least expect that either one or both of them would have answered the letter he had written, but not a solitary line had come to him. But he made no inquiries, neither would he deceive himself by fond fancies; it was for him to fight his love and to kill it.

This was one reason why he threw himself so eagerly into the work he had set out to do—a work which appealed to him more and more strongly as the days went by. Now that he had fairly launched on it, its necessity and nobility became more and more manifest, and the difficulties it presented only made him more determined to succeed.

As we have mentioned, he had discharged some hands for disobeying the orders he had given. This had greatly incensed the more dangerous class of the workmen, and had also led to frequent interviews between Reuben Fletcher and the publicans.

"Has the engineer been to chapel to-night, Mary?" asked Reuben one Sunday night.

"Yes," said Mary quietly.

"I suppose people look upon him as a very religious kind of a chap?"

"The best people in the town think he is a very noble young man," replied Mary more warmly than she meant to speak.

"I suppose these chapel people think he'd a perfect right to sack a lot of men just for having a friendly bet?"

"They disobeyed his orders."

"Orders!" said Fletcher, with an oath. "And this young puppy thinks he has a right to let women and children starve, just because he wants to turn the works into a bloomin' chapel! That's religion, I s'pose?"

"Only two of the men have wives and children," replied Mary; "and they have not been allowed to starve."

"How do you know?"

The girl became crimson as her father bent his eyes on her, but she replied quietly.

"It is the talk of the town," she said.

"Look here, Mary"—and Reuben Fletcher looked at her searchingly—"has this fellow ever made love to you, or aught of that sort?"

"Never!" said the girl. She had become deathly pale now, and she dreaded lest her father should ask her whether she loved him.

But evidently Fletcher was satisfied with the answer she had given. He had never known her to tell a lie, and although suspicions had crossed his mind, he knew of no sufficient reason for them.

"Why are you interested in Mr. Keverne, father?" she asked. She felt that the time was opportune for knowing something of her father's thoughts.

"Why?" said Reuben Fletcher angrily. "Didn't he beat me on the lighthouse? You was there yourself, and you ought to know. But for you, I'd 'a' killed him that night!"

"What night?" she asked with fast-beating heart.

"The night when—but you know. You came and said that mother was ill, and——"

"Yes; she died a few days after," replied Mary.

Fletcher was silent. He had well-nigh broken his wife's heart, but in his own way he had loved her.

"He's 'beaten me again since then," he said presently.

"When?" asked Mary.

"Never you mind; you don't know about it, nor never will know. But it's all right—I'm going to be even with him!"

"But he's never done you any harm."

"Ain't he? That's all you know! Just because he took a dislike to me, he sacked me. If I had my rights, I should 'a' been foreman at the harbour, with three quid a week!"

"How could he give you such a post when you've worked against him? You know very well that after that night just before mother died, he took you on again and gave you a very good post."

"Yes, and set men to spy on me! Think I don't know? I tell you, Mary, no man ever got the better of me yet, and I'll see to it that he don't—no, not if I've got to swing for it!"

"For what?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing!"

"Father," said Mary, "I want to ask you something."

"What?"

"How is it, seeing you never work now, that you have plenty of money?"

"Never you mind, Mary. There's other people in the world besides that young engineer. He's lost his head because he's got on in the world, and wants to boss everybody about; but he won't, mind that. Perhaps his little game may be stopped sooner than he thinks."

"What little game? And how is it to be stopped?"

"Never mind. But what I've got to say is this: If you ever have anything to say to him——"

"Father, how dare you!"

"Oh, well, I'm only telling you; and he must not think he can do as he likes with his men."

"Nonsense!" said Mary, with a laugh which she did not feel. "Mr. Keverne is a man who always has his own way."

"Oh, has he?"

"Why, yes. If anyone has plans to hurt him, he can find them out in a minute, and if anyone tries to hurt him, it will be worse for them than for him."

"Will it?" said Reuben Fletcher quietly, but there was a sinister gleam in his eyes.

"Why, you know it will," said the girl. "People are saying that the publicans and the bookmakers are trying to drive him out of the town, because he means to stop a great deal of their trade. But he's more brains in his little finger than the whole lot of them put together. They drive him out? Why, it's absurd!"

"Absurd, is it? Why, I can tell you that——"

This was the point in the conversation which Mary had tried to reach, but in doing so she had overreached herself. As Reuben Fletcher spoke, he turned towards his daughter, and saw in her eyes such a look of intense, eager inquiry that he did not finish his sentence. He was a cunning, cautious man, even when in drink, and the suspicions which flashed through his mind silenced him.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, looking at the clock; "he's a clever chap. I think I'll go and have a pint of beer before closing time."

He put on his cap and went out, Mary watching him closely all the time. He had not gone a dozen steps before she threw a shawl over her head and followed him. There was no moon, but the night was not dark, and so she was easily able to follow him. She had expected that he would find his way to that corner of the town where the larger part of the public-houses which Rossini meant to fight were situated. But in this she was mistaken. He had not gone far before he turned into a lane which led to the country. In following, she was careful to keep out of sight, and as she wore light, thin shoes, she walked as silently as a cat. The lane was full of sudden turns, so that she often lost sight of him, but she was able to hear the clatter of his heavy shoes on the hard roadway. When she had followed for very nearly a mile, he came to a "cross-lanes," where he stopped. Presently he gave a low whistle, which was answered by another low whistle not far away. Instantly Reuben Fletcher jumped over the hedge into a meadow that lay beyond.

The girl rushed on swiftly until she came to the place

where her father had disappeared, and looked into the meadow, but she could see nothing. The night was perfectly still. A heavy grey sky hung overhead, but no wind blew. Presently she thought she saw a dark form some distance away. No dwelling-houses were near, but she remembered an old cowshed that stood in the corner of the field. Still acting on impulse, she got over the hedge and made her way beneath the shadow of a row of trees towards the shed. More than once she stopped and listened intently; but all was silent as death.

As she drew near the shed, she slackened her speed and strained her ears to catch the faintest sound. Her heart gave a bound—surely she heard the low murmur of voices? Nearer and nearer she drew; yes, she felt sure now. The sound of voices became plainer; if she could but get up close, she could hear what was said. Every fibre of her body trembled with fear, but she had no thought of turning back. She believed she was serving the man she loved, and although he neither knew of nor cared about her love, she would serve him.

Stealthily she crept nearer and nearer. "It's all right," she heard someone say. "Nobody's got the slightest inkling."

"And everything's fixed up?"

"Yes."

"You are sure nobody can give him a tip?"

"Nobody knows."

"We mustn't make a mistake this time."

"I've took good care of that."

It was her father who spoke, and she shivered as she heard the sound of his voice.

"How's that?"

"If anybody knows anything, it's these bloomin' chapel people. Well, there isn't a shadow of suspicion. I asked Mary only to-night in an innocent sort of way, and I tell you that while there is all sorts of women's talk, nobody's got any inkling."

"Then it's all fixed up, and everything is mapped out."

"But how shall we——"

The speaker dropped his voice and muttered something which she could not hear.

"No, no; that's not the lay. He'll go—then—all alone—he'll—Jimmer—mum's the word."

She heard these disjointed words, but could not connect them. The only thing of which she was sure was the name of Jimmer. But it was enough to make her fear for Rossini.

Again she heard the confused murmur of voices, and in her desire to catch what they said, she crept nearer to them; but in so doing, a twig cracked beneath her feet.

"I heard someone!" cried a voice. "We are watched!"

Without waiting a second, Mary rushed up beside the hedge. When she had gone some distance, she stopped and listened.

"It was nobody," she heard someone say.

"I am sure I heard a footstep."

"You were dreamin', I tell you."

This was again followed by confused voices, but nothing more could she hear plainly. Evidently they had gone back to the shed again. She would have liked to have returned; but she reflected that probably

someone would be watching, and therefore she would be injuring Rossini rather than helping him by doing so.

"I must tell him. I must tell him!" she repeated again and again. But how? Like all other small towns, Port St. Mary was noted for its gossip. If she went to the house where he lodged, his landlady would wonder why she came, and would talk. Besides, the fact of her visit would be sure to reach her father's ears. No, she must write to him. But she must be very careful. Moreover, she must not mention her father's name; if she did so, and anything were to happen, she might be doing him a serious injury. For, small as her reasons were for loving her father, she did love him sincerely.

On her way back she tried to compose a letter whereby she could warn Rossini, and still fail to implicate her father; but somehow there seemed to be objections against everything she could think of.

As she neared the town she heard a quick, firm foot-step behind her. She drew her shawl more closely so as to hide her face.

"Good night!"

It was only the customary words with which all country people greet each other after dark. If anyone fails to give it, suspicion is immediately aroused against such a one. And yet for a moment she did not speak. It was Rossini who spoke, and his presence seemed to take away her power of speech.

He passed on, and then she realised the opportunity she was missing.

"Mr. Keverne!" she stammered.

He turned quickly. "Why, it is Mary—Mary Fletcher!" he said. "Is it not late for you to be out alone, Mary?"

"Yes, sir, it is; but please, Mr. Keverne, will you let me tell you something?"

"Yes, of course. I'll walk back to the town with you, and then you can tell me on the way."

"No, sir, I'd rather not—that is, I don't want us to be seen together."

He heard the tremble in her voice. He knew that some fear possessed her.

"There is something the matter with you, Mary. Tell, me, can I help you in any way?"

"No, sir, it's not that; but please will you be very careful, Mr. Keverne?"

"Careful of what, Mary?"

"Of everything, Mr. Keverne. Be careful never to go out except you have friends with you. Don't go out of a night, sir."

"Why?"

"Because it is not safe. Because you have enemies."

Rossini laughed. "Yes, I know that, Mary," he replied. "But who are they? A number of drunken labourers whom I have discharged, and a few publicans and bookmakers."

"Yes, sir; but you don't know. They are plotting against you, and they'll kill you if they can."

"How do you know, Mary?" he asked.

"Because, because—oh, sir, don't ask me!"

Rossini hesitated a second. "Ah, I see! Your father is hatching another plot, is he?"

"It's not only he, sir; he's only a tool in someone else's hands. He's paid for it; I know he is."

"How do you know?"

She had not meant to tell him anything, but he seemed to compel her to speak.

"He does not work," she said, "and yet he has plenty of money. How does he get it? Besides, he's drinking hard. Who gives it to him?"

"Mary," he said quietly, "tell me what you know."

She looked around as though she were afraid, and then she told him what she had just heard. Rossini looked very stern. The thought that this man still nursed his plans of revenge angered him; but he realised that it was not only Reuben Fletcher now—there were others.

"Don't go out of a night," pleaded Mary; "and be very careful. And please, sir, don't stay with me any longer!"

"Why?"

"Someone might see us, sir, and tell father, and then he'd guess I knew something."

"Very well. Good-night, Mary, and thank you very much."

"Good-night. And you'll be very careful, won't you?"

The two separated, he to think of what she had told him, she to hurry back home before her father could possibly arrive.

"Oh, God, preserve him—save him!" she prayed again and again as she hurried along. The life of this man was more than anything else on earth to her. She knew he cared nothing for her, and yet she was willing to give her life to keep him from harm.

As for Rossini, he pondered deeply over what Mary had said, and while he determined to be reasonably careful, he made up his mind that nothing she had told him should alter his plans. His fight with the publicans and bookmakers had helped him to forget his heart-wounds. Besides, the more he thought about his

purposes, the more did he realise his duty to try and make the town clean and pure. Naturally, he was no enemy of the men he employed ; he knew their hardships, their temptations, their difficulties. He knew, too, that a large number supported him in what he was doing ; for while a number of them were enslaved by drink and lust, many others were clean-minded, pure-living men.

Thus, while he was careful not to put himself in the way of danger, he insisted that his orders should be carried out. When anyone broke them, he in every case gave the offender warning that if he disobeyed again, he would be discharged. Several continued to disobey, and they were forthwith dismissed. Naturally a certain section of the men were maddened by this, with the result that, their anger being fostered by the publicans he was fighting, many regarded him with black, scowling looks, and some swore that they would "do for him."

Some time passed by and nothing happened. Meanwhile he had been carefully collecting evidence against certain of the publicans and bookmakers. The licensing-day drew nearer, and the tavern-keepers knew that he was the prime mover in the agitation against them. But for him, they would be able to defy their enemies ; he was the man of brains, of influence, of power, and if he were not removed out of their way, their cause would be lost.

But he heard nothing further of the plot which Mary Fletcher believed she had discovered. If such a plot had been made, they guarded its secret well ; and as the days went by, and Rossini heard nothing about it, he concluded that either she had been mistaken, or they had abandoned their plans.

On one occasion he had met Reuben Fletcher, and had spoken to him concerning what had taken place at the lighthouse, but Reuben had said nothing in reply.

"I have decided, for the sake of the fellows whom you led away, to take no further action in the matter, Fletcher," he said; "but remember this is the last time. I have a habit of keeping my eyes open, and I know what is going on. Whatever you do, I shall find it out; and if there are any more of your tricks, I shall have no mercy."

Reuben Fletcher listened sullenly, but answered never a word. When they had parted, however, the man shook his fist at Rossini's retreating form. "Find out, will you?" he snarled. "And you won't have no mercy, won't you? The boot'll be on the other foot, my young cock bantam, and it'll be I who'll have no mercy—mind that!"

As for Mary Fletcher, she watched her father as closely as she was able. Moreover, she questioned him as closely as she dared; but, in spite of everything, she discovered nothing. Whatever Reuben had in his mind he kept his own counsel, and as the days went by and he seemed more cheerful and natural, she was fain to hope that she had been mistaken.

"Father has thought better of it," she reflected. "He has realised that Mr. Keverne is too clever for him, and has given up all thoughts of harming him."

This feeling became strengthened when one day he announced that he was going away to try and get work.

"The money has run out, Mary," he said, "and I'm going over to Dowlally to get work. You'll be all right, won't you?"

"Why go to Dowlally?" she asked. "I don't like

being left here alone; and while I earn my living by dressmaking, it'll be very lonely here without you."

"It's not much you've seen of me, Mary."

"No; but you come home to meals and to sleep."

"Well, it can't be helped. I'm sick of Port St. Mary. Besides, I must get work; the chaps won't lend me any more."

"But why not get employment here?"

"Because that engineer chap has given me a bad name—that's why. No, I'm off in the morning. I shall come back at week-ends. You can get Polly Bray to come and sleep in the house, so that you won't be lonely. I'll send you a letter from Downton."

The next morning he took a little bundle and started. He seemed more affectionate than usual, and Mary's heart beat high with hope that her father had turned over a new leaf, and that Rossini would no longer be in danger because of him. Two days later she received a letter from him, stamped with the Downton postmark. He stated that he had got work and would earn good wages. He moreover told her that in all probability he would be back on the following Saturday week. That same evening Polly Bray, the girl who had promised to sleep in the house, rushed to the room where she was sitting, with wild excitement in her eyes.

"Have you heard the news, Mary?" she asked.

"What news?"

"Mr. Keverne, the young engineer, went out last night to go to a party over to Mr. Kenyon's at the Manor Farm, and he's not returned since!"

CHAPTER VI.

A WOMAN'S HEART.

MARY FLETCHER'S heart almost ceased beating as she heard the words which Polly Bray had spoken. She felt sure that her father's absence on the pretence that he was going to Dowladilly had something to do with Rossini's disappearance. To her the news came as a double calamity, for with it came the conviction that the man she loved was murdered, and that her father would be convicted of the murder. For a few seconds she was too overcome to speak, but presently she mastered her feelings enough to speak quietly.

"Isn't it terrible?" continued Polly Bray, not dreaming of what the news meant to Mary.

"Tell me about it," she said, and although there was a quiver in her voice, the other did not notice it.

"Well, you know Mr. Keverne had rooms at Mrs. Beagle's. Beautiful rooms they are—I saw them myself. As you know, Mrs. Beagle is a lady herself, and never would think of takin' in lodgers in the ordinary way. But I s'pose Mr. Keverne paid her well. Three pound a week, some say, but I don't believe it was as much as that. Why——"

"Yes, yes, never mind that," said Mary impatiently. "Tell me about the accident."

"We don't know that it was an accident. Some think Mr. Keverne had his reasons for not coming back. It's the talk of the town that he can't pay the men

their wages, and so he's run away. But he paid Mrs. Beagle up to last Saturday, I know that; and Franky Flew told me he got his wages all right."

"But you say he went to Mr. Kenyon's party last night."

"No, I didn't. I only said that he told Mrs. Beagle that he was going there. Mrs. Beagle said that he put on his evening clothes—those clothes, you know, like the waiters at 'The Bull' put on when there's a big dinner there."

"Yes, well?"

"Well, I'm telling you as fast as I can," went on Polly. "He told Mrs. Beagle that he expected to return about twelve o'clock, and that he should walk back, as it was a fine night. I've heard that a lot of the gentry around were at the party, and that they had a band to play dance music, and all that; for, as you know, Mr. Kenyon is a gentleman farmer who farms his own land."

