

## CHAPTER X.

“HUMPHREY,” said Edward, “the sooner all this is over the better. As long as poor Jacob’s body remains in the cottage, there will be nothing but distress with the poor girls.”

“I agree with you,” replied Humphrey. “Where shall we bury him?”

“Under the great oak-tree, at the back of the cottage,” replied Edward. “One day the old man said to me that he should like to be buried under one of the oaks of the forest.”

“Well, then, I will go and dig his grave to-night,” replied Humphrey. “The moon is bright, and I shall have it finished before morning.”

“I am sorry that I cannot help you, Humphrey.”

“I am sorry that you are hurt; but I want no help, Edward. If you will lie down a little, perhaps you will be able to sleep. Let us change the potato poultice before you go on.”

Humphrey put the fresh dressing on Edward’s arm; and Edward, who was very much exhausted, lay down in his clothes on the bed. Humphrey went out, and having found his tools, set to his task. He worked hard, and before morning had finished. He then went in, and took his place on the bed by the side of Edward, who was in a sound sleep. At daylight Humphrey rose

and waked Edward: "All is ready, Edward; but I fear you must help me to put poor Jacob in the cart. Do you think you can?"

"Oh yes; my arm is much easier, and I feel very different from what I did last night. If you will go and get the cart, I will see what I can do in the meantime."

When Humphrey returned, he found Edward had selected a sheet to wind the body in, but could not do more till Humphrey came to help him. They then wrapped it round the body, and carried it out of the cottage, and put it into the cart.

"Now, Edward, shall we call our sisters?"

"No, not yet. Let us have the body laid in the grave first, and then we will call them."

They dragged the body on the cart to the grave, and laid it in it, and then returned back and put the pony in the stable again.

"Are there not prayers proper for reading over the dead?" said Humphrey.

"I believe that there are, but they are not in the Bible; so we must read some portion of the Bible," said Edward.

"Yes, I think there is one of the Psalms which it would be right to read, Edward," said Humphrey, turning over the leaves. "Here it is—the 90th, in which you recollect it says 'that the days of man are three-score years and ten.'"

"Yes," replied Edward; "and we will read this one also—the 146th."

"Are our sisters risen, do you think?"

"I am sure that they are," replied Humphrey, "and I will go to them."

Humphrey went to the door, and said, "Alice—Alice and Edith—come out immediately." They were both ready dressed.

Edward took the Bible under his arm, and Alice by the hand. Humphrey led Edith until they arrived at the grave, when the two little girls saw the covered body of Jacob lying in it.

"Kneel down," said Edward, opening the Bible. And they all knelt by the grave. Edward read the two psalms, and then closed the book. The little girls took one last look at the body, and then turned away weeping to the cottage. Edward and Humphrey filled up the grave, and then followed their sisters home.

"I'm glad it's over," said Humphrey, wiping his eyes. "Poor old Jacob! I'll put a paling round his grave."

"Come in, Humphrey," said Edward.

Edward sat down upon old Jacob's chair, and took Alice and Edith to him. Putting his arm round each, he said,—

"Alice and Edith, my dear little sisters, we have lost a good friend, and one to whose memory we cannot be too grateful. He saved us from perishing in the flames which burnt down our father's house, and has protected us here ever since. He is gone; for it has pleased God to summon him to Him, and we must bow to the will of Heaven. And here we are, brothers and sisters, orphans, and with not one to look to for protection but Heaven. Here we are, away from the rest of the world, living for one another. What, then, must we do? We must love one another dearly, and help one another. I will do my part, if my life is spared, and so will Humphrey, and so will you, my dear sisters. I can answer for all. Now it is no use to lament—we must all work, and work cheerfully; and we will pray every morning and every night that God will bless our endeavours, and enable us to provide for ourselves, and live here in peace and safety. Kiss me, dear Alice and Edith, and kiss Humphrey, and kiss one another. Let these kisses be the seals to our

bond ; and let us put our trust in Him who only is a father to the widow and the orphan. And now let us pray."

Edward and the children repeated the Lord's Prayer, and then rose up. They went to their respective employments, and the labour of the day soon made them composed, although then, for many days afterwards, it was but occasionally that a smile was seen upon their lips.

