

CHAPTER XI.

“WOULD you have found your way to Lymington?” said Oswald, as the pony trotted along.

“Yes, I think so,” replied Edward; “but I must have first gone to Arnwood. Indeed, had I been alone, I should have done so; but we have made a much shorter cut.”

“I did not think that you would have liked to have seen the ruins of Arnwood,” replied Oswald.

“Not a day passes without my thinking of them,” replied Edward. “I should like to see them. I should like to see if any one has taken possession of the property, for they say it is confiscated.”

“I heard that it was to be, but not that it was yet,” said Oswald; “but we shall know more when we get to Lymington. I have not seen it for more than a year. I hardly think that any one will recognize you.”

“I should think not; but I care little if they do. Indeed, who is there to know me?”

“Well, my introduction of you will save some surmises, probably. I shall not take you among those who may be inclined to ask questions. See, there is the steeple; we have not more than a quarter of an hour’s drive.”

As soon as they arrived at Lymington, Oswald directed the way to a small hostelrie, to which the keepers and verderers usually resorted. In fact, the landlord was

the party who took all the venison off their hands, and disposed of it. They drove into the yard, and giving the pony and cart in charge of the hostler, went into the inn, where they found the landlord, and one or two other people, who were drinking.

“ Well, Master Andrew, how fare you ? ” said Oswald.

“ Let me see,” said the corpulent landlord, throwing back his head and putting out his stomach as he peered at Oswald ; “ why, Oswald Partridge, as I am a born man. Where have you been this many a day ? ”

“ In the forest, Master Andrew, where there are no few chops and changes.”

“ Yes, I heard you have a sort of Parliamentary keeper, I’m told. And who is this with you ? ”

“ The grandson of an old friend of yours, now dead, poor old Jacob Armitage.”

“ Jacob dead, poor fellow ! As true as flint was Jacob Armitage, as I’m a born man ! And so he is dead ! Well, we all owe Heaven a death. Foresters and landlords, as well as kings, all must die ! ”

“ I have brought Edward Armitage over here to introduce him to you, Master Andrew. Now that the old man is dead, you must look to him for forest meat.”

“ Oh, well, well, it is scarce now. I have not had any for some time. Old Jacob brought me the last. You are not one of the Parliamentary foresters, then, I presume ? ” continued the landlord, turning to Edward.

“ No,” replied Edward, “ I kill no venison for Round-heads.”

“ Right, my sapling—right and well said. The Armitages were all good men and true, and followed the fortunes of the Beverleys ; but there are no Beverleys to follow now. Cut off root and branch—more’s the pity. That was a sad business. But come in we must not

talk here, for walls have ears, they say, and one never knows who one dares to speak before now."

Oswald and Edward then entered with the landlord, and arrangements were made between Master Andrew and the latter for a regular supply of venison during the season at a certain price; but as it would now be dangerous to bring it into the town, it was agreed that when there was any ready Edward should come to Lymington and give notice, and the landlord would send out people to bring it in during the night. This bargain concluded, they took a glass with the landlord, and then went into the town to make the necessary purchases. Oswald took Edward to all the shops where the articles he required were to be purchased; some they carried away with them; others, which were too heavy, they left, to be called for with the cart as they went away. Among other articles, Edward required powder and lead, and they went to a gunsmith's where it was to be procured. While making his purchases, Edward perceived a sword, which he thought he had seen before, hanging up against the wall among other weapons.

"What sword is that?" said he to the man who was measuring out the powder.

"It's not my sword exactly," replied the man, "and yet I cannot return it to its owner or to the family. It was brought me to be cleaned by one of Colonel Beverley's people, and before it was called for the house was burnt and every soul perished. It was one of the colonel's swords, I am sure, as there is E. B. on a silver plate engraved on it. I have a bill owing me for work done at Arnwood, and I have no chance of its being paid now; so, whether I am to sell the sword, or what to do, I hardly know."

Edward remained silent for some little while, for he could not trust himself to speak. At last he replied, "To

be candid with you, I am, and all my family have been, followers of the Beverley family, and I should be sorry if the colonel's sword was to fall into any other hands. I think, therefore, if I pay the bill which is due, you may safely let me hold the sword as a security for the money, with the express understanding that if it is ever claimed by the Beverley family I am to give it up."

"Certainly," said Oswald; "nothing can be fairer or more clearly put."

"I think so too, young man," replied the shopkeeper. "Of course you will leave your name and address?"

"Yes; and my friend here will vouch for its being correct," replied Edward.

The shopkeeper then produced the account, which Edward paid; and giving on the paper the name of Edward Armitage, he took possession of the sword. He then paid for the powder and lead, which Oswald took charge of, and, hardly able to conceal his joy, hastened out of the shop.