Mary Fletcher could scarcely repress her impatience, but she let Polly, who was of a garrulous disposition, tell her story in her own way.

"Well, Mr. Keverne has a latch-key, and comes and goes just when he likes, and Mrs. Beagle went to bed. She told the housemaid to put a jug of hot milk on the hob in Mr. Keverne's sitting-room, so that he could have it when he came home. Eliza Trudgeon she's called, and she came from Glanellan. Well, she put the milk on the hob, for she told me so herself; and she told me that Mr. Keverne has hundreds and hundreds of books all around the room, and a lot of funny instruments and all that sort of thing."

"What time did he leave Mrs. Beagle's?" said

Mary, trying to get Polly back to the subject, which was of such tragic interest to her.

"Oh, he left about seven o'clock. It's a good hour's walk to Manor Farm, and he carried a pair of shiny slippers with him. Eliza wrapped 'em up for him. Well, as I said, Mrs. Beagle and the servants went to bed and fell asleep. This morning Eliza went to his bedroom door and knocked; but she didn't get no answer, so she just put his hot water outside the door and proceeded to do her work. She thought as he'd been out late the night before, he might want to lie a bit longer. 'Bout ten o'clock the cook went to Mrs. Beagle, and told her that Mr. Keverne's breakfast was spoiled, as she'd cooked it two hours before. Mrs. Beagle went up to his room and knocked, and when she got no answer, she entered. It was just as the housemaid had left it the night before. The bed had never been slept on, and so Mr. Keverne had not come back."

"Well, and what then?" asked Mary excitedly.

"Well, Mrs. Beagle didn't think nothin' much, although she couldn't quite make it out. Well, 'bout eleven o'clock, Mr. Jinks, who is the ganger down to the harbour, sends up word that Mr. Keverne was wanted, and would he please come at once. This sets Mrs. Beagle wonderin', so she just sends over a boy to the Manor Farm with a letter tellin' Mrs. Kenyon that Mr. Keverne was wanted, and, as he hadn't come back from there the night before, would she kindly tell him to come back at once. Two hours after—that was about two o'clock—the boy comes back with a letter from Mrs. Kenyon."

"Well, what did she say?"

"I don't know the exact words of the letter, but Mrs. Kenyon told her that they had been very disappointed the night before that Mr. Keverne had not come. No one had even seen him, and they thought it must be the very thick mist which came on about eight o'clock that kept him away, especially as two or three others had been kept away for that reason. As you know, the Manor Farm is not far from the Ashdown Moors, and at this time of the year they moors are sometimes just terrible. Anyhow, this terribly upset Mrs. Beagle; she didn't know what to do, being a widow woman and having no man in the house."

"But couldn't she have sent for Inspector Blewitt?"

"Well, she was 'fraid to do that. For, as you know, Mr. Keverne is a very proud young man, and would be very vexed if the police were set to find out where he was. You see, he may have got a message which called him away. Jemmy Hendy, the postman, says he gave him some letters as he left Mrs. Beagle's last night, and one of the letters may have asked him to go somewhere."

"But he could not read the letters in the dark!" cried Mary impatiently. "It was dark an hour before he left Mrs. Beagle's, and if the postman gave him the letters after he left the house, how could he read them?"

"No, I never thought of that," assented Polly; "still, there's no knowin' the ways a clever young man like Mr. Keverne may have of reading letters."

Mary Fletcher had learnt all that Polly Bray could tell her now—Rossini started out for Mrs. Kenyon's the night before and had never returned. Under ordinary circumstances this need not have caused so much anxiety; but knowing what she knew she felt sure that

something terrible had happened to him. But what made it harder to bear was that she could do nothing. If she told her story, suspicion would be fastened upon her father. What the people called the Brewster Sessions would soon be held, and it was well known that Rossini was determined to take away the licences from a number of bad houses in the town. It was he who had collected evidence, and it was he who would have to oppose the renewal of licences before the licensing magistrates. It was the natural desire of the publicans, therefore, to get him out of the way, but doubtless they would have taken care that no suspicion would fall upon them. No, if the truth came to light, the guilt would be traced to her father. It was well known that Reuben Fletcher hated the young engineer, and had more than once made sinister vows concerning him.

Polly Bray went on talking about the gossip of Port St. Mary, but Mary did not hear her; she was trying to think of what she ought to do. Presently Polly rose to go.

"Are you going out?" asked Mary.

"Yes," replied the girl; "I'm going to see if there is any more news. And I say, Mary, would you mind if I did not come back here to sleep to-night?"

Mary looked at her inquiringly.

"Oh, I'll come if you like," said Polly. "Only my cousin Tom has come home from sea, and he's coming to our house to supper. You know what good company he is, and—and—— Of course, if you think you'd be afraid, I'll——"

"No, no, all right," said Mary. "I can manage all right. I've often slept in the house alone since mother

died. As you know, father hasn't always come home of a night."

"That's all right, then," said Polly. "Of course, I'll come back if you think you'd be afraid; but I hate having to come away when everybody else is enjoyin' themselves."

"All right; what time is your cousin Tom coming?"

"Why, he must be at our house by now," said Polly, looking at the clock. "Good-night, Mary."

The girl was left alone with her thoughts now, and she tried to think what to do. Presently the room became unbearable. She must go out and try and hear if there were any further news. Carefully locking the door behind her, she went into the street and found her way into the centre of the town, where the people congregated.

She found that Rossini's absence was the one topic of conversation. The young engineer had loomed largely in the life of Port St. Mary, and thus the stories which had been circulated about him aroused everyone to the tiptoe of curiosity.

"I think the police ought to tak et up," she heard someone say.

"Yes, but Inspector Blewitt do zay that et's all a great fuss 'bout nothin'. He do zay that he might have took a laate train and gone to Plymouth, or some other place. The young engineer ed'n a chap to tell everybody about his business."

"But I don't believe he'd go away at a time like this."

"Why, the Brewster Sessions is to-morrow, and it was arranged that he should meet Mr. Williams and Mr. Tresidder to-night."

"Did you tell Inspector Blewitt?"

"Of course I did; but he only laughed. He said he wasn't going to git laughed out of the town by organising search-parties to find a gentleman that's gone away somewhere on business."

"Exactly, but he promised to go to Mrs. Kenyon's last night."

"Blewitt do zay that he ded'n promise properly. He told Mrs. Kenyon that he would go ef he could."

"But Mrs. Beagle said that he started to go there."

Mary listened to all this eagerly. She wandered from group to group, but she could hear nothing but groundless gossip. Nevertheless, the fact that Rossini had not returned haunted her. Ought she not to go to Inspector Blewitt and tell him her fears? But that would place her father in danger. No, she dared not do that.

Presently she found her way back to the house again. The cottage looked dark and lonely as she entered. Even when she had lit the lamp, she was afraid. The ticking of the clock seemed like the sound of a "death watch"—the silence of the cottage was horrible.

How could she spend the night there alone, knowing all the time that the man she loved was perhaps lying stark and dead by some lonely hedge-side, or perhaps in the power of her father and the other men who had been with him in the shed on that night when she followed him? The thought was fearful. Why should Polly have chosen that of all nights to ask that she might sleep at home? If she could only do something! How long she brooded and wondered and prayed she knew not; but presently she started as though someone had touched her, and her eyes shone with a strange

light. She drew aside the curtains and looked out. The night was cloudy and forbidding; no wind blew, but the air seemed to portend a storm.

"I am all alone in the house," she said aloud. "I am free to do what I like, to go where I like. No one will know."

A few minutes later she was out in the street again. No one was in sight, for Port St. Mary was now asleep. She did not turn in the direction of the town, but towards the country; she had no definite plan in her mind, she only knew that she was going to try and find the man she loved. Even yet she might be in time to save him, although more than twenty-four hours had passed since he left Mrs. Beagle's house.

Her instinct led her in the direction of Manor Farm, where Rossini had been expected on the previous night. If her father had made his plans to harm him, he would have arranged to waylay him on his way thither. She did not see what good she could do by going in search of him, but she knew that she could not do otherwise. He was all the world to her, and she would find him.

She met no one along the silent lanes in which she walked. No sound of human footstep or living thing broke upon her ears. Away in the distance she could hear the sobbing of the sea, and now and then the wind, which had risen slightly since she came out, wailed its way across the lonely moors which lay beyond Manor Farm. But she felt no fear now. The thought that she was doing something, vague and undefined though it might be, seemed to give her courage.

After an hour's walking she reached the end of the lane which led up to the Manor Farm house. Here she stopped, undecided what to do. It was no use going

up there and asking Mrs. Kenyon the question which had doubtless been asked her before; besides, it would attract suspicion. She felt that the very fact of her being known to ask questions about Rossini would lead people to think of her father. But what could she do? She had left the highway now and was in a lane almost exclusively used by Mr. Kenyon and his people. The roads at her right practically ended at the moors, although there were cart-tracks which led to some cottages which were scattered over the wide expanse of the moors.

For the first time she realised the uselessness of her errand. She had come out without any definite plan as to what ought to be done. She only had a feeling that, seeing Rossini come to the Manor Farm, her father would waylay him on his way thither, and then work his will on him. Therefore she wanted to be near the place where her father had wreaked his vengeance. She felt that she would be able to help Rossini better that way.

For some moments she remained undecided, and in the silence of the night a great fear possessed her. She had no idea of what time it was. She only knew that it must be getting very late, and that she was out there in the lonely countryside all alone. Presently, however, her thoughts began to shape themselves somewhat. She knew her father. More than once when he had been breathing out vengeance against Rossini, he had said he'd "like to get him away to some lonely place and do for him." Like most men of his class, Reuben Fletcher believed that the more lonely the place at which a crime was committed, the less would the chances be of discovery.

Mary Fletcher turned and made her way towards the moors. She was still following the impulses of her simple nature. Reason had very little to do with the action she was taking. She only knew that she must find the man she loved, and that she must, if possible, save her father from a terrible doom.

Directly she left the lane and came upon the moors, a feeling of desolation possessed her. There had been a sense of companionship in the trees and the hedges; besides, her nearness to the Manor Farm had made her feel that she was not far from human beings. But now that she had reached the moors she felt all alone. The waning moon had by this time risen, and revealed to her the drear outline of the moors. It was not flat tableland which she saw, but a wild, desolate region that rose sometimes in rocky tors, and then again sank into dark, swampy valleys. On leaving the lane and entering the moors she had crossed a stream, and this stream seemed to have cut her off from all human companionship.

These moors were said to be haunted by moor spirits, and many a tale had she been told concerning the doleful happenings to those who had dared to cross them after dark. In her excited imagination she fancied she heard dismal cries and woeful wailings, as though dark spirits of the dead were vainly trying to find rest.

But although Mary Fletcher had been taught to believe in such things, she did not yield to her fears. In her simple faith, she believed that God was behind all things, and that He would listen to her prayers. It was natural, therefore, that when she found herself out on the moors, her heart turned to prayer.

"Oh, dear Lord Ješus," she said, "take care of me, and help me to find him!"

The prayer brought her comfort, as prayer ever does. In a dim, undefined way she felt that God was near her, and that in His presence she was safe. She had a kind of belief, too, that God would help her to find the man she loved.

All at once she thought of a lonely pond on the moors, which she had once come to see years ago in company with her father and mother. The day had been fine, and the sun was shining brightly, and so she never thought of fear then. She felt sure that if her father had a dark deed to do, this was the kind of place he would choose. The pond, or "tarn," as the people called it, was situated between two rocky peaks, which the Port St. Mary people called "tors," and was seldom visited by the villagers because of its lonely situation. The moon shot into a clear sky between the clouds, and she saw the moors more clearly. She could see one of the tors. It was more than a mile away, and the tarn lay beyond it. Yes, she would find her way to it.

"God, help me! dear Lord Jesus, help me!" she prayed again and again, as she made her way towards the distant tor. The night became clearer now, and she had no difficulty in keeping to the track, until presently she descended into a valley, where it lost itself in a swampy place.

The ground here was covered by a coarse kind of grass, and was altogether unlike the heather and gorse amongst which she had been walking. Nor could she see any of the white "spar rocks" over which she had stumbled on her way thither. Her feet sank

in the slimy mud, and she knew she had got away from the track. It was not dangerous, nevertheless she wanted to keep on the track which led to the top. She looked anxiously around her, and saw what seemed to her the top of a grey rock.

"That will be the cart-track," she reflected. "If I can get to that, I shall be all right." Hurriedly she found her way thither, but when she put her foot on what she thought was rock, it sank beneath her feet!

It was only paper, after all, but in placing her foot upon it she touched something that attracted her attention. She stooped and examined it, and as she did so her heart almost ceased beating. It was a dress-slipper. Like lightning her mind reverted to what Polly Bray had told her. Rossini had told Mrs. Beagle that he intended walking to Mrs. Kenyon's at Manor Farm, and he had taken a pair of dress-slippers with him.

Again the moon shone out between the clouds, and she saw it more clearly. Yes, it belonged to a man; it must be Rossini's. In the simple life of Port St. Mary such things were but little used, and there was no one else to whom it could belong.

She searched in order to find the companion slipper, but failed; nevertheless she had no doubt of what had taken place. Her father and the other men had taken him to this lonely place upon the moors, and possibly, when they came here, he had struggled with them, and in the struggle this had been dropped. With this discovery vague uncertainty became conviction. God had put it into her heart to come hither, and she in coming had obeyed His commands.

Struggling across the swampy place, she reached dry land again. Her heart was filled with a great fear, but

she felt sure that she would find Rossini. She was convinced that her father would try to murder him, but then she had great faith in Rossini's power to take care of himself. Had he not defeated her father twice before, and would he not defeat him again? And yet she was not sure. This plot was more deeply laid than the others, and she knew that for months her father had been in a desperate mood. Still, she must go on. God had called her, and her heart had gladly responded.

"Oh, Lord Jesus, help me to save him!" she pleaded again and again. She thought not of her own happiness, she never dreamt of reward; she only obeyed the pleadings of her great love, and even had she known that her life would have to be the forfeit of Rossini's safety, she would gladly have given it.

The ground was higher now. Up and up she climbed, the top of the tor being her only guide. For there was no further sign of the cart-track. That had either ended at the swamp or it led away in some other direction at the foot of the hill.

"They would try to kill him, and then throw him in the pond," was the thought that haunted her; and then she made her way towards the lonely tarn she remembered visiting years before.

Presently she reached the summit of the tor, and saw lying at its foot a stretch of dark water. The place was drear enough in the daytime, when the larks were singing and the sun was shining; but it was terrible now. No habitation was near, no sound was heard save the southing of the wind and the occasional chatter of a night bird.

"It will be there," she said. "I must go down there," and thither she made her way, drawn on by the

conviction that it was there she would find the man she loved. No pillar of fire went before her, as it went before the Israelites of old; no voice spoke out of the night, telling her to be of good cheer; but a great love such as only a pure woman can feel burned in her heart, and a great faith that God was near possessed her soul. In life and in death, God lived!

Away in the eastern sky was the faint glow of the dawn.

CHAPTER VII.

THE END OF MARY FLETCHER'S SEARCH.

MARY FLETCHER made her way towards the lonely tarn. Not a house was near, no sound reached her ears. In after years, when she tried to recall the experiences of that night, she found that she had little recollection of anything that took place from the time she found the dress-slipper to the time she stood by the side of the pool, whose waters looked as black as ink in the first grey light of the morning. The only feeling to which she could confess was an utter loneliness. The ancient mariner who spoke of his crew as being

“ The first which ever burst
Into that silent sea,”

felt no more lonely than she, except for the one great consciousness which he did not possess. Lonely as it was, God was there, and in the strength of that thought she scrambled down the rocky slopes of the tor until she stood on the edge of the mountain-pool.

She neither saw nor heard anything which told her that she would be successful in her search, but she felt sure nevertheless that she was on the brink of some discovery. The old people in Port St. Mary said that Mary's grandmother was endowed with the gift of second sight, and even yet stories were told of Betsy Pentraze having seen, in a vision of the night, a vessel

sinking outside Port St. Mary, and the sides of the vessel were gored by the cruel rocks near the lonely island on which Black Rock lighthouse was now built. She also told the names of those whom she had seen on her decks, and, strange to relate, it was said that she had faithfully described the story of the wreck. The generation to which Mary belonged had ceased to believe in such stories, and yet it might be that she inherited something of that peculiar gift which laughs at investigation and brings to naught the theories of men. Be that as it may, her journey that night was not influenced by any chain of reasoning. She had followed the leadership of her heart, and that was all.

Slowly she walked around the pool, ever casting furtive glances at its deep, black waters; but nothing did she see which rewarded her search. There was no suggestion of the man she sought. The surface of the pool was untroubled. No breath of wind, even, ruffled the waters. Still she did not give up hope. It had come to her by this time that she had not come hither in vain. She had asked God to guide her, and He would guide her. Alive or dead, the feeling possessed her that she would find the man she loved.