Thus passed a week, by which time Edward's arm was so far well that it gave him no pain, and he was able to assist Humphrey in the work on the farm. The snow had disappeared, and the spring, although it had been checked for a time, now made rapid advances. Constant occupation and the return of fine weather, both had the effect of restoring the serenity of their minds ; and while Humphrey was preparing the paling to fix round the grave of old Jacob, Alice and Edith collected the wild violets which now peeped forth on sheltered spots, and planted the roots over the grave. Edward also procured all the early flowers he could collect, and assisted his sisters in their task ; and thus, in planting it and putting up the paling, the grave of the old man became their constant work-ground ; and when their labour was done, they would still remain there and talk over his worth. The Sunday following the burial, the weather being fine and warm, Edward proposed that they should read the usual service, which had been selected by old Jacob, at the grave, and not in the cottage as formerly ; and this they continued afterwards to do whenever the weather would permit. Thus did old Jacob's resting-place become their church ; and overpower them with those feelings of love and devotion which give efficacy to prayer. As soon as the paling was finished, Humphrey put up a board against the oak

tree, with the simple words carved on it: "Jacob Armitage."

Edward had every day expected that Oswald Partridge would have called upon him, as he had promised to do before the week was out; but Oswald had not made his appearance, much to Edward's surprise. A month passed away; Edward's arm was now quite well, and still Oswald came not. One morning Humphrey and Edward were conversing upon many points—the principal of which was upon Edward going to Lymington, for they were now in want of flour and meal—when Edward thought of what old Jacob had told him relative to the money that he would find in his chest. He went into Jacob's room and opened the chest, at the bottom of which, under the clothes, he found a leather bag, which he brought out to Humphrey. On opening it they were much surprised to find in it more than sixty gold pieces, besides a great deal of silver coin.

"Surely this is a great sum of money," observed Humphrey. "I don't know what is the price of things, but it appears to me that it ought to last us a long while."

"I think so too," replied Edward. "I wish Oswald Partridge would come, for I want to ask him many questions. I don't know the price of flour or anything else we have to purchase, nor do I know what I ought to be paid for venison. I don't like to go to Lymington till I see him, for that reason. If he does not come soon, I shall ride over and see what is the matter."

Edward then replaced the money in the chest, and he and Humphrey then went out to the farmyard to go on with their work.

It was not until six weeks after the death of old Jacob that Oswald Partridge made his appearance.

"How is the old man, sir?" was his first question.

"He was buried a few days after you left," replied Edward.

"I expected as much," said the forester. "Peace be with him—he was a good man. And how is your arm?"

"Nearly well," replied Edward. "Now, sit down, Oswald, for I have a great deal to say to you; and first let me ask you what has detained you from coming here according to your promise?"

"Simply, and in few words—murder."

"Murder!" exclaimed Edward.

"Yes, deliberate murder, sir. In short, they have beheaded the King—beheaded King Charles, our sovereign."

"Have they dared to do it?"

"They have," replied Oswald. "We know little that is going on in the forest, but when I saw you last I heard that he was then in London, and was to be tried."

"Tried!" exclaimed Edward. "How could they try a king? By the laws of our country a man must be tried by his equals; and where were his equals?"

"Majesty becomes nought, I suppose," replied Oswald; "but still it is as I say. Two days after you left, the Intendant hastened up to London, and from what I have understood he was strongly opposed to the deed, and did all he could to prevent it, but it was of no use. When he left, he gave me strict injunctions not to go away from the cottage for an hour, as his daughter was left alone; and as I promised, I could not come to you; but, nevertheless, Patience received letters from him, and told me what I tell you."

"You have not dined, Oswald?" said Edward.

"No, that I have not."

"Alice, dear, get some dinner, will you? And, Oswald, while you dine, excuse me if I leave you for a while. Your intelligence has so astounded me that I

can listen to nothing else till I have had a little while to commune with myself and subdue my feelings."

Edward was indeed in a state of mind which required calming down. He quitted the cottage and walked out for some distance into the forest in deep thought.