"Oswald," cried Edward, "I would not part with it for thousands of pounds. I never will part with it but with my life."

"I believe so," replied Oswald. "And I believe more, that it will never be disgraced in your hands. But do not talk so loud, for there are listeners and spies everywhere. Is there anything else that you require?"

"No, I think not. The fact is, that this sword has put everything out of my head. If there was anything else, I have forgotten it. Let us go back to the inn, and we will harness the pony and call for the flour and oat-meal."

When they arrived at the inn, Oswald went out to the yard to get the cart ready, while Edward went into the landlord's room to make inquiries as to the quantity of venison he would be able to take off his hands at a

time. Oswald had taken the sword from Edward, and had put it in the cart while he was fastening the harness, when a man came up to the cart, and looked earnestly at the sword. He then examined it, and said to Oswald,—

“Why, that was Colonel Beverley’s, my old master’s, sword. I knowed it again directly. I took it to Phillips, the gunmaker, to be cleaned.”

“Indeed!” replied Oswald. “I pray what may be your name?”

“Benjamin White,” replied the man. “I served at Arnwood till the night it was burned down, and I have been here ever since.”

“And what are you doing now?”

“I’m tapster at the Commonwealth in Fish Street—not much of a place.”

“Well, well, you stand by the pony, and look that nobody takes anything out of the cart, while I go in for some parcels.”

“Yes, to be sure I will. But, I say, forester, how came you by that sword?”

“I will tell you when I come out again,” replied Oswald.

Oswald then went in to Edward, and told him what had occurred.

“He will certainly know you, sir, and you must not come out till I can get him away,” said he.

“You are right, Oswald. But before he goes, ask him what became of my aunt, and where she was buried, and also ask him where the other servants are—perhaps they are at Lymington as well as he.”

“I will find it all out,” replied Oswald, who then left Edward and returned to the landlord and recommenced conversation.

Oswald on his return told Benjamin in what manner

the sword had been procured from the shopman by the grandson of old Armitage.

"I never knew that he had one," replied Benjamin; "nor did I know that old Jacob was dead."

"What became of all the women who were at Arnwood?" inquired Oswald.

"Why, Agatha married one of the troopers, and went away to London."

"And the others?"

"Why, cook went home to her friends, who live about ten miles from here, and I have never heard of her since."

"But there were three of them," said Oswald.

"Oh yes; there was Phœbe," replied Benjamin, looking rather confused. "She married a trooper—the jilt!—and went off to London when Agatha did. If I'd have thought that she would have done so, I would not have carried her away from Arnwood behind me, on a pillion, as I did; she might have been burnt with the poor children, for all as I cared."

"Was not the old lady killed?"

"Yes; that is to say, she killed herself rather than not kill Southwold."

"Where was she buried?"

"In the churchyard at St. Faith's, by the mayor and corporation; for there was not money enough found upon her person to pay the expenses of her burial."

"And so you are tapster at the Commonwealth. Is it a good inn?"

"Can't say much for it. I shan't stay longer than I can help, I can tell you."

"Well, but you must have an easy place if you can stay away so long as you do now."

"Won't I be mobbed when I go back! but that's always the case, make haste or not, so it's all one. How-

ever, I do think I must be agoing now, so good-bye, Mr. Forester ; and tell Jacob Armitage's grandson that I shall be glad to see him, for old Jacob's sake ; and it's hard but I'll find him something to drink when he calls."

" I will : I shall see him to-morrow," replied Oswald, getting into the cart ; " so good-bye, Benjamin," much to the satisfaction of Oswald, who thought that he would never go.

They went away at a rapid pace to make up for lost time, and soon disappeared round the corner of the street. Oswald then got out again, summoned Edward, and having called for the flour and other heavy articles, they set off on their return.

During the drive Oswald made known to Edward the information which he had gained from Benjamin, and at a late hour they arrived safely at the cottage.

They stayed up but a short time, as they were tired ; and Oswald had resolved upon setting off before daylight on the following morning, which he did without disturbing any one ; for Humphrey was up and dressed as soon as Oswald was, and gave him something to eat as he went along. All the others remained fast asleep. Humphrey walked about a mile with Oswald, and was returning to the farm, when he thought, as he had not examined his pitfall for many days, that he might as well look at it before he went back. He therefore struck out in the direction in which it lay, and arrived there just as the day began to dawn.