The light was now increasing rapidly. Objects which had been at first indistinct now revealed themselves clearly. Her second excursion around the pool was not so fruitless as the first. It was but little she discovered, but what she saw confirmed all her feelings. Close by the edge of the pond, and on a soft and marshy place, she saw footprints. There were not many, but some were plainly to be seen. Mostly the ground was covered by a coarse, sharp grass which the country-folk called "spires." This kind of grass grew only in

marshy places such as she saw here. When winter came on, the pond would cover these "spires" completely; but now, although the ground was somewhat spongy, it afforded a fairly good foothold. The footmarks she saw were between the clumps of grass.

Eagerly she searched for other signs that the place had been lately visited, but she saw none. She tried hard to think what these might mean. If they were made by Rossini and those who sought to do him harm, then there was only one sequel. Rossini had been led to this silent, lonely place, he had been thrown into the pond, and then left to die. It would be just such a scheme as her father would invent—it would appeal to him as safe and effective.

She looked long and steadily into the pond, but could see nothing. The water looked as black as ink, and only by dredging would it reveal what lay beneath its calm surface. She carefully examined the grass that grew near the footmarks. She thought it gave evidence of being trodden upon and bruised; but she was not sure. Whatever had been done, scarcely a sign had been left behind.

The silence of the place oppressed her. Around rose the great, grey, rocky tors, at her feet lay the chill waters of the mountain-tarn. No sign of life was anywhere to be seen. Not a bird chirped, not even a breath of wind stirred. No more gloomy or silent place could be found. Probably this spot was not visited from October to March. Who would come hither, to see barrenness and loneliness? More than once it seemed to her that she had come on a mere will-o'-the-wisp chase, and perhaps she would have been overpowered by the thought did she not hold in her hand

the slipper she had found on the other side of the tor that rose up in front of her.

No, it was impossible to find him here. If her father and his companions had worked their wills, Rossini lay at the bottom of the pool, and she would never see him again. The thought maddened her. Without him, it seemed to her that there was nothing to live for. He filled the whole horizon of her desire; if he were dead, the sun of her life had been blotted out. But what should she do? She could not let this terrible uncertainty remain an uncertainty. Besides, if she went back to Port St. Mary, and told Inspector Blewitt that she had found the slipper and seen the footmarks, it would lead to further investigation. She would be asked why she had taken this journey, and enquiry would lead to her telling what she believed about her father's schemes of vengeance.

She felt faint and weary. The sun was now beginning to appear behind one of the tors which stood at the eastern end of the tarn, so that for many hours there would be light. But it would be useless to stay there—she must do something, she must find out the truth. But how?

Again she walked around the mountain-pool, only to return to the place where she had discovered the footmarks. But here she thought she saw something else. It seemed to her that near the spot where these footmarks were, the grass was somewhat discoloured. A kind of red slime covered the ground. What could it mean?

"Oh, Lord Jesus, tell me what to do!" she cried again and again; but her mind seemed a blank.

Presently, however, she began to reason. She knew

how clever Rossini was, and she had all along been sustained by the feeling that, although her father and the other men had him in their power, he would find some way of frustrating their plans. He had done it before, and would he not do it again?

Then something else struck her. She noticed a tiny stream which emptied itself into the tarn, and she noticed that the bed of the stream was red. Doubtless it came from a mineral spring, and the mineral in the water had left a deposit of red as it flowed along. She saw, too, that the ground through which it flowed was discoloured.

Her heart began to beat rapidly now, and she looked eagerly around for some means whereby she could put to a test the hope which had flashed into her mind. She tried to find some stick or bush, but the place was perfectly barren; not even a furze bush was to be seen. Quick as thought, she turned the sleeve of her dress up to the shoulder, and then knelt down by the water. A moment later, her arm was shoulder-deep in the water; indeed, she would have fallen into it, had she not supported herself by holding a clump of grass firmly with her left hand. When she drew her right hand from the water, she held a handful of red slime. It was the same kind of mud as that which had discoloured some of the grass by the edge of the pond.

Her eyes flashed with a new light. All feelings of faintness and weariness were gone. It was but little she had discovered, but it had given her hope. That grass might easily have been discoloured by someone who had crawled out of the pool. This red slime could not have been there long—it would be washed away by the first shower of rain. When had it rained last?

Certainly not for two days. That fact would account for the red slime drying on the grass and remaining there so long.

She felt sure now that Rossini had outwitted his enemies, and she felt angry with herself for thinking that her father and his companions were more than a match for the man whom she almost deified. But if he were not in the pool, where was he?

Again she looked eagerly around, but still nothing could she see, save the tarn at her feet, and the great, rocky tors, which rose up around her. The tarn stood in a basin between the hills, and was fed by the streams which flowed from them. At the bottom of the hills, close by the water, lay large rocks which had rolled down their steep slopes; but beyond that, nothing.

Still she was not afraid. The conviction that Rossini had been thrown into the tarn, and had then crept out again, grew upon her. If that were true, he might have tried to find shelter somewhere. She knew there were lonely cottages among these moors; perhaps he had found his way to one of them. Now that the day had come, she would be able to find out. Seeing what seemed to her like a pathway between two of the tors, she started to climb out of the hollow in which she was. When she had gone perhaps a hundred steps, she stopped, for again she saw that the grass was discoloured by the same red slime she had noticed on the bank of the tarn. She felt sure Rossini had come along here. A little later she found that the task of getting out of the hollow in this direction was harder than she had thought. Great boulders lay everywhere. Probably in the far-back past there had been some great upheaval, and the rocks from the hill-tops had rolled

towards the valley. Still she went on eagerly ; she felt sure that Rossini was alive, and it was for her to find him.

Again she stopped suddenly. Close to her she heard the sound of a human voice. It was faint and indistinct, but she was sure she was not mistaken. Eagerly she looked around, but she could see nothing save the dreary scene she had been scanning for the last hour. Again the sound of a voice reached her. It was close by her, and yet no one could she see. A moment later her heart gave a great bound. Lying behind a great rock, his clothes sodden and discoloured, his face bloodstained, she saw the man whom she had come to seek.

She gave a cry of joy and leapt to his side.

"Mr. Keverne!" she cried. "Oh, thank God, I have found you!"

But there was no answer to her cry, no look of recognition in his eyes. He moaned as if in pain, and then talked in an incoherent fashion.

"Mr. Keverne," she said, "don't you know me? I am Mary Fletcher."

But the eyes which she had so often seen flash with the light of purpose were expressionless now. It seemed to her that a film had gathered over them, and that they were staring into vacancy.

"Black and cold," she heard him mutter ; "but there was no other way. If I can only get to the other side—yes, that's it. Oh, yes, I can dive right enough. Down, down, down. Yes, I'm at the bottom now. Who said there was no bottom to the pool? They are all wrong. There is a bottom, and little devils live there," and mirthless laughter escaped his lips.

"It's all right, Mr. Keverne," she said. "Don't fear; you'll soon be better."

But still he went on, unheeding. "I can swim it—yes, I can swim it right enough—only there's the pain in my arm, and my head is so heavy. The fellow didn't hit me hard; he meant to, but he didn't. I just dodged him; it was a clever trick. But it is terribly cold, cold, cold! If the sun would only shine, it would make the water hot. Isn't it funny that I can breathe down here at the bottom of the pond? But perhaps I'm dead. Who knows? Are they coming? No, I dodged them. When they saw me sink to the bottom, they thought I was done for. If my head didn't ache so, and my right arm were better, I should be all right. Oh, yes, Reuben Fletcher is a clever man; but there—— If I could only go to sleep!"

"You are not at the bottom of the pond, Mr. Keverne," she said; "you are all safe now."

"What I can't make out," he continued, still unconscious of her presence, "is that I can be cold and thirsty at the same time. How can a man be lying at the bottom of a pond, and still be thirsty? What did I say to Lady Beatrice? Human nature is always laughing at us. I expect she's married now. I told her to marry; but wasn't it rather mean of her never to let me know? There's Henwood, too; I thought he would play the game. Oh, she doesn't know what it cost me—she never will! Why should I tell her that? 'Twould be a mean thing. What is love worth if it is not prepared to suffer? I tell the doctors they don't know anything. Here am I, like a fish, living in the water, and yet I'm parched with thirst."

Mary Fletcher was kneeling by his side now and

praying that God would tell her what to do. She had found the man she had sought, but she seemed powerless to help him. And yet she would have given her life for him.

"I'm so tired, tired, tired," he went on; "and nobody knows—nobody cares!"

There was a plaintive wail in his wanderings now, and the girl's tears fell as she heard it.

"Somebody does care, Mr. Keverne!" she cried. "I've been out all night trying to find you."

But still he took no heed. "Nobody knows and nobody cares," he went on.

Her heart seemed breaking, and yet a great joy filled her being. She found him, she and no other. She was alone with the man she loved. Oh, how gladly she would give her life for him! Eagerly she looked around again, but no one was near. The place was as silent as death. Bending her face to his, she kissed him, and then started back as if frightened at what she had done.

Her touch seemed to arouse him to momentary consciousness.

"Who are you?" he asked. "You are not Reuben Fletcher, or Jimmer; you are——"

"Mary Fletcher, sir. I am come to take you home."

"Isn't it strange that one should be so thirsty at the bottom of a pond, Mary?" he said.

His words brought her to a sense of activity. She must do something. Although she felt afraid to leave him, she scrambled among the rocks until she came to a tiny stream. Making the palms of her hands into a cup, she carried some water to him and bathed his

parched lips, and some drops trickled through his teeth into his mouth.

This aroused him still more. A gleam of intelligence, of memory, flashed into his eyes.

"Don't tell anyone, Mary," he said. "Not a word; no, not a word. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whatever people ask you, don't tell them. It'll be all right—not a word. But isn't it strange that I can live so long under water? And these little devils are shaped like eels; they crawl, and crawl, and crawl. Oh, I can't bear this much longer!"

She started up again. "I must find a place for him," she said; "he needs a doctor, and—and——"

She stood by his side for a little time, as if unable to tear herself away; then, with the speed of a deer, she ran up the ravine. From rock to rock she leapt, heedless of falls and bruises. What was her own pain now? God had answered her prayers. She had found Rossini; now she must find some house where he could rest and get better.

Presently she reached a point from which she could see the broad expanse of the moors, and to her delight she saw, some distance away, a cottage. Without hesitating a second, she ran towards it, and when she reached it, she saw to her joy that it was inhabited. Opening the door, she entered; and sitting by the open fire were an old man and woman, eating their morning meal.

Both of them looked up questioningly.

"Wher'd you come from?" asked the man.

"From the pool," she panted. "Come at once. He'll die if he's not taken care of."

"Who'll die? What do 'ee main? You bean't up to no good, you bean't."

"Never mind me. He must have been in the pool. I've only just found him. Come."

"Who be 'ee talkin' 'bout?"

"Come, come, I tell you. He'll die if you don't. I've been searching all night; it's only a little while ago since I found him. But he must have been there all yesterday and all the night. We must have a doctor, too. Don't fear, I'll pay for the doctor."

"No doctor doan't come near this 'ouse," said the old woman. "But go, Eli, and zee what she do main."

"That's it, come. But we must bring a stretcher or something; he can't walk."

"I mus' know more 'bout this," said the old man. "Who be 'ee talkin' 'bout?"

For some time the girl tried to explain what was the matter, bearing in mind all the time Rossini's instructions that she must tell nothing. At length she persuaded the man that help must be rendered first, and explanations could come afterwards.

"A man?" said the old woman, as they prepared to start. "A heavy man, es a?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then you two caan't car' un. I must whistle for Tobias."

"But we can't wait," said Mary, in a fever of anxiety.

"Doan't 'ee be a vool!" said the old woman tartly.

A few minutes later a great, gawky youth of about eighteen came into the house.

"Hay-pook poles, some ropes, and some hay," she said.

"What vur?" asked Tobias.

"Hold yer gab, and do as you be towld."

Without a word, the youth obeyed her bidding, and a little later Mary Fletcher was leading the way to the tarn.

They found Rossini where she had left him, but she saw at a glance that he was worse. He was staring wildly, and crying aloud as if in anguish.

"They mean to kill me!" he shouted. "One I don't mind, nor two; but there are such numbers. There, drive them off! If only my arm wasn't so heavy, and—there—there—I'm blind again, I can't see!"

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Keverne," she said. "No harm shall come to you."

Her presence quietened him, but he did not know her. "You are a woman," he said, "and if you can do nothing else, you can hide me."

"Yes, yes, I'll hide you. You can't walk, so we are going to carry you."

He seemed to pay no heed while they lifted him on to the stretcher which they were able to improvise, and a little later they were struggling up towards the old man's cottage. How they reached it Mary never knew. To the youth called Tobias the burden did not seem so great; rather he seemed proud of exhibiting his prowess. But to Mary it was a different matter. For Rossini was no light weight, and she insisted on helping to carry him. Indeed, it was necessary for her to do so, for although old Eli knew an easier way than she had discovered, he was too decrepit and weak to bear such a burden. But she thought not of overstrained muscles and aching limbs. Her only thought was that she was carrying the man she loved to a place of safety; and although she was well-nigh faint, she

struggled on, until at last they laid him on the little bed which the old woman had prepared.

"Ee's a gen'leman, for sure," said the old woman, as they brought him in.

But Mary did not answer. Her strength had at last given way, and no sooner had they placed him on the bed than she fell down in a faint.

"Never mind 'bout she," said the old woman quietly; "she'll. soon come to. Here, Eli, 'elp me to undress un."

"I be feared," said Eli. "He do look as ef ee's dead."

"Now, doan't 'ee be fullish," replied his wife. "You jist do what you'm towld."

CHAPTER VIII.

DR. TAMSIN KEAST.

THE cottage into which Rossini Keverne had been taken was owned by Eli and Tamsin Keast. They had come into the neighbourhood some time previous, with their son Tobias. The cottage was situated on the loneliest spot on the great Ashdown Moors, and no other house was visible from it. Eli and Tamsin had come from a distant town, where the latter had made quite a reputation as a doctor. Indeed, it is to be doubted whether any qualified medical practitioner in the town had a "practice" which approached anything like the dimensions of Tamsin's. People came for miles around to see her—indeed, according to local gossip, many a patient, given up by the ordinary doctor, had been cured by Tamsin. Her knowledge of herbs was remarkable, and although her medical training was of the most elementary order, the cures she wrought were for years the talk of the town. Tamsin had her regular hours for seeing patients, just as other doctors had, and from nine o'clock of a morning until half-past one her little kitchen was literally besieged by patients. Having had the good fortune to live for two years in Tamsin's house, I can testify to the truth of this, as well as to the efficacy of her medicines. Eli Keast owned a fairly large garden, and as he supplied a number of people with vegetables and fruit, he contributed his share towards household expenses. Young Tobias worked with his father in the

garden. Mrs. Keast also took in a lodger. She had a spare bedroom and sitting-room, which were at the disposal of any eligible single man for a consideration. For two years I happened to be the eligible single man. A middle-aged woman looked after the house and attended to the lodger, while Mrs. Keast looked after the patients.

After some years, however, Mrs. Keast felt a desire to retire. The old couple had saved sufficient to meet their needs during the remainder of their lives, and so, with Tobias, their son, they moved to a town about five miles away. But Tamsin's patients followed her, and she found that instead of having less work, she had more. After a great deal of discussion they came to the conclusion that the only chance Tamsin would have of being free from her patients would be to get to some thinly populated part of the country where no one would know of her skill. Both Eli and Tamsin had been reared in the country, and both had "a 'ankerin'," as they put it, after farming. As chance would have it, Eli's brother, who had reclaimed a piece of land on Ashdown Moors and built a house on it, had died just at the time that Eli and Tamsin were wondering "'ow they could git away somewhere where they wuddn't be knawed." Moreover, Eli found himself the owner of the said piece of reclaimed land. Without informing anyone of their intention, they moved to their new property, and at the time of which I am writing they had been on their farm about a year.

At first Tamsin had enjoyed her freedom from the worry of her patients, but as time went on, although she was fairly happy among her cows and pigs, she longed for an opportunity of occasionally putting her

medical skill into practice. Moreover, as was natural to such a person, she had an intense dislike for doctors. They had often expressed the opinion that it ought to be made illegal for this "ignorant old woman to pretend to doctor people."

This may account for her remarking, when Mary Fletcher had said that Rossini would need a doctor, that no doctor should enter her house.

A stranger coming into this lonely moorland cottage would be surprised at its comfort. As a matter of fact, Tamsin had kept not only her kitchen furniture, but that which had been used by her lodgers. As a consequence, the room into which Rossini was brought was replete with all things necessary for one in his condition.