"Murdered at last!" exclaimed he. "Yes, well may it be called murder, and no one to save him—not a blow struck in his defence—not an arm raised. How much gallant blood has been shed in vain! Spirit of my fathers—didst thou leave none of thy mettle and thy honour behind thee? or has all England become craven? Well, the time will come, and if I can no longer hope to fight for my King, at all events I can fight against those who have murdered him."

Such were Edward's thoughts as he wandered through the forest, and more than an hour elapsed before his impetuous blood could return to its usual flow. At last, more calm, he returned to the cottage, and listened to the details which Oswald now gave to him of what he had heard.

When Oswald had finished, Edward asked him whether the Intendant had returned.

"Yes, or I should not have been here," replied Oswald. "He came back yesterday, looking most disconsolate and grave, and I hear that he returns to London in a few days. Indeed, he told me so himself, for I requested permission to come over to see your grandfather. He said that I might go, but must return soon, as he must go back to London. I believe from what Miss Patience told me, and what I have seen myself, that he is sincerely amazed and vexed at what has taken place; and so indeed are many more, who, although opposed to the King's method of government, never had an idea that things should have turned out as they had done. I have a message from him to you, which is, that he

begs you will come to see him that he may thank you for the preservation of his child."

"I will take his thanks from you, Oswald; that will do as well as if he gave them me in person."

"Yes, perhaps so; but I have another message from another party, which is the young lady herself. She desires me to tell you that she will never be happy till she has seen you and thanked you for your courage and kindness; and that you have no right to put her under such an obligation, and not give her an opportunity of expressing what she feels. Now, Mr. Edward, I am certain that she is earnest in what she says, and she made me promise that I would persuade you to come. I could not refuse her, for she is a dear little creature. As her father will go to London in a few days, you may ride over and see her without any fear of being affronted by any offers which he may make to you."

"Well," replied Edward, "I have no great objection to see her again, for she was very kind to me; and as you say that the Intendant will not be there, I perhaps may come. But now I must talk to you about other matters."

Edward then put many questions to Oswald relative to the value of various articles, and to the best method of disposing of his venison.

Oswald answered all his questions, and Edward took down notes and directions on paper.

Oswald remained with them for two days, and then bade them farewell, exacting a promise from Edward that he would come to the ranger's cottage as soon as he could. "Should the Intendant come back before he is expected, I will come over and let you know; but I think, from what I heard him say, he expected to be at least a month in London."

Edward promised that Oswald should see him in less than ten days, and Oswald set out on his journey.



"Humphrey," said Edward, as soon as Oswald was gone, "I have made up my mind to go to Lymington to-morrow. We must have some flour, and many other articles, which Alice says she can no longer do without."

"Why should we not both go, Edward?" replied Humphrey.

"No, not this time," replied Edward. "I have to find out many things and many people, and I had rather go by myself. Besides, I cannot allow my sisters to be left alone. I do not consider there is any danger, I admit, but something might happen to them. I should never forgive myself. Still, it is necessary that you should go to Lymington with me some time or another, that you may know where to purchase and sell, if required. What I propose is, that I will ask Oswald to come and stay here a couple of days. We will then leave him in charge of our sisters, and go to Lymington together."

"You are right, Edward; that will be the best plan."

As Humphrey made this remark, Oswald re-entered the cottage.

"I will tell you why I have returned, Mr. Edward," said Oswald. "It is of no consequence whether I return now or to-morrow. It is now early, and as you intend going to Lymington, it occurred to me that I had better go with you. I can then show you all you want, which will be much better than going by yourself."

"Thank you, Oswald; I am much obliged to you," said Edward.—"Humphrey, we will get the cart out immediately, or we shall be late. Will you get it, Humphrey? for I must go for some money, and speak to Alice."

Humphrey went immediately to put the pony in the cart, when Edward said,—

"Oswald, you must not call me Mr. Edward, even

when we are alone. If you do, you will be calling me so before other people; and therefore recollect in future it must be plain Edward."

"Since you wish it, certainly," replied Oswald. "Indeed, it would be better, for a slip of the tongue before other people might create suspicion."

The pony and cart were soon at the door, and Edward, having received further instructions from Alice, set off for Lymington, accompanied by Oswald.