"'Ee's a gen'leman, I tell 'ee," repeated Tamsin, after she had spent an hour at Rossini's side. "I've 'ad fower curates and five young Independent passons lodgin' with me, and I ought to know."

"But what's the maid doin' 'ere?" asked Eli.

"Time enough to ax that when she's better. She's come round a bit, ed'n she?"

"Iss, she's settin' in the armchair in the kitchen. She do zay she's all right, and do want to know 'ow 'ee 'es."

"I'll talk to she presently; but at present 'ee've got to be 'tended to."

"What do 'ee think on 'im?" asked Eli.

"A ghastly wound in his 'ead, 'is arm brokked, and 'igh faiver," replied Tamsin.

"Will 'ee pull round?"

"Ef'ee can be got better, I'll git 'im better," she remarked rather tartly.

"Because——" and Eli hesitated.

"Because what?"

"Well, ef 'ee doan't git better, lots o' questions'll be axed. You d' know the law. The doctor must sign a death cettificut."

"There shaan't no doctors cum 'ere while I d' live 'ere," replied Tamsin; nevertheless, there was an anxious look in her eyes as she turned to Rossini.

"How is he?"

It was Mary Fletcher who appeared at the door and asked the question.

"Now, then, go 'way, and I'll talk to 'ee d'reckly," replied Tamsin.

"Will he get better?"

"Of course he will. Go 'way, do 'ee, now."

Mary went back to the kitchen in a dazed kind of way. She was still faint from the experiences of the night, while the strain she had undergone in helping to carry Rossini to the cottage would be felt for many days to come.

As for Rossini he talked incessantly. He evidently believed he was still at the bottom of the pool, and in his mind wanderings he told how he had got there. Sometimes he grew almost violent, and tried to get out of bed. He must fight his enemies, he said, for there would be no safety for him while they followed him.

"Don't you see them?" he cried; "they are standing on the edge of the pool, now! The moment I rise to the surface, they'll be upon me!"

Presently, however, he became quieter. Tamsin had given him some medicine, and although he showed no sign of consciousness, it was evident that the fever was considerably reduced.

It was not until midday that Tamsin was able to

leave his room, and then she came into the kitchen, where she found Mary eagerly waiting for news.

"Now, then, be you better?" she asked.

"I'm all right; how is he?"

"He's better now."

"But you'll let me go for a doctor?"

"No, I shaan't, so there now. P'raps you doan't know, but I've bin a doctor for more'n twenty year, so there's no need of no more."

"But, but——"

"I shaan't 'ave one 'ere, now, mind that. I d' know what 'ud happen. Doctors doan't know nothin' 'bout curin' people. 'T'es all opperations, opperations with they. Chloroform, and the knife, tha's oal doctors do think 'bout. I do hail people, that's what I do. I've set his arm as well as any bonesetter, and his faiver es gone down. Plaise God I'll make 'im better; but no doctors shall come 'ere with their falde-rals."

"But can you cure people?"

"I've cured 'undreds. I've cured scores what the doctors 'ave said cudden't be cured. I've set scores of broken bones, so doan't you trouble. But tell me who es a? And 'ow did 'ee find un?"

The girl was silent. He had told her to tell nothing, and his command must be obeyed.

"'Ow did 'ee find un?" repeated Tamsin.

"I've told you," replied Mary. "I found him lying beside the rock, where I brought your husband."

"But how long had he been lying there?"

"I don't know. It must have been all day yesterday."

"All day 'esterday!"

"Yes. But I can't tell you anything. Haven't you

heard him? All the way as we carried him he was crying to us not to tell anybody anything."

"That's all wind," replied Tamsin; "a thing like this must come to light. Besides, I've larnt a lot already. Look 'ere, ed'n 'ee the young engineer what did build the lighthouse?"

"How did you guess?" asked Mary.

"I thought 'ee was. Ah, that 'counts. I heerd 'bout un when I was over to Port St. Mary market with butter. Ter'ble 'ard 'pon the drunkard-makers and card-sharpers, 'ee was, so I was towld. Ah!"

Tamsin evidently found food for thought in this remark, for she remained quiet for several seconds.

"But what I want to know es, 'ow did you find him?" she asked presently.

Mary Fletcher was silent. She felt by instinct that Tamsin was a woman of more than ordinary penetration, and she was afraid of implicating her father.

Tamsin gave Mary a suspicious glance and then went to Rossini's bedside again. He was lying very quietly now, and his face, save for a flesh wound on his left cheek, had become very pale. The old woman watched him attentively.

"I'm better, now, Henwood," she heard him say presently, "very much better. Oh, yes, don't trouble. But tell me, Henwood, are you married? I wrote to Lady Beatrice, and advised her to—to accept your love; but you've told me nothing, neither has she."

After this he was silent again for a time, then he went on: "He doesn't know what it cost me. He never will, for I'll not tell him. It would be mean. He was my best friend, and—and—well, I could not help doing what he asked me. I had loved her for years; but it

does not matter. She was all the world to me, my every thought was for her; but it does not matter. Besides, fancy Rossini Keverne marrying Lady Beatrice Penwithen! And yet I might—I might! But I gave her up, and came away into the darkness.”

“Poor young gen’leman!” murmured Tamsin; “his mind is wanderin’. Es there anything in it, I wonder? But, then, people do talk queer stuff when they’ve got a faiver.”

She was a kind woman, was Tamsin Keast, in spite of a somewhat sharp tongue, and she placed her hand with motherly tenderness on Rossini’s hot brow. “Poor dear, poor dear!” she murmured.

The action seemed to arouse Rossini, for he opened his eyes and looked up towards her.

“Who are you?” he asked, with half-awakened intelligence.

“Think I’m yer mauther, my dear,” she said, “and mind all the time that no ’arm can ’appen to ’ee, and that I’m going to make ’ee better.”

He seemed to try and understand what she had said. “If there was only something to get better for,” he murmured. “If only Lady Beatrice were—— But what’s the use? Keep your hand there, it does me good.”

A few minutes later he fell into a kind of doze, at which Tamsin gave a sigh of satisfaction. When she took her hand from his brow, and turned towards the door, she saw Mary Fletcher watching her. Tamsin led the girl into the kitchen. “Was you ’arkenin’?” she asked.

Mary nodded. Her face was pale, and in her eyes was a look of terror.

"All the time?"

"Yes."

"Be you Lady Beatrice Penwithen?"

"No."

"Who be you, then?"

Mary told her.

"Be you his sweetheart, or anything of that sort?"

"No, no."

"Ah, but you do love un."

"Don't tell him, don't tell him!" she sobbed. "If you did—— Oh, don't tell him! Promise you won't."

But this time Tamsin was silent.

"I must go back now," said Mary presently; "but tell me, may I come and nurse him?"

"What do you know 'bout nursin'?"

"I'll do whatever you tell me, anything, everything!"

Again Tamsin looked at her keenly. By this time she had drawn conclusions which were very near the truth.

"Ef you do go back, you'll have to tell people where 'ee es," remarked Tamsin.

"No, not a word," said Mary. "He told me not, you know. You won't say anything, will you?"

"No," said Tamsin, after hesitating a second, "I shaan't tell nothin'. All the same——"

"What?" said Mary.

"People'll be sure to ax questions. They'll be sure to search for un. 'Ee ed'n like a ordinary man. What 'bout all the men 'ee've employed?"

"We'll wait a day or two, won't we?" said Mary. "Perhaps by that time he'll let us know what to do. He's so clever."

Tamsin shook her head. "You'd better go back and

vind out all you can," she said, "and then come back. By that time I shall 'ave summin' to tell 'ee."

"And Eli and Tobias will say nothing?"

"Catch 'em," said Tamsin grimly. "There, now, I'll go back to un again."

"May I come too?"

"Ef you don't spaik a word."

The two crept quietly into the bedroom. Rossini was still dozing. Now and then he murmured, but on the whole he kept fairly quiet. Tamsin put her hand on his forehead again.

"The faiver ed'n wuss," she said, "and 'tes time for un to 'ave some more med'cine."

She lifted a glass to his mouth. "'Ere, my dear," she said, "drink this. I'll make 'ee better."

Rossini opened his eyes again. "Who are you?" he asked.

"Think of me as yer mauther, my dear," said Tamsin.

"They'll find out," he said. "The men'll want their wages. If someone would write to Mr. Pentewan and say I was all right, he would attend to everything."

Tamsin shook her head. "The poor thing doan't know what 'ee's talkin' 'bout," she said.

"I'm glad I'm out of the water at last," went on Rossini; "all the same, no one must see me. No one must know anything. Only Mr. Pentewan. He would know what to do. You are sure those men are not watching through the windows. Yes, I know the lighthouse is built, and I don't think even Reuben Fletcher will try and blow it up again. But the harbour must be finished, and then there's that licensing business. But I can't think it out now. My head is all of a buzz; it's

not as bad as it was, but it keeps on buzz, buzz, as though a swarm of bees were inside. I wonder if there is?"

Thus he wandered on, while Mary Fletcher and Tamsin Keast listened.

"I'll attend to everything, sir," said Mary.

"Who are you?" asked Rossini.

"Don't you know, sir? I'll attend to everything."

"Always do things yourself if you want them well done," he murmured. "That's what Sir Michael said, so did Mr. Pentewan, and they were right. But what does it matter? Why should I care? No one cares. Sir Hugh has never written, nor Lady Beatrice Penwithen. She doesn't care. I wonder if they are married. It's strange I've never heard anything—oh, if they shouldn't be married, if she really loves me, after all! Then I should have something to live for,"

Tamsin bathed his forehead with a preparation she had made. "Ah, that's it—that does me good," he murmured; "but I wish someone would tell Mr. Pentewan; yes, I do—not anyone else, but he would know; yes, he would know what to do."

"I'm going," said Mary, presently. "May I come back again to-night. Tell me I may."

A little later Mary started out for her five miles walk to Port St. Mary. When she arrived there, she found that the little town was all agog with excitement. The whereabouts of the young engineer was still a mystery, and, in spite of all the inquiries which had been made, no one had the suggestion of a clue. No one took any notice of her, and no one knew that she had been away from her cottage. Polly Bray had not called through the day, and as a consequence had no suspicion of what

had taken place. She longed to tell what she knew, and yet she spoke no word. She felt she must not disobey Rossini, and, more than that, she was anxious that no suspicion should fall upon her father.

As she walked along the streets of Port St. Mary, listening to the gossip of the people, Polly Bray touched her arm.

"You are not vexed with me, are you, Mary?"

"Vexed! Why should I be?"

"Because I haven't been to see you all the day. But my cousin Tom is such good company, and I thought you wouldn't mind."

"No, it's all right. I hope you enjoyed yourself?"

"Oh, I've had such a glorious time. Only it's terrible about Mr. Keverne, isn't it?"

"Has nothing been found out?"

"Nothing. I hear if there is no news by to-morrow morning, they are going to organise search-parties. I say, would you mind if I didn't come to-night again? You see, Tom asked me to go to the Town Hall with him, and——"

"It's all right," said Mary eagerly. "Perhaps—perhaps I may not stay the night here. You see—well, you know, father has got work at Downtedly."

"And you want to go to him? Then you'll not want me to-morrow, either. That's splendid, for Tom wants to take me to Plymouth to see his ship. Oh, I do hope they'll find Mr. Keverne. You've heard that a new contractor has taken on his work."

"A new contractor?"

"Yes; a Mr. Pentewan. I suppose they couldn't wait."

Mary did not utter a word, but she thought quickly.

If the harbour authorities believed Rossini to have left his work without making proper provision, it might mean his ruin.

"Is—is Mr. Pentewan here?" she asked.

"Yes; I hear he's down at the works now," said Polly, who seemed to be acquainted with the news of the town.

"I shall not expect you to-night, then," said Mary; "and if I am not at home when you call at the house, you'll not be surprised?"

"Oh, no. It happens just exactly right; for, Mary," listen. You'll not tell anybody, now, will you?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, then, you know, Tom is only a second cousin, and—and—well, he wants to buy me a ring when we go to Plymouth to-morrow." And then, before Mary could reply, Polly ran away, laughing.

"I must see Mr. Pentewan," said Mary. "I must see him to-night, and I must tell him all I dare."

She wended her way towards the harbour. The bell for closing work was ringing as she drew near, and a few minutes later the road was full of men. But she took no heed of them, she was eager to get to the new works, where she hoped to find the man whom Rossini had mentioned in his mind-wanderings. She waited for some minutes, not knowing what to do; moreover, she was afraid to make inquiries.

"I expect he's staying in town," she said presently. "Perhaps I'd better go home, and then——"

But she did not formulate her thoughts into words, for the sound of voices broke upon her ears.

"Then we're to go on just as if he was here?"

"Exactly."

"But he've been away two days. Some people think he's been made away with."

"I'll take all responsibility."

"But, but——"

"You'll get your wages at the end of the week as usual, Jinks; so will the men. And I'll be responsible for all results."

"Of course, Mr. Pentewan, if you'll be responsible; only——"

"There is no 'only,' Jinks. All arrangements will be made with the harbour authorities. And mind, Jinks, I look to you to carry out Mr. Keverne's orders."

A minute later Mary Fletcher saw an elderly looking gentleman, who left the harbour and walked away towards the town.

"If you please, Mr. Pentewan——"

"Yes," and the contractor turned quickly.

"I have something to tell you. I want to see you alone."

Mr. Pentewan gave her a searching glance. He was old enough to be her grandfather, and he was a good judge of character.

"Yes," he said; "but what do you want to tell me about?"

"Mr. Keverne, sir," she said in a whisper.

"Is it important?"

"Yes, sir; but it must be in secret. If you could call at my house, sir," and she told him where she lived.

"I will call in half an hour," said Mr. Pentewan.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW A DOCTOR CAME TO TAMSIN KEAST'S COTTAGE.

"Now, then, young lady, tell me what you know," said Mr. Pentewan, as he sat in Reuben Fletcher's cottage.

And Mary told her story as she had planned to tell it during the half hour she had been alone. It began when she reached the lonely tarn, and finished at the point at which Rossini had expressed the wish that Mr. Pentewan should be informed of his whereabouts. The old contractor listened carefully, and when she had finished, he opened his mouth to ask her the questions which Mary dreaded. But he did not ask them. Mr. Pentewan was a keen-sighted man; moreover, he knew a great deal more than Mary was aware of. Rossini had told him of his encounters with Reuben Fletcher, and of the man's continuous threats against him; and when he discovered that Mary was Reuben's daughter, he drew his own conclusions. That he entirely believed in the girl was evident. No one, he thought, could look at her face without believing in her.

He remained quietly thinking for some time after Mary had completed her narrative, and seemed to be trying to find links to connect the broken parts of her story. He had come to Port St. Mary to pay an ordinary visit to Rossini that day, and when he arrived he found that the "works" were in a state of confusion, on account of Rossini's absence. The simple facts of the case had been much magnified, and all sorts of

rumours were afloat. But Mr. Pentewan was not so much disturbed by them as others seemed to be. It was true he knew of Fletcher's threats, but then he had infinite faith in Rossini's power to defend himself. "The lad's all right," he said to himself, and then he set to work to bring the operations at the harbour into a state of order. He was a well-known contractor, and many were aware that Rossini had been associated with him in the past. Of course, he was able to give no information about Rossini, but his air of confidence did much to stop the wild imaginings of the men.

"You have done quite right in coming to me, Miss Fletcher," he said presently, "and I congratulate you on your success in finding him, especially as you had no clue; for you had no clue, had you?"

"No," said Mary, "I had no clue."

Mr. Pentewan looked at her steadily for a few seconds, and then he went on. -

"I can put a stop to all wild talk now. I can go to his landlady's house and tell her——"

"But you'll not tell where he is—you know what he asked me!"

"I shall tell nothing, except that I have heard from him, and that he'll return in due time. That'll be sufficient to stop the tongues of most of the gossips. I'll also go to the police; and then if I say a few words to the workmen in the morning, everything will settle down to its normal condition. But I must see him. Can you take me to the place where he is, young lady?"

"Oh, yes," said the girl. "But no one must know; and it's five miles away."

"I'm an old man," replied Mr. Pentewan; "all the same, I'm still good for a ten mile walk; but is there

not a railway station nearer to Ashdown Moors than Port St. Mary? I think there must be."

"Yes," said Mary, "there is Pendiggle."

"Ah, that should save me two miles, and I could go there without attracting attention. I can manage it with your assistance. I am inclined to think, however, that when I see Mrs. Keast, I shall have to persuade her to admit a doctor."

For half an hour they talked together, and then Mary Fletcher again prepared to leave the house and go out alone. But in spite of the fact that she had found Rossini, and in all probability saved his life, her step was heavy and her heart was sad. For somehow, in a way she could not understand, he seemed farther away from her than ever now. Hitherto she had loved him secretly, and, as far as she knew, without hope that he would ever care for her. Nevertheless, the words she had heard him speak about Lady Beatrice Penwithen seemed to blot out all sunlight from her life. Up to that day, even while she had no hope that he could ever care for her, she did not think of him as loving anyone else. Now she knew that she was less than nothing to him, for all his heart had gone out towards the lady he had mentioned in his mind-wanderings. For of course he was mistaken about this lady not loving him. Who could know him and not love him, and who could prefer another to him? Therefore, although she rejoiced that she had been the means of saving his life, she felt that she had saved him for another.

Not that this altered her course of action. No thought of self entered into her love. Her every thought had been as to how she could serve him. So, although her step was weary, she made her way to Eli

Keast's cottage again. She did not go by way of the Manor Farm this time, but struck upon a moor track far nearer Port St. Mary. More than once she stopped and listened, for she feared she was followed. She imagined that her father and his companions might not be sure about the success of their work, and as she had saved Rossini in the past, Fletcher might still have suspicions about her. Besides, he might have come to the house, and, finding the cottage empty, have drawn his own conclusions. On the other hand, however, she felt sure he would desire to stay away from Port St. Mary, for she knew that he had gone to Dowdelly in order that he might wreak his vengeance without attracting suspicion to himself.

"I have saved him from being a murderer," she said to herself again and again, and yet in her heart she knew that her father was as much a murderer as if his plans had succeeded.

When she arrived at Eli Keast's cottage, it had been dark for two hours. The old man had gone to bed, while Tobias sat in the armchair by the kitchen fire.

"Mawther's in theer," said Tobias, nodding to Rossini's bedroom. "She zed you'd come again—that was why I stopped up. Set down, will 'ee?"

"How is he?" she asked.

"I reckon 'ee's better. Mawther'll zoon put 'im to rights." Then he spoke in a whisper. "She towld me not to ax questions, but you'll tell me everything, waan't 'ee?"

"I've nothing to tell," said Mary.

"Aw, iss, you 'ave. You must. Besides, I won't tell nothin'."

"I've nothing to tell," repeated Mary.

"Es 'ee your sweetheart?" asked Tobias.

"Oh, no, no," said the girl.

Tobias gave a sigh of relief. During the day he had thought a great deal about the beautiful girl who had brought news of the sick stranger, and although he was not a susceptible youth, his heart beat rapidly at the thought of her coming.

"Be you goin' back to Port St. Mary to-night?" he asked presently.

"No. Why?"

"Cos, ef you was, I'd walk back with 'ee. I bean't 'fraid of ghoasts. Not a bit. Besides, you seed how strong I was this morning. I cud 'a' carr'd un by myself."

At that moment Tamsin entered the room.

"Iss, 'ee's better," she said in reply to Mary's look of inquiry, "but 't'll be a long job."

Mary heaved a sigh of thankfulness.

"What 'ave 'ee done down to Port St. Mary?" went on Tamsin. "What be 'em sayin'?"

Mary looked at Tobias and did not reply. Tamsin fully understood.

"'Bias," she said, "you be off to bed to wance. You'll be slaipy in the mornin', that's what you'll be. Off, now!"

Tobias cast a longing glance at Mary, but did as he was told. Evidently he regarded his mother with great awe.

"Ther, now, he's gone," said Tamsin. "Look 'ere, my dear, ef ever you do git married, begin as you do main to hould out. Men must allays do as they be towld. Ef you doan't git 'em into that way, ther's no livin' with 'em. 'Usband or sons, 'tis jist the same."

"Doesn't that depend on the man?" asked Mary, thinking of Rossini.

"Nothin' of the sort, my dear. The way is to begin right. For the fust year I was married, Eli wanted to be maaster; but I jist beganned as I mained to hould out, and at the end of the year 'ee was as tractable as a lamb. But ther's various ways of doin' ev it, my dear. The right way es to git your own way, but to make yer man think 'ee's gittin' his. Tha's the saicret of married happiness. Aw, iss, I do know what you be thinkin' 'bout. 'Ee's better, my dear. 'Ee'll git on all right."

"There's a gentleman coming to see him," said Mary.

"Then, 'ee caan't see un," replied Tamsin; "but who es it?"

Mary explained who Mr. Pentewan was, after which Tamsin became less pronounced in her decision that no one should see her patient. When Mr. Pentewan arrived, however, Rossini was sleeping quietly, and although the old gentleman went into his room and stood by his side for a few minutes, no word was spoken.

"You'll be staying all night, I expect?" Mr. Pentewan said to Mary.

"Yes," said the girl.

"Then you had better go and sit with him while I have a few minutes' talk with this lady," he remarked.

"And, mind, not a sound," said Tamsin.

Mary took her place by Rossini's bed, and watched him as he lay. She felt happier now that she was near him, and into her heart came a sense of possession which she had never known before. Now and then he murmured in his sleep, but on the whole he was sleeping restfully.

"I saved him! I saved him!" she murmured again and again; "but for me he would have died."

She rose and placed the candle where she could see him more plainly. His face was very pale now ; evidently the fever had been much lessened.

"I wonder if he'll ever know how I love him?" she thought as she watched him. "That Lady Beatrice may be very grand and beautiful, but she does not love him as I do. She could not."

She looked anxiously around the room, and then she listened intently. No one was looking, and she knew by the murmur of voices that Tamsin and Mr. Pentewan were busily talking.

She leant over the bed and kissed him ; then, like one frightened, she snatched the candle away and hid herself in a shadow.

But Rossini heeded her not. He was unconscious of her presence. Once he murmured something about building a bridge, and again he mentioned the name of Lady Beatrice Penwithen, but he seemed to have no thought of her who would gladly have laid down her life for him.

Meanwhile Tamsin Keast and Mr. Pentewan were talking earnestly. Each had a great deal to ask of the other, but neither had anything to communicate.

"I think you had better get a doctor," said Mr. Pentewan presently, as he rose to leave.

"Not ef I do know et," replied Tamsin. "I do know more 'bout curin' people than any doctor in Port St. Mary, even though I do say it myself."

"But if he should die?"

"'Ee waan't die, I tell 'ee ; 'ee'll git better."

"It's not a matter of expense," went on Mr. Pentewan. "Your patient has considerable means ; and even if he hadn't, I would pay everything."

"I tell 'ee the doctors would only put un back," persisted Tamsin. "I ain't a-bin a doctor for nothin'."

"But you'll see that he wants for nothing," said Mr. Pentewan. "Let him have everything that is necessary, and let no thought of cost hinder you."

"'Ee shall 'ave everything of the best," said Tamsin; "and 'ee'll git better; but no doctor must come 'ere."

Mr. Pentewan went into Rossini's bedroom again before he left, and then he went away in a very thoughtful frame of mind.

A week passed away, and Mary Fletcher spent as much time as possible at Tamsin Keast's house. When she went to her own home, it was in fear and trembling, for she dreaded her father coming back. But she had no need to fear. Reuben Fletcher never came near Port St. Mary. He wrote to her from Dowlundelly, telling her he was getting good wages, and that he thought of taking a house there, so that she might come to him. But he never mentioned Rossini's name, nor did he suggest that he knew anything of his disappearance. Mary discovered, moreover, that Mr. Pentewan had silenced much of the gossip about Rossini. The operations at the harbour went on as usual, and the workmen expected the "young boss" back daily.

But Rossini did not come. The injuries he had received seemed to be far less than Tamsin had feared; moreover, the fever had passed away quickly; and yet he did not recover. The wound in his head healed, and the broken arm progressed satisfactorily, and yet he failed to gain back his strength; neither did he take any interest in those things which Mary Fletcher had thought were the joy of his life. When his mind became clear, she told him of what Mr. Pentewan had

done, and he had sighed like one relieved of a great burden.

"That will be all right," he said quietly, and then he seemed to dismiss it from his mind.

Moreover, he showed but little disappointment when she told him that the magistrates had renewed the licences of the public-houses he had determined to destroy. Rather, he seemed in a state of torpor, out of which nothing could arouse him.

Mr. Pentewan visited him frequently, and, as the time passed, began to grow anxious. There seemed no reason why he should not grow strong quickly. After all, as the old man reasoned, Rossini's constitution was strong and vigorous; and even though he had passed through terrible experiences, he could not understand why his youth and strength should not assert themselves and bring him back to health again.

Presently he again approached Tamsin Keast with the suggestion that a doctor should visit him, but the old woman stubbornly refused.

"I tell 'ee, no doctor c'n do un good," she urged. "And I'll not 'ave 'em 'ere, now, then. Laive un alone, an' 'ee'll git better."

The next visit Mr. Pentewan made, however, determined him to do without Mrs. Keast's consent what he could not do with it. In this he was partly influenced by Mary Fletcher, who besought him to overrule the old woman's prejudices.

"He does not seem ill, and yet he does not get better," she urged. "There must be something Mrs. Keast does not understand; and, oh! if he should die!"

Mr. Pentewan said nothing, but on his next visit he was accompanied by a quiet, middle-aged gentleman

named Pollard, who talked to Mrs. Keast about rearing poultry in such a way that she thought he must have given his life to poultry-farming. Mr. Pentewan told her, however, that Mr. Pollard was greatly interested in the harbour, and that it was necessary for him to have a short chat with her patient.

"'Ee caan't bear much excitement, mind that," said Mrs. Keast, "for 'ee's as waik as a kitten. And more than that, you mustn't stay more'n a quarter of an hour."

"Oh, I think I shall be able to say all I've got to say in that time," said Mr. Pollard quietly; but Mr. Pentewan noticed a smile lurking around his lips and a twinkling in his eyes as he spoke.

"Well, Keverne," said Mr. Pentewan as he entered the room, "how are you to-day?"

"Oh, all right," said Rossini, with a wan smile.

"Then why don't you get up?"

"Oh, I don't know. I am very tired, I think. Besides, there's nothing to get up for."

"Why, that's not like you, Keverne. There's a great deal to get up for. They want you down at the harbour. I'm only a very poor makeshift, you know. It's true I've arranged with the powers that be, but they naturally expect you there."

"I don't see that it matters much," said Rossini. "As you know, you were regarded as a sort of sponsor for me, and if I never turn up—well, it'll be all right."

"But what about you?"

"I scarcely count, do I?" he said feebly.

"And, meanwhile, who's to fight the pothouse-keepers and the bookmakers?"

Something of the old Rossini's look came back into his eyes, but it quickly passed away.

"I'm afraid I attempted an impossible task," he said presently, and there was a tone of intense weariness in his voice.

"This from you, who used to say there was nothing impossible to a determined man."

"To a determined man—aye, but there's the rub."

"Well, aren't you a determined man?"

"What is there to be determined about? Is anything worth while?"

At this point Mr. Pollard took up the conversation, and presently Rossini found himself talking about his experiences. He would say nothing of the men who attacked him; he simply stated that he had been attacked, and that he had been dragged to the edge of the tarn by men who determined to murder him. He said it was a popular belief that the tarn had no bottom, and that they believed if he were to sink into the pool he would never rise again. He had, however, managed to slip from these men's grasp and plunge into the water, but not before one of them struck him a heavy blow with a cudgel which was meant to kill him. Fortunately, however, the blow only grazed his head, but it injured his arm so badly that he was obliged to swim with one hand.

This led to an examination of his head and arm, and to a thorough examination of his physical condition.

"There should be no reason why you should not be strong and well in a few days," said Mr. Pollard, when he had finished his examination.

"Ah, you are a doctor," said Rossini, with a wan smile. "I see. Mr. Pentewan has managed to smuggle you here in spite of Mrs. Keast's objections."

"Mrs. Keast's treatment has been all that could be

desired," said the doctor. "Personally I can see no earthly reason why you should not be on the high-road to convalescence."

They talked a few minutes longer and then left him.

"Well?" said Mr. Pentewan as they left the house.

"The man's case is very critical," said Dr. Pollard.

"You mean that it is doubtful if he will get better?" asked Mr. Pentewan in dismay.

"That's what I do mean. He's had a tremendous nervous shock, but that I should not trouble about if he wanted to get better. But he doesn't. I believe he wants to die. I say, Pentewan, has he any sweetheart, or has he had any love affair?"

"No," said Mr. Pentewan; "the only sweetheart or love affair Rossini Keverne has ever had has been his work and his love for his profession."

"You are sure of that?"

"I have known him for seven years—ever since he was a boy, in fact—and I've never seen him take the slightest notice of any woman."

"Then," said the doctor, "I am nonplussed. Physically there is no reason why he should not soon recover, the reason he does not is that he lacks the desire to live. He wants motive force. His desire is to die rather than to live. Excuse me for asking again, but are you sure he loves no one? No woman, I mean?"

"As sure as a man can be."

"Well, I think differently. I believe he loves some woman, and it is only that woman who can save his life."

"That can't be," said Mr. Pentewan. "I tell you, he isn't that kind of man."

"That is the kind of man who generally has some love affair hidden in his heart. What he wants is some-

thing to live for. If, as I believe is the case, there is some woman that he loves, that woman could give him motive force to live."

"But, assuming there is a woman, supposing she does not care for him, supposing she has married someone else? What then?"

"Answer the question for yourself, Mr. Pentewan. Here is a fellow with a splendid physique. Every organ in his body is perfect. Now, then, you admit that you have seen a change in him these last few months—what has caused that change? Still, he has been strong and vigorous until—until—this strange happening. He receives a terrible shock, he has been very near death. But he has been carefully and skilfully attended to. Yes, I admit that this old woman knows her business, and has nursed him carefully. The fever is gone, the wounds are healed; but he does not get better. Why? With such a constitution he should be on the high-road to health; but what is the state of things? His pulse is weak, he is deathly tired, he takes no interest in anything, he does not want to live. Why? I have given you my opinion."

"Then you can do nothing?"

"No doctor can help him. What he needs is motive, it is the desire to live, and that I cannot give him."

Although he did not know it, Mr. Pentewan was not the only listener to the doctor's words. Mary Fletcher had heard all, and when they had returned to Port St. Mary, she fought a great battle in her own heart.

"The doctor is right," she said; "and, after all, it is not I who can save his life."

Presently she made up her mind what she should do, and a little later she was on her way to Penwithen Hall.

CHAPTER X.

LADY BEATRICE AND MARY FLETCHER.

THE next day Mary Fletcher stepped out of the train at the station nearest Penwithen Hall with a strange feeling at her heart.

"Which is the way to Lord Penwithen's house?" she asked one of the porters.

"Follow thickey road till you come to the lodge gates. You caan't miss et," replied the man, eyeing her keenly. "Be 'ee come from far?" he added.

"Yes," replied Mary. "Do you know whether—that is—is the family at home?"

"Iss, I reckon. Oh, iss, I know they be. I seed Lady Beatrice out drivin' yesterday. Be you Lady Beatrice's new maid? You beean't a sarvent, be 'ee?"

"No," said Mary, "I'm not a servant. Good-day, and thank you."

"I wonder who she es?" said John Beel to himself as she walked away. "I shudden wonder ef I ain't a-bin taakin' liberties with my betters. But then a lady wouldn't come in sich a way. She ain't a-got no luggage, and ther ed'n no carriage to mit her. But she es purty. Purty as Lady Beatrice es, she ed'n so purty as she; and she do look like a laady, too."

But Mary did not trouble about John's questions, nor his speculations, as she walked towards Penwithen Hall; her mind was too much occupied with other things.

Never until this moment had she realised the strangeness of her mission. When she had heard what Dr. Pollard told Mr. Pentewan, it seemed easy for her to go and tell Lady Beatrice what she knew. During the hours she had sat by Rossini's bedside and listened to what he said in his delirium, it seemed to her that she had learnt to know a great deal about the woman he loved. For Rossini had repeated much of the conversation they had had together. It is true that a great deal he had said was disconnected and meaningless; nevertheless, she had pieced his confessions together in such a way that she felt that Lady Beatrice loved him, and that they had only been parted through a misunderstanding. It is true she had been much puzzled about the reference to Sir Hugh Henwood, but she had no doubt that all would be explained. It was for her to go to Lady Beatrice and tell her what had happened, and then she felt sure that this proud lady would rush to his side.

What it had cost her to come to this decision, no one but herself knew. Though she had never cherished the hope that Rossini would ever love her, yet the thought that he loved another was like death to her. For a time she hated the thought of Lady Beatrice Penwithen, and passionately resented the idea of another woman entering Rossini's life; but when she heard Dr. Pollard's words, there seemed nothing for her to do but to go to her and tell her what she had to tell. She felt like one signing her own death-warrant in doing this, but her love for Rossini demanded it of her, and she must do it. What was her life, what was anyone's life, compared with his? She thought she had saved him after that terrible night on the moors; now she knew that there was a harder task still to accomplish.

Presently she reached the lodge gates, and her heart almost failed her as she entered the park and walked towards the house. How would Lady Beatrice receive her, and what must she say to her? This had not seemed a difficulty the day before, but now all was different. Would not the woman who had been reared amidst such surroundings resent her presence as an unpardonable intrusion? Had she not better turn back? Perhaps, after all, Rossini would get better, and then in time he might forget all about the lady she was going to see. And then—who knew?—perhaps when he realised that it was she—Mary Fletcher—who had saved his life, he might think of her kindly. Besides, why should she throw away her own happiness by going to this woman? She did not love him really. If she did, she would not have treated him badly; for Mary was sure she had treated him badly—that was why his heart was breaking now.

But all this failed to satisfy her. Rossini's life hung in a balance, and it was the woman who lived at the great house which she dimly saw through the trees who would be able to turn that balance. After all, who was she, Mary Fletcher? Only the child of the man who had sought to murder him. What right had she to expect—aye, even to dream—that he could care for her? And his life must be saved, no matter what the cost might be to her.

Presently the great house burst upon her view, and to her it seemed a kind of enchanted palace. She knew nothing about such places. Her life had been passed amidst humble surroundings, and she had no knowledge of the rich and the great. For a moment she wondered that even Rossini should have dared to love the owner

of such a mansion, but only for a moment. Nothing was too great or too good for him, nothing was too difficult for him to accomplish. Besides, the very grandeur of the old house, and the ideas it inspired, seemed to confirm her in her belief that Lady Beatrice could win Rossini back to health.

Tremblingly she went up to the main entrance and rang the bell. She heard its clang re-echoing through the rooms, and it seemed to her like a death-knell to her every hope; and presently, when a servant appeared, she could scarcely speak.

"Is Lady Beatrice Penwithen at home?" she asked.

The man looked at her almost rudely; evidently he was trying to estimate her position. That she was not the kind of lady visitor which usually came to the Hall, he was quite sure. On the other hand, he felt sure that she was not of the servant class. True, she was quietly and plainly dressed; nevertheless, there was an air of dignity and of refinement not only in her person, but in her manner of speech.

"I don't know," he said. "If you'll tell me your name and business, I'll see."

"She would not know my name," replied Mary. "As for my business, I can only tell it to her."

"Then I'm afraid she's not at 'ome," said the man; "but if you'll give me your card, as I said, I'll see."

"I have no card," said Mary. "Nevertheless, it's very important that I see her—most important."

"I dare say," said the man. He had drawn his conclusions by this time. She was not a lady, and was most likely come to beg, or something of that sort. "No doubt your business is very important. All the same, I can safely say that she's not at 'ome."

"But I've come many miles to see her," urged Mary.

"Very likely," said the man. "May I inquire if you have an appointment?"

"No," said Mary. "All the same, I know Lady Beatrice would be very sorry if I went away without her seeing me. It's a matter of life and death," she added.

"Well, I'll see," said the man. She might not be a lady, but there was something in her presence which commanded respect. "Will you sit here in the 'all a minute?"

A few minutes later he returned. "Will you be pleased to follow me, miss?" he said.

Mary followed him with a fast-beating heart, and so much was her mind filled with her mission that she scarcely noticed the spacious halls and what were to her the strangely beautiful rooms. The man led her up a flight of stairs and along a thickly carpeted corridor, until he stopped at the door of a room at which he knocked. A moment later the man had gone, and Mary found herself face to face with the woman of whom Rossini Keverne had spoken in his delirium.

She looked at her eagerly. This was the lady whom Rossini loved; this was the woman whom she believed would save his life. At first she was disappointed. Yes, doubtless she was beautiful, and, besides her beauty, there was something in her presence which baffled her. Nevertheless, a sad feeling crept into her heart. This lady, beautiful and rich as she was, could never make Rossini happy. He was great, he was passionate, he laughed at conventionalities; but this lady was—well, she could not put her thoughts into words, but she felt that she was smaller than he. She thought she would

have been afraid of her, but she was not. This lady could not love as she loved.

"I am told that you wish to see me," said Lady Beatrice, dropping her pen, for she had been writing. "What can I do for you?"

"My name is Mary Fletcher," said the girl, hardly knowing how to begin. "I do not suppose you ever heard of me?"

"No," said Lady Beatrice, "I never heard of you."

"Of course, he would never think of mentioning me to you," said Mary. She did not mean to say this, but the words escaped from her before she was aware.

"Who would never think of mentioning you?" asked Lady Beatrice. Like the servant, she was trying to draw conclusions as to what kind of a person her visitor was. Why she had received her, she hardly knew; perhaps it was because the man had repeated Mary's words, that her visit was a matter of life and death. Now that she stood before her she became interested. There was something in the look in her visitor's eyes, and more in the tone of her voice, which arrested her. Besides, she was beautiful, and the simplicity of her dress added to her beauty.

"Who?" said Mary. "Why, Mr. Keverne."

Lady Beatrice started. "Mr. Keverne!" she cried. "Did he send you here?"

"No, no; he does not know. He would be angry if he did—I am sure; but I could not help it. The doctor says he will die if—if——"

She did not finish the sentence, because she did not know how to put her thoughts into words.

"Die! What do you mean? Is he ill? Tell me quickly!"

Her face became white as she spoke. Evidently she had not forgotten him; evidently, too, the news of his illness moved her greatly.

"Promise that you'll not tell. I'm sure he would never forgive me if he knew that I told—what I must tell."

"Who are you?" asked Lady Beatrice quickly. "Are you a friend of Mr. Keverne's? Why do *you* come to speak to me about him?"

"Because—— But promise you'll not tell. You see, he does not know. He has been ill. He was nearly killed by—by——"

"By whom?"

"I dare not tell you that; besides, there is no need."

Like lightning Lady Beatrice's mind flew back to the night when she had first met Rossini. He had told her that he had been attacked by a gang of men, and had been saved by the daughter of the leader of the gang. She remembered, too, that Rossini had described her as a beautiful girl, a modern Joan of Arc.

"You are the daughter of that man who tried to kill him, aren't you?" she asked.

"How did you know?" gasped Mary.

"He told me."

"He told you? What about? When?"

"That night on Black Rock, when some men attacked him; and you came and saved him. Has your father tried to harm him since?"

"Oh! but he is *my* father, and I must not harm him. But this is why I've come. Mr. Keverne is ill, dying perhaps. And the doctor says he's dying because he has no desire to live. I heard him tell Mr. Pentewan that he was sure Mr. Keverne loved *some* woman, and

he was dying because this woman had—had refused him. You see, he does not desire to get better, because there's nothing to live for. But you could save him, my lady, I know you could. Because you love him, you know."

"I love him. How dare you say so?"

"Because you could not help it. How could you, when he loves you so? No one could help loving him."

Lady Beatrice looked at her keenly. "Tell me more, tell me everything!" she cried. She had forgotten the difference in their social positions; they were two women talking about a man whom Lady Beatrice, in spite of everything, could not forget.

Little by little Mary told her story, until Lady Beatrice knew almost everything that had happened since that day when she had received a letter from Rossini telling her to marry the man she loved.

"Then your father has tried to murder him twice since that night when——"

"But you'll tell nothing, my lady, will you? Besides, I—I found him—and now, he'll get better if—if you go to him and tell him that—but you know what to say."

"And he talked of me while he was unconscious, did he?" said Beatrice. "Tell me again what he said."

"Oh, it is not fair to make me tell you more than I have told you. Besides, you know. He said he gave you up because his friend loved you, and he did not believe you really loved him, although he loved you more than his own life. But you do love him, and you'll go to him, won't you? You'll tell him to hope, won't you. Then he will soon be strong and well again. Say you will!"

Lady Beatrice looked at the girl keenly.

"You love him," she said.

Mary was silent.

Lady Beatrice took a step nearer to her.

"You love him," she repeated. "Tell me, you love him, don't you? You have done all this because you love him."

The tone of her voice aroused Mary Fletcher's anger.

"Yes," she said, "I do; and if he loved me as he loves you, I—I would not have driven him to—to his death."

"How dare you!"

"How dare I what?" asked Mary.

"Love him."

The question angered the girl still more. There was something scornful in her voice, something which seemed to tell her that she had been guilty of presumption in lifting her eyes to such a man.

"If you loved him really, you would not have asked that," said Mary. "I see now why you drove him away. You are not capable of loving such a man as he ought to be loved."

For a moment Beatrice Penwithen almost forgot herself in her anger. She was about to say something for which she would have been sorry, but she checked herself.

"I think there is nothing more to say now," she said quietly. "I will order some refreshments for you before you go."

"I do not want any refreshments. I must go back and nurse him. But you will come to him, won't you? Forgive me if I said anything wrong; but you can save his life. Say you will."

But Beatrice Penwithen did not speak ; she seemed to be pondering deeply.

"Even if you do not love him," said Mary, "you can go to him ; perhaps the sight of you would save his life."

"How could that help him?" she said. "Besides, he may have ceased to love me ; and perhaps when he realises what you have done, he will——"

"Oh, I am nothing to him. He never thinks of me. I have sat by his side for hours, and I have heard him talk of all sorts of things ; but never of me. Oh, yes, I will say it. I love him a thousand times more than you are capable of loving ; I would face death to win a smile, a kind word from him ; I would die even now, if I could bring him back to health ; but I am nothing to him ; he never thinks of me. It is you he wants. If you go to him, you will give him something to live for—yes, and he will live. Come with me now ; I will show you the way."

"You scarcely understand, I think," Lady Beatrice said after a moment's hesitation. "I have not seen him for months—never, in fact, since he told me in a letter to marry his friend."

"And you have not married his friend—you are not engaged to him?"

"No-o—that is, no, I am not engaged to him. But I do not think I can go to Mr. Keverne. You see——"

"But you can save his life!"

"You do not understand. What would my father—the world—say, if they knew I went away to this lonely house on the moors? You cannot realise how such an action might be construed."

"What does that matter?"

"I tell you, you can't understand. I must think about it. It is no use my explaining things to you. You could not enter into my feelings."

Again her words angered Mary Fletcher.

"I cannot enter into your feelings!" she said. "I wonder if you understand what it cost me to come and tell you what I have told you? Do you think I came for my own pleasure? Why, it has been like tearing my heart out to come here to plead with you to go to his side, when—— But, there, you do not know what love is. Don't you see? He's perhaps dying, and you can save him! What does it matter what people say? What does anything matter? If you really loved him, you would be on your way to him even now."

It gave Mary a sort of savage pleasure to say this. She could not understand the cold demeanour of this proud girl. Rossini loved her. The doctor had made it known to her that she could save his life. What need, then, was there for persuasion?

"You are sure I shall not ring for refreshments?" said Lady Beatrice. "No? Then I think I need not detain you. Good-day."

Mary left the great house like one dazed. In one sense she rejoiced that this woman would not go to Rossini's side. Perhaps—perhaps—— And a thousand wild hopes rose in her heart. Nevertheless, she was angered beyond words at her reception.

Meanwhile, Lady Beatrice Penwithen sat alone in deep thought. Mary Fletcher had aroused feelings within her to which she thought herself a stranger; and yet she hesitated what to do. Months before, when

she received Rossini's letter, she felt that he had treated her badly. She did not know until he was gone how much he was to her. So great, indeed, was the shock, that she had refused Sir Hugh Henwood when he pleaded his cause, and the most she could promise him was that he could speak to her in a year's time. When Sir Hugh had left the house, Rossini's action appealed to her more and more strongly. The young engineer loved her like his own life, and yet, for the sake of his friend, and believing that she loved his friend, he had given her up, to go away into the darkness. Through the months which followed, her mind had been torn by doubts, and often she found herself thinking of Rossini and wondering what had become of him. Often, too, she recalled the words he had said to her, and her heart thrilled at the thought of the look in his eyes and the tone of his voice. And yet she hesitated what to do when Mary Fletcher came to her. How could she go to the lonely cottage on Ashdown Moors, and what could she say to him if she went? It was easy enough for this cottage girl to tell her what to do, but not so easy for her to put her desire into practice.

Presently she found herself growing angry with Mary. What right had this cottage girl to enter into Rossini's life at all? And how dare she tell her, Beatrice Penwithen, her duty? Besides, it angered her that Mary Fletcher, good and pure as she might be, should know anything of what had passed between the young engineer and herself. But this feeling did not remain long, for she began to realise more and more the purport of Mary's visit. What if Rossini should die? The thought was horrible to her, and she would never forgive

herself for neglecting to do what she was able to do for him. After all, it was quite easy for her to go to him. Her father was not at the Hall, and—and——

Thus, little by little, she began to make plans whereby she could reach Rossini's side without attracting attention.

The next day Mary arrived at Tamsin Keast's cottage as usual. "How is he to-day?" she asked.

"'Bout the same," said Tamsin rather sharply. She was a little angry that her patient should be so long in recovering.

"May I go and see him?"

"Iss, you can go in weth me now."

Rossini lay in a kind of stupor. Never since Dr. Pollard had left had he shown interest in anything. Tamsin had tried to rouse him by talking about the harbour and the lighthouse, but all in vain. Often he sighed wearily, as though life were a burden to him. He did not complain, but he would lie for hours staring into vacancy.

"Are you better, sir?"

It was Mary who spoke to him, and she looked at him eagerly as she waited for his reply.

"I'm all right, Mary, only I'm very tired."

"Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

"No, I think not. Perhaps I had better try and get a little sleep."

It was almost piteous to see him, and Mary's heart grew hot with anger as she remembered her interview with Lady Beatrice Penwithen the day before.

"Is there anyone you'd like to see, sir? Or can I take any message to anyone for you?"

For a moment a bright light flashed into his eyes,

but only for a moment. The old look of languor came back again, and he sighed with utter weariness.

At that moment there was a sound of wheels outside the door, and a woman's voice reached them. Rossini heard it plainly, and he spoke like one startled.

"Who's that?" he asked quickly.

"I'll go and see," said Tamsin.

"It might be her voice," he murmured. "It was, I'm sure it was! And yet how can it be? Why should she come here? No, no, my mind must be wandering."

"A laady es come to see you, sur," said Tamsin, returning to the room.

"A lady! What lady? What is her name?"

"She dedn't tell me, sur."

Such a look as Mary Fletcher had never seen before came to his face, and the girl felt her heart grow like lead as she saw it.

"Can I bring her in, sur?"

"Yes, yes—if—if she will come," he said.

A moment later Lady Beatrice Penwithen entered the room.

CHAPTER XI.

ROSSINI'S AWAKENING.

ROSSINI looked at her with eyes full of wonder. He could not understand her presence. How did she get there? Who had told her where he was?

The girl went straight to his bedside, taking no notice either of Tamsin or Mary Fletcher.

"I am sorry to see you so ill, Mr. Keverne," she said.

Rossini was aroused now. All lethargy, all weariness were gone. He felt that his heart was beating wildly, and for a moment he could scarcely speak. He remembered the circumstances when he had seen her last; then his strength and health were almost brutal in their vitality; then, too, he had well-nigh won the promise from this proud lady that she would be his wife.

He looked around the room and saw that Tamsin and Mary were leaving them. He did not, however, fail to notice the deathly pallor on the latter's face.

"It is very kind of you to come," he said at last; then he added almost grimly: "I'm an illustration of our first conversation, Lady Beatrice—the facts of life laugh at our plans."

He hardly knew what he was saying, so overwhelmed was he at the thought of her being by his side.

"I'm so grieved to hear of what has happened to you," she said—"and to see you so ill," she added after a moment's pause.

"How did you know what had happened to me?" he asked. "Who told you I was ill?"

"Don't you know?"

"No, I know nothing; tell me."

"That girl who was here just now; she came to me and told me."

"How did she know of you? I never breathed your name to anyone."

Lady Beatrice was silent. She did not know how to answer the question he had put to her.

"But never mind that now," he went on; "you have come to me. Thank you very much. I did not think you cared enough. How—how is Henwood—that is, Sir Hugh?"

"I do not know. I have not seen him since—since—immediately after you left us."

"Then—you are not his wife?"

"No."

"Nor have you promised to marry him?"

"N-n-o."

Rossini closed his eyes and tried to realise what her words meant. Lady Beatrice was still free—she had not taken advantage of the sacrifice he had made. What did it mean? Could it be that, in spite of everything, she—she—

He looked at her again, while the girl sat on a chair a little distance away. The light from the window shone upon her face so that he could see every feature.

"When I heard you were ill," went on Lady Beatrice, "I thought I would call and see you. I thought, perhaps, that when you got better, father would like you to come to the Hall for a few days."

It cost her a great deal to say this, for she felt she

was departing from all conventional rules. And yet she hardly knew why she was saying it, except that she was very anxious for him to get better. Besides, she remembered what Mary Fletcher had told her, and although she was not sure of her own heart, she wondered greatly.

"I may not get better," he replied presently.

"Oh, yes, you must, Mr. Keverne. Everything demands that you should. Your profession, and—and—then your friends want you to get better."

"Who would care if I didn't?"

He said the words with a kind of new-born strength, and yet there was a touch of bitterness in his tone.

"Many would care," she replied.

Again Rossini looked at her steadily. He did not understand her presence, and in a vague way he wondered why she had come.

"Do you know why I left you so suddenly last June?" he asked.

"I think so."

"You saw the meaning of my letter?"

"Yes."

"Was I mistaken?"

She was silent.

"Was I? Were you not glad that I wrote it?"

"I would rather not speak of it now, Mr. Keverne. I'm sure I hope you'll soon be better."

"Is Henwood coming back again?"

"I suppose so."

"When?"

"Next June."

"You told him he might?"

Again she was silent for a few seconds, then she said—

"I am afraid I must go now. I hope you will soon be better; and when you are, I know my father will be glad to see you at the Hall."

She rose as if to go, and held out her hand.

"No, don't go yet," said Rossini. "There is so much I want to ask you. Why did Mary Fletcher tell you I—I was ill?"

"Do not ask me. I would rather not tell you."

"But—but you know what—what happened to me?"

"Yes, it was very terrible. That awful man should be sent to prison for life. He, and the others, they all ought to be hanged. You told me about them when you visited us, do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember. Then Sir Hugh is coming to see you again next June?"

"Yes, I expect so."

"Why is he waiting so long? Did you tell him?"

She did not answer him—something seemed to seal her lips.

"I am sure I had better go now," she said presently; "and when you are well again, I know that my father will be delighted to see you. Good-day; I hope to hear soon that you are quite well again."

He let her go; he knew not why. He wanted her to remain longer, and yet he did not try to keep her. It is true she had come to his side without his bidding, and yet it seemed to him that there was an invisible barrier between them all the time they were together. When she had gone, he no longer felt a desire to sleep. Rather his mind was preternaturally awake. He was trying to find an answer to the question which he had put to Lady Beatrice in vain. He had asked her why Mary Fletcher told her of his illness, and she had refused

to tell him. But he was not long in finding the answer. In his delirium he must have mentioned her name, and then Mary Fletcher, who had heard him, must have either written to her or have gone to her.

"She wants me to go and see her when I am better," he mused. "What does that mean? Well, I shall know soon."

When Tamsin Keast brought him food, he ate it almost heartily. He no longer complained of tiredness, he was no longer lethargic or careless of what happened. A new light had come into his eyes, the old Rossini was asserting himself.

"How long will it be before I am well again, Mrs. Keast?" he asked.

"Not long now, I reckon," the old woman answered significantly.

"I must be up soon," he said after a few minutes' silence; "there is so much to do."

"Iss, ther's a lot to do," replied Tamsin.

Meanwhile, Lady Beatrice had left the cottage. Outside, in the farmyard, a lumbering conveyance stood, which had brought her from the station. She was making her way towards it when Mary Fletcher came and spoke to her.

"You said you would not come," she said quietly.

"But I have, you see."

"Yes. Tell me, did he seem very tired? Did he seem as though he didn't want to live?"

"No," replied Lady Beatrice. There was a suggestion of triumph in her voice, as though she rejoiced at being able to do what no one else had done.

Mary Fletcher still kept near her. "Did—did you speak about my father?" she asked.

"Yes," she replied. "He must be a terrible man."

"But you'll tell nothing? You promised that, you know."

Lady Beatrice looked at her doubtfully. "That depends," she said. She was angry with herself for speaking in this way, but the look on the girl's face compelled her. "I mean," she went on, "that neither of us must say anything about your visit to me, nor of its results."

"As though I would think of it!" replied Mary angrily. "But tell me, do you think he'll get better?"

"Yes, I believe he will."

Again there was a suggestion of triumph in her voice, but although Mary looked steadily in her face, she could not see what she expected to find.

"This woman does not know my name, does she?" said Lady Beatrice quickly.

"No, and she never will from me," replied Mary.

Lady Beatrice entered the conveyance and drove away, while Mary stood watching.

"Oh, she does not love him!" she said again and again. "I am sure she does not. If she did, and if she could make him happy, I—I——" But she did not finish the sentence. A little later she sat by the kitchen fire like one dazed.

Presently Tamsin Keast came to her, and then Mary looked up with eager questioning in her eyes.

"He'll soon git better now," said Tamsin.

"Why? How do you know?"

"He've ait his broth with a relish, my dear, and he's axin' how soon he can be out and around again. That'll be his young laady, I s'poose. Well, my dear, she've done for un more than all the doctors can do.

He's a defferent man, my dear, a defferent man. The look in his eyes es defferent, the tone of his voice es changed."

Mary listened, but did not speak.

Presently she said: "I'm going home."

"All right, my dear. You're a very good maid. Ef ever you do want a charatter as a nurse, I'll give 'ee wan."

"You don't want me any more now, do you?"

"Not ef you do want to go 'ome, my dear. When will 'ee come over again?"

"I don't know."

"I doan't expect I shall need 'ee. He'll soon be all right now. Ef I shud want 'ee, I'll send Tobias over."

A little later Mary was on her way to Port St. Mary. She felt she was no longer needed now, and her feet dragged heavily. Not that she was sad. Rather she rejoiced with a great joy. She felt sure now that Rossini would soon be well again, and that was enough to dispel her sadness. For Mary Fletcher's love had as little of the alloy of self in it as it is possible for a woman to have in this world. Ever since she had known him, the thought of self had taken little part in her love. All her thought had been for Rossini's welfarè and happiness. That obtained, it mattered little about herself. It is not always thus; nay, such love as hers is very rare. In many cases the love of women is rather a love for self than for the person loved. They think of their own happiness rather than the happiness of the one to whom they imagine they have given their love. The question they ask is: "How can I be happy?" rather than "How can I make him happy?" As a consequence they miss

the end and purpose of life. Happiness is not gained by seeking it, but by seeking to give it.

Thus Mary Fletcher rejoiced in spite of everything, as she wended her way homeward. Rossini would get well, and she believed, although Lady Beatrice had disappointed her, that he would be happy. And yet her feet dragged heavily, and, to a certain extent, purpose had gone out of her life. There was nothing more she could do now. Even if she had not saved Rossini's life, she had taken her part in a work that was dearer than all else to her. That done, she must go into silence and solitude again.

Day after day she had gone to the cottage on the moors, only too glad to render the most menial service for the man she loved. Now and then great hopes had entered her heart, but she had quickly driven them away. How could Rossini ever think of her? Hers was the happiness of loving and serving, rather than the happiness of being loved and being served, and between these two the poles are placed.

And yet as she found her way back to her home she could not help feeling that she had no desire to live. It was not for her to think of the man whose thoughts were given to another. He would be happy, and henceforth she could have no part or lot in his life.

She was nearing the edge of the moor when she heard a quick footstep behind her.

"Mary," said a voice, "where have you been?"

She turned quickly and saw her father. There was a look of terror in Reuben Fletcher's eyes, and his whole appearance was gaunt and haggard.

"Where have you been?" he asked again; and Mary shuddered as he spoke.

"Why?" she asked, for she knew instinctively the thoughts in her father's mind.

"Tell me," he cried, "tell me everything!"

"What is there to tell, father?" she said. "Have you left Dowlerry? When you wrote to me last, you said you should take a house there, and that I must come to you. Have you done so?"

"Look here!" he cried, "what is it about the young engineer?"

"Yes," she said quietly, "what about him?"

"He's dead, isn't he?"

The words seemed dragged out of the man, and there was agony in every tone.

She still retained her presence of mind and looked steadily into her father's face.

"Why should he be dead?" she asked.

"Because—look here—I've been told that he hasn't been at Port St. Mary for weeks, and that Mr. Pentewan says that he met with an accident some time ago, but that he'll soon be back. There's some mystery about him; tell me what it is."

"How should I know?"

"Look here; you came to us on Black Rock one night before mother died. How did you know we meant to harm him? And, more than that, who told him that we meant to blow up the lighthouse? Did you?"

"Yes." The word came from her suddenly, even before she was aware she had spoken it.

"How did you know?"

"How did I know you meant to murder him up on the moors, you and the rest of them?" she asked quietly. "You thought you killed him, didn't you?"

"And didn't we?" he asked, forgetting all caution.

"As though you could master such a man as he!" she said scornfully.

"And he isn't dead?"

"It is the talk of the town that Mr. Pentewan has been to see him," she replied. "He has told the men at the harbour that he'll soon be back."

"Yes, I've heard of it. People say he got hurt on the night of the Manor Farm party, and then he wrote to Mr. Pentewan to take his place. They say he was up to no good on the night he got hurt—that's why he's never let anybody but Mr. Pentewan know where he is. But that can't be true; he must be dead. If he isn't——"

"Yes, if he isn't, what then?" said Mary, looking at her father's wild, bloodshot eyes and haggard face.

"He must be dead, I tell you. No man could get out. I tell you he's dead; all the rest is made up. Why, if he isn't dead, he could——"

"He could bring you up for trying to murder him," said Mary.

"How do you know?"

"If you could see yourself, you'd have no need to ask," replied the girl.

"And do you believe he's alive?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Then you know more than the rest of them. Tell me what you know, tell me everything."

"No, I shall tell you nothing," replied the girl.

He lifted his hand to strike her, but the blow did not fall. Reuben Fletcher was a different man from what he had been a few weeks before. All his grim strength was gone, the look in his eyes was the look of a frightened, hunted animal.

"Mary," he said, "let me tell you something. The others are gone. They've hooked it. I'd have gone, too, but I couldn't leave you. I say, Mary, come away with me. Let us go somewhere where our names are not known—where nothing is known. Will you? I tell you, he'll have the law on me, he'll—he'll—God only knows what he'll do. I'm afraid. I've hardly eaten anything for days—meat chokes me; and my strength is gone. Sometimes I've believed him dead, and then I've thought his spirit haunted me; and sometimes, when I've thought him alive, I've seen his black eyes looking at me from every quarter. He'll pay me out, Mary—and I'm afraid. Come with me, my girl; come with your old father, and we'll go where no one knows us. Will you, Mary?"

"Why should I go with you?" asked the girl.

"Because—oh, because of mother," he stammered. "She loved me, Mary, although I was a bad un. And, look here—I say, is that engineer anything to you? Has he ever courted you?"

"No, never!" said the girl passionately.

"Then let's go. Oh, come with me, Mary. I'm afraid of him, alive or dead. He's mastered me. When I thought he was dead, I was afraid of him; and now you say he's alive, I'm afraid of him. But how do you know he's alive, Mary? I struck him on the head; I heard the sound of the stick, a heavy one, on his skull; I saw him sink in the bottomless pool. Are you sure he's alive, Mary?"

"Yes, sure."

"How are you sure?"

"I found out; never mind how, but I found out. He'll soon be back at Port St. Mary again."

"Then I must be off. Come with me, Mary, will you? God knows what I shall do if you don't."

"Very well," said Mary, "I'll come with you."

"But the furniture, Mary, what about that?"

"I'll see to it. Come back home now, and then we can arrange everything."

"Not till dark, Mary. When 'tis dark, I'll come. I can trust you, can't I?"

"Yes," replied the girl, "you can trust me."

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The following day Rossini Keverne was much stronger and better. He had slept well throughout the night, and on waking had felt hungry.

"You'll soon be all right now," said Tamsin, as she brought him food.

"Yes, I feel I shall. I must be careful about my arm, though, mustn't I?"

"Iss, you mus' be careful, but 'tis goin' on oal right."

"Do you think I can sit up a bit to-day?"

"Why not?" said Tamsin.

An hour or so later Rossini called Tamsin to his side.

"Is Mary Fletcher coming to-day?" he said.

"I dunnaw."

"But she has come every day, hasn't she?"

"Nearly every day."

"I should have died but for her, shouldn't I?"

"Iss, ther's no doubt about that."

"I've been a brute," said Rossini presently.

"Why?"

"I've never thanked her. Why, she—she——" He did not finish the sentence, but remained for a long time in deep thought.

"She did not tell you whether she was coming to-day, did she?" he asked presently.

"No, I hardly think she will. You see—well, I towld 'er I didn't think I should want 'er any more. But she's a good maid; besides, she must have gived up a lot of work to come here and help me in the way she did."

"You mean that—— Yes, I see. But of course I must make that all right."

Mary did not come that day, although Rossini asked many times for her. When the next day passed and she did not come, Rossini evidently grew anxious. "Why does she not come?" he asked.

"Ef she doan't come by to-morrow, I'll send Tobias over and ax about her," remarked Tamsin.

"But why not to-day?" asked Rossini.

"Tobias is busy," replied Tamsin; "besides, there's nothing she can do. You're all right now. In a day or two more you'll be able to go back to Port St. Mary."

When the next day came, and Mary did not arrive, Rossini insisted on Tobias going to Reuben Fletcher's cottage to make inquiries.

"She may be ill, you know," he said; "she looked terribly pale when I saw her last."

After Tobias had left for Port St. Mary, he sat in an easy-chair with a look of expectation in his eyes. Often he turned to the clock, as though anxious to know the time, and again he struggled to the window and looked out across the moor.

"She can't be long now," he repeated to himself again and again.

Presently Tobias returned with a look of terror in

his eyes. Evidently he had come back with great speed for he panted freely.

"What's the matter?" asked Tamsin.

"Miss Mary's gone!"

"Gone where?"

"Dunnaw. People be sayin' that ther's bin foul play. Her father comed back t'other night, and since then she ain't a-bin seed."

Tamsin asked many questions, but Rossini sat looking at the youth without a word. The colour had left his cheeks, however, and in his eyes was a look of terror.

"Mrs. Keast," he said, "will you lend me your pony and trap?"

"What for?"

"I'm going to Port St. Mary."

"You bean't goin' to do nothin' of the sort. Why, you be as waik as a babby yet."

"Will you lend me your pony and trap?" repeated Rossini.

"Iss, perhaps to-morrow."

"No, to-day."

"No; you bean't fit for the journey to-day. I shaan't laive 'ee 'ave it"

"Then I shall walk back," said Rossini, rising to his feet.

CHAPTER XII.

ROSSINI'S VICTORY.

TAMSIN KEAST looked at Rossini with amazement as he spoke. There was a tone in his voice which she had never heard before, while his black eyes flashed dangerously.

"You caan't main it," she said weakly.

"If you had known me longer, Mrs. Keast," he said, "you would know that I never say anything without meaning it."

"But—but—be 'ee sure you be strong enough?"

"I know that I'm going to Port St. Mary at once," said Rossini.

Unconsciously the woman yielded to the grim strength by which this young man had bent circumstances to his will.

"Well, ef you must 'ave et, you must. 'Bias, go and harness Smiler right away."

"Must I drive en ovver?" asked Tobias.

"Of course you must. Now, what be 'ee waiting for? Off you go!"

Tobias went without a word. He knew his mother too well to ask questions.

"You must wrap up warm," said Tamsin.

"Your husband's overcoat will do."

"'T'll be dark by the time you git to Port St. Mary."

"All the better," said Rossini quietly.

A little later, Rossini walked to the trap which stood

at the farmyard gate. His arm was still in a sling, but he walked uprightly as in the olden days. His face was pale, but in his eyes was that look of determination which had so impressed Hugh Henwood long years before.

"Here, drink this before you go," said Tamsin.

"Thank you, Mrs. Keast," he said; "and thank you for all the kindness you've shown me. I'm afraid I've been a bad patient, but you shall not lose by doing all you've done for me."

"I hope you'll find—the maid," said Tamsin, looking at him suspiciously.

"I shall find her," he replied, and then he got into the trap, with less help than she had believed possible.

Tobias sat by his side and drove a shaggy pony which he called Smiler. Often the youth cast furtive glances at him, but he dared not speak. There was a look on the young man's face which forbade him. The young engineer was a mystery to him. All he knew of him was that he had constructed the lighthouse, was building a great harbour, and that he had been lying like one dead on the moors when Mary Fletcher found him. Since he had helped to carry him to the house, he had seen but little of him, although he wondered why Miss Mary, as he called her, should come so often to his mother's house to help to nurse him. But his mother had told him to ask no questions, and to tell no one anything of what had happened; and he dared not disobey. All the same, "Miss Mary" had a great fascination for him, and he thought of her much during the lonely days on the farm.

He had obeyed his mother without question when she told him to drive the young engineer to Port St.

Mary, as he obeyed her in everything else ; nevertheless, he did not like the masterful young man who sat so quietly by his side. What was he thinking about ? And why should he be so anxious to find " Miss Mary " ?

" We shall soon get there ? " said Rossini presently.

" Iss, 'bout ten minnits."

" You know where Mr. Pentewan stays when he comes to Port St. Mary ? "

" Iss."

" Is he there now ? "

" Dunnaw."

" You must go and see directly after we arrive at Mrs. Beagle's. You must tell him I want to see him at once."

" All right."

When Rossini arrived at his lodgings, Mrs. Beagle almost went into hysterics ; but the young man was quiet and calm.

" You see I have turned up again, Mrs. Beagle."

" I was afraid you was dead, sir," replied that lady. "'Tis true Mr. Pentewan came and told me you was all right, but I couldn't believe it, sir. You see, nobody knew where you were. Why didn't you let us know where you were staying, sir ? I'm sure I'd have come to nurse you, gladly. Tell me, sir, have you been very ill ? You *do* look poorly."

" Oh, I'm all right, Mrs. Beagle. I didn't let anyone know where I was because I wanted to be quiet. Will you light a fire in my sitting-room, and air some clothes for me, Mrs. Beagle ? I expect a visitor presently."

" Certainly, sir." She badly wanted to question him concerning his absence, but the look in Rossini's eyes

stopped her. He was not the kind of man with whom she could take liberties.

"I shall never know from him where he's been or what's happened to him," she said to herself, as she went into the kitchen to order the servant to carry out Rossini's wishes. "Here's all the town been agog for weeks to know about him, and yet he's come back quietly as though nothing had happened."

Half an hour later, Rossini was sitting by a cheerful fire, while Mrs. Beagle prepared a tempting meal for him. Often she came into the room and asked him questions as to the state of his appetite, and what he had been in the habit of eating during his sickness, hoping thereby to learn something of what had happened to him; but she learnt nothing. For one thing, Rossini had no desire to tell the story of his happenings, and for another, he was busy thinking of other matters.

Presently he received a message to the effect that Mr. Pentewan was not staying at Port St. Mary that night, but that he was expected the next day. Rossini said nothing, neither did he give any sign that he was disappointed. Nevertheless, when he was alone again, he sat for a long time staring into the fire.

He was still far from strong, although since Lady Beatrice Penwithen's visit, strength had come back to him in a marvellous way. It had been a turning-point in his recovery, and his vigorous constitution had asserted itself. So that while far from possessing the strength which he had before the night when Reuben Fletcher had planned to kill him, he was capable both of thought and action. He was not able to use his arm, but beyond an occasional twinge it gave him no pain. In a few days it would be as well as ever.

"My coming back will be the talk of the town," he said presently, "but I shall not trouble about that. Let people say and think what they will. I have always been regarded as somewhat of a mystery, and this will confirm people in their opinions; but it does not matter."

He looked around the comfortably appointed room, and as he did so, the events which had taken place since he was there last seemed almost like a dream. The dreadful night on the moors, the struggle on the edge of the tarn, the fight for life, and then the great darkness—all seemed like some hideous nightmare. And yet he knew that they had changed his life. Life now and life before that night was different; he was different.

Almost in spite of himself, he began to review the last few years. He thought of the time when he, the wild, half-savage youth, found his way to Penwithen Hall and saw Lady Beatrice Penwithen. He thought of the vow he had made, and then of his endeavours to fulfil that vow. How he had worked, had struggled, to obtain the position he had coveted! How he had worshipped the proud lady he had vowed to win as his wife!

He recalled the last visit he had made at the Hall, that twenty-ninth day of June, when he had determined to win Lady Beatrice's promise to be his wife. And practically he had won it. If he had turned a deaf ear to Sir Hugh Henwood, and pressed his suit, he might have obtained her consent. But was he sure? Did she ever love him? And his heart told him she did not.

But she had come to him only a few days before. Why did she come? Her visit had aroused him to

life. Directly he had heard her voice, all lethargy, all indifference to life had gone; but did he love her? Had he ever loved her? With all the mad, unreasoning passion of boyhood he had worshipped her; but now, remembering her visit, thinking of the look in her eyes, and recalling her words, did he love her?

The question startled him. Never in all his life had he felt like criticising her till now. Never had he dared to ask the question which he had just asked of his heart. She had not married Sir Hugh Henwood—therefore— But did he want to go to Penwithen Hall? Yes, he remembered the invitation, but did he want to go? He recalled that second vow he had made; but had it not become meaningless? If Lady Beatrice Penwithen cared so little for Sir Hugh Henwood, why need he regard the vow as binding? Marriage with her would be the realisation of his wildest hopes. But would he be happy? Would she satisfy the deepest desires of his heart? Was not her nature little and shallow? Was she capable of a great, passionate love such as he had dreamed of?

He was no longer a boy. He knew now that the last few weeks had marked an epoch in his life. He had stood by the very gates of death, and for a time he had longed to enter them. And this had caused him to reflect. During the hours of loneliness and silence he had thought and brooded much, and he knew that what would have satisfied him years ago failed to satisfy him now. The thought of Lady Beatrice Penwithen was different now from what it had been a few months before.

Why?

The answer came to him in a moment, but he would

not admit of its truth. Were the dreams of years to end in this? Was he who had been the suitor for the hand of a lady of high degree, he who had surmounted all sorts of difficulties that he might have the right to speak to her, to cast everything aside and confess to this? But even as he tried to repel the idea, the picture of the cottage girl rose in his mind. He remembered her as he saw her on the night when he had first taken notice of her. She had rowed out to Black Rock alone, that she might save him. She had saved his life then, and she had saved it since. Even on the night he had returned from Penwithen Hall, it was she who had saved his work from destruction. It was she who had braved all sorts of dangers in watching her father, and it was she who had watched over him and protected him. But for her, Reuben Fletcher and the others would have succeeded in their project. She had saved him. Tamsin Keast had told the story of her coming to her cottage in the early morning, and how day by day she had come to nurse him.

How blind he had been! Here was love indeed, and he had never dreamed of it. Yes, he had spoken of her to Lady Beatrice Penwithen, and had described her as the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He had spoken of her as a modern Joan of Arc, and he realised how true his description had been.

Unwittingly, almost, he compared them. Lady Beatrice Penwithen, the daughter of one of the oldest families in England, a woman surrounded with all the refinements, with all the culture that civilisation and wealth could give her. Yes, she was beautiful and she was good—but she was shallow. No great purpose moved her, no great love inspired her. Then he thought

of Mary Fletcher: a cottage girl, the daughter of a drunken, bad man, yet a saint, a heroine. He thought of her service to him, he realised what she had done for him, and his heart burned, his pulses throbbed wildly.

And yet he would not admit it. He had dreamed of wedding a lady of high degree, of associating with the rich and the great. Should he give up all by giving his life to a cottage girl?

Where was she now? He remembered that he had come home quickly to make inquiries about her. He had felt it his duty to see that no harm happened to one who had done so much for him. But now he knew it was because of a deeper reason. He realised now why he had been asking for Mary Fletcher ever since the day when Lady Beatrice had called to see him.

He started up from his chair and walked across the room excitedly. In the morning he did not believe he was strong enough to do this; then it was with difficulty that he had tottered from the chair to the window in Tamsin Keast's cottage. Now a new strength seemed to be born within him.

"Mary, Mary!" he cried out; "may God make me worthy!"

"I cannot rest; I must know!" he went on presently. "If her father has come back, he may have learnt what she has done, and in his frenzy he may have murdered her!"

The thought was maddening. What would life be to him now without her? His heart had fought the battle with his pride and his ambition; and in the battle his pride and ambition were driven to the winds.

He heard a knock at the door, and Mrs. Beagle entered.

"How are you by this time, Mr. Keverne?" she asked.

"All right, thank you."

"You feel quite well, sir?"

"Yes, quite well and strong."

"Can I get you anything before I go to bed, sir? 'Tis good to have you back again."

"You are very good, but I do not wish for anything, thank you."

"You—you are sure, sir? You look rather weak, sir."

"Nothing, thank you. Good-night."

Rossini waited a few minutes, and then he rose from his chair again.

"I must know!" he cried. "I can't remain here like this! It may be madness, but I must go!"

He put on his boots and an overcoat, and quietly let himself out of the house. It was not until he stood alone in the street that he realised how weak he was; but he set his teeth firmly together and struggled along towards Reuben Fletcher's cottage. How he reached it he never knew, but presently he stood outside the door. He had expected to find the house in darkness, and had determined to ask of the neighbours whether they knew anything of Mary. To his surprise, however, he saw a light in the window, and he heard footsteps within.

Without hesitation he knocked. There was a shuffling of feet, and then a heavy step came towards the door. When the door opened, he saw Reuben Fletcher, standing with a candle in his hand. As Rossini saw him he realised that perhaps he had again placed himself in the power of this man, but his old coolness did not forsake him.

"Ah, Fletcher," he said, "is that you?"

"My God!" said Fletcher, and Rossini noted that his voice trembled.

"I want a word with you, Fletcher," said Rossini.

"Are the police with you?" asked the man fearfully.

Rossini's mind worked like lightning, and he saw all that the man's question meant.

"May I come in?" he asked, not seeming to notice what Fletcher had said.

The man led the way into the kitchen. A cheerful fire burnt in the room, but no one was there.

"Fletcher," said Rossini, "where is Mary?"

"How did you know we had come back?" he cried. "For God's sake, sir, be merciful!"

The young man felt he was master of the situation as far as Reuben was concerned. All his insolence had gone, all his determination to conquer the young engineer had vanished.

"I will sit down if I may," he said, taking a chair.

In spite of his cool demeanour, he felt his legs shaking under him. Compared with Fletcher, he was weaker than a child, but he gave no sign that had he not sat down he must have fallen on the floor.

"You say that Mary is with you?" he continued, as he watched Reuben Fletcher's haggard face.

"She's upstairs. Oh, sir, be merciful!"

"You know what would happen if I told—everything to the police?"

"Yes. But don't, sir! For God's sake, don't!"

"You were preparing to leave Port St. Mary, Fletcher."

"I thought I might get away before you came back

I had arranged—that is, Mary and I—to go away where we were not known.”

Rossini reflected a moment. What did this mean? He knew the thought in Fletcher's mind, but what was Mary's motive in doing this?

“You'll let me go, sir? I'll promise never to——”

The man broke off, shuddering. He had spoken truly when he told Mary that his strength had all gone.

“Why should I let you go?” asked Rossini. “Why should I not call in the police and have justice done to you?”

“I go mad at the thought of it,” said the man. “I'm told that they put such as I in solitary confinement in a black cell, and—and—— Don't, sir!”

“Fletcher,” said Rossini, “you might have been in a good position by this time if you had been a man. You are a good workman, and could be a good servant.”

“Why speak of that now?”

Something like the man's old sullenness had come back to him. It seemed to him cruel that Rossini should taunt him before calling in the police, as he believed he meant to do.

“Because,” said Rossini slowly, “I have made up my mind to give you another chance.”

“What?”

“I have made up my mind to give you another chance,” said the young man. “I am not satisfied with Jinks, my foreman, and I have decided to offer you his place. I believe you will be faithful to me. Reuben Fletcher, will you take the post?”

“Don't, don't mock me, sir! You mean it, on your word as a gentleman?”

"I always say what I mean," replied Rossini quietly.

"Then you forgive me for all I've done! God forgive me, I tried to murder you. I've done you all the harm I've been able. I—I——"

"But that's all over now, Reuben Fletcher. I know all you say, and more; but shall we wipe the slate clean and begin anew? Will you take the post?"

"Take the post! To be a man among men again! To be free from all I have feared! To stay at Port St. Mary, where I've been born! Sir, Mr. Keverne, I'll serve you like a dog, I'll slave for you night and day! I'll—I'll——" But he could not finish the sentence. He was sobbing like a child.

"There's only one stipulation that I have to make, Reuben Fletcher," said Rossini. "You must never touch the drink again."

"Touch it again! Never! never! And I'll help you to fight those publicans, and the cardsharps, and the bookmakers!"

For a moment the man seemed to have taken leave of his senses. It was as though he had been taken from hell to heaven in a moment.

"I must go and tell Mary, sir," he said presently. "She's upstairs, busy packing things. Her heart is breaking, I think, at the thought of leaving her old home."

"No, wait another moment before you do that, Reuben Fletcher. Shall I tell you why I have done what I have done? Partly it is because I have all the time believed that you had the making of a man in you, and I wanted to see you become the man you could be. But that is not all. Except for another reason, I doubt whether I should have forgiven you so easily. I know

this, Fletcher, that although your daughter has saved me again and again from you, she loves you dearly. And then there is something else. I want to ask her to be my wife."

"Mary, your wife?"

"Yes, Fletcher; may I?"

The man was so overwhelmed that he could not speak, but tears of joy ran down his face.

"That's all right; I have your consent, then. Will you ask her to come down, Fletcher, and then leave us alone for a few minutes? But don't tell her anything of what has passed between us."

A minute later Mary Fletcher entered the room. She knew it was Rossini who had been there, and she had wondered what he had been talking to her father about. She came to his side quickly.

"I did not know you were well enough to come home, sir," she said. "I am so glad. But are you sure you did wisely in coming so soon?"

"That depends, Mary," said Rossini.

"On what, sir?"

"On you, Mary."

"I—I don't understand," she stammered. Then she went on: "Father is almost mad with fear. He is afraid that you will not let us go away—that you will——" She shuddered as she spoke, but she did not finish the sentence. "We had hoped to be away from here before you returned; but—but will you forgive him again, sir? I know he does not deserve it; but—but—you will let us go away, won't you?"

"No," said Rossini quietly, and there was a touch of grim humour in his voice as he spoke. "I cannot let you go away."

She looked at him fearfully. "Oh, sir, do be merciful!" she said. "It would kill me if—if he were disgraced."

"No, I am not going to let him go away, Mary. Do you know why?"

There was a look of fearful expectancy in her eyes, but she did not speak.

"I cannot let him go away, Mary, because—I want you to be my wife. Will you?"

"Your—wife—sir!"

"That is it, Mary. Will you?"

"Please don't laugh at me. That beautiful lady, Lady Beatrice Penwithen, is to be your wife. That is why I went to her. I heard Dr. Pollard say that if you were not aroused, that if you were given no interest in life, you—you would die. Then I knew what you wanted. I had heard you speak of her when—when—that is, after—I—I found you on the moors; and I said: If she comes, he will want to live. I went to her, and she came. That was why you got better. You love her—please don't laugh at me."

"I love you, Mary; only you. There is no one else to me in the world but you. Do you hear?—no one. Will you marry me?"

The girl's eyes were full of wonder. The thought was too great. She had idealised Rossini; she regarded him as one as far above her as the stars are above the earth. How could he, who loved Lady Beatrice Penwithen, ever think of her? It was joy beyond words. It translated the cottage kitchen into a Paradise; but it could not be true.

"Mary," went on Rossini, "I love you, love you. Do you love me?"

"Love you, sir! Love you! Why, you must know that I do. I would go across the wide world to serve you. I would die for you. Oh, sir! love for you swallows up everything else. But—but—I am not worthy. I am only a poor, ignorant cottage girl. Besides, what of the great lady who visited you?"

"Listen," said Rossini. "Let me tell you a story." Then he told her of his boyhood. He related to her the story of his life; while Mary's eyes were wide with wonder.

"When she left me the other day," he said, when he had finished, "it was not of her that I thought, but of you. It was not she I wanted, but you. I did not know why, but I knew that it was so. When Tobias Keast came back to-day, and told me you had left Port St. Mary, I felt I must come and find you, although even then I could not have told you why. But it has come to me since, Mary. Lady Beatrice Penwithen is nothing to me, and you are everything. I cannot be happy without you, Mary. Will you be my wife?"

"Cannot be happy without me?" cried Mary. "Then—why—why, oh, my love! Oh, you cannot mean it. Say you do again!"

"I cannot be happy without you, Mary; you are everything to me. There, Mary, kiss me, and tell me you will be my wife."

He drew her towards him until their lips met.

"Oh, if you think I can ever be worthy of you, I will—oh, will do anything to be worthy. I will work, I will learn, I will try to be clever."

"No, none of these things. Love me, Mary; that is all I want."

"Why, I cannot help doing that," she replied, with a sob. "I—I have loved you from the first hour I saw you."

Then Rossini Keverne knew that he had won the greatest victory of his life.



The people of Port St. Mary formed many wild conjectures as to what happened to Rossini Keverne on the Ashdown Moors, but they never knew the truth. Many knew that Reuben Fletcher hated him, but how could he have harmed him, when he was appointed Rossini's foreman? Besides, he became another kind of man on his return, and people said he watched over his young master with all the tender solicitude of a mother watching over her child. But no one guessed that Mary had promised to be the young engineer's wife, until one day the registrar of marriages told the inhabitants that Rossini had been to him to make arrangements for his wedding.

The little Independent chapel was crowded on the wedding-day as it had never been crowded before, and when it was known that the officiating minister was an English baronet, the excitement of the people knew no bounds.

"Rossini, old man," said Sir Hugh Henwood, after the service was over, "no one congratulates you so heartily as I. No one. I'm sure you know that."

"Yes, I know it," replied Rossini.

"And—and I hope you will come to my wedding, old man. Beatrice has promised me at last."

"Good," said Rossini quietly; "I was sure she would."

"Do you know, Keverne," and Sir Hugh Henwood's eyes had a strange look, "at one time I thought that you were the man who stood between me and Beatrice."

"I?" said Rossini, with a laugh. "My wife is the only woman that I could ever love."