It was the end of March, and the weather was mild for the season. Humphrey arrived at the pit, and it was sufficiently light for him to perceive that the covering had been broken in, and therefore, in all probability, something must have been trapped. He sat down and waited for daylight, but at times he thought he heard a

heavy breathing, and once a low groan. This made him more anxious, and he again and again peered into the pit, but could not for a long while discover anything, until at last he thought that he could make out a human figure lying at the bottom. Humphrey called out, asking if there was any one there. A groan was the reply, and now Humphrey was horrified at the idea that somebody had fallen into the pit, and had perished, or was perishing for want of succour. Recollecting that the rough ladder which he had made to take the soil up out of the pit was against an oak tree close at hand, he ran for it and put it down the pit, and then cautiously descended. On his arrival at the bottom, his fears were found to be verified, for he found the body of a lad half-clothed lying there. He turned it up, as it was lying with its face to the ground, and attempted to remove it and to ascertain if there was life in it, which he was delighted to find was the case. The lad groaned several times, and opened his eyes. Humphrey was afraid that he was not strong enough to lift it on his shoulders and carry it up the ladder; but on making the attempt, he found out, from exhaustion, the poor lad was light enough for him to carry him, which he did, and safely landed him by the side of the pit.

Recollecting that the watering-place of the herd of cattle was not far off, Humphrey then hastened to it, and filled his hat half full of water. The lad, although he could not speak, drank eagerly, and in a few minutes appeared much recovered. Humphrey gave him some more, and bathed his face and temples. The sun had now risen, and it was broad daylight. The lad attempted to speak, but what he did say was in so low a tone, and evidently in a foreign language, that Humphrey could not make him out. He therefore made

signs to the lad that he was going away, and would be back soon, and having, as he thought, made the lad comprehend this, Humphrey ran away to the cottage as fast as he could; and as soon as he arrived he called for Edward, who came out, and when Humphrey told him in few words what had happened, Edward went into the cottage again for some milk and some cake, while Humphrey put the pony into the cart.

In a few moments they were off again, and soon arrived at the pitfall, where they found the lad still lying where Humphrey had left him. They soaked the cake in the milk, and as soon as it was soft, gave him some; after a time he swallowed pretty freely, and was so much recovered as to be able to sit up. They then lifted him into the cart, and drove gently home to their cottage.

“What do you think he is, Edward?” said Humphrey.

“Some poor beggar lad who has been crossing the forest.”

“No, not exactly; he appears to me to be one of the Zingaros or gipsies, as they call them; he is very dark, and has black eyes and white teeth, just like those I saw once near Arnwood when I was out with Jacob. Jacob said that no one knew where they came from, but that they were all over the country, and that they were great thieves, and told fortunes and played all manner of tricks.”

“Perhaps it may be so; I do not think that he can speak English.”

“I am most thankful to Heaven that I chanced this morning to visit the pitfall! Only suppose that I had found the poor boy starved and dead! I should have been very unhappy, and never should have had any pleasure in looking at the cows, as they would always have reminded me of such a melancholy accident.”

"Very true, Humphrey; but you have been saved that misfortune, and ought to be grateful to Heaven that such is the case. What shall we do with him now we have him?"

"Why, if he chooses to remain with us, he will be very useful in the cow-yard," said Humphrey.

"Of course," replied Edward, laughing, "as he was taken in the pitfall, he must go into the yard with all the others who were captured in the same way."

"Well, Edward, let us get him all right again first, and then we will see what is to be done with him; perhaps he will refuse to remain with us."

As soon as they arrived at the cottage they lifted the lad out of the cart, and carried him into Jacob's room, and laid him on the bed, for he was too weak to stand.

Alice and Edith, who were much surprised at the new visitor, and the way in which he had been caught, hastened to get some gruel ready for him. As soon as it was ready, they gave it to the boy, who then fell back on the bed with exhaustion, and was soon in a sound sleep. He slept soundly all that night; and the next morning, when he awoke, he appeared much better, although very hungry. This last complaint was easy to remedy, and then the lad got up and walked into the sitting-room.

"What's your name?" said Humphrey to the lad:

"Pablo," replied the lad.

"Can you speak English?"

"Yes, little," replied he.

"How did you happen to fall into the pit?"

"Not see hole."

"Are you a gipsy?"

"Yes, Gitano—same thing."

Humphrey put a great many more questions to the

lad, and elicited from him, in his imperfect English, the following particulars.

That he was in company with several others of his race, going down to the sea-coast on one of their usual migrations, and that they had pitched their tents not far from the pitfall. That during the night he had gone out to set some snares for rabbits, and going back to the tents, it being quite dark, he had fallen into the hole. That he had remained there three days and nights, having in vain attempted to get out. His mother was with the party of gipsies to which he belonged; but he had no father. He did not know where to follow the gang, as they had not said where they were going, further than to the sea-coast. That it was no use looking for them; and that he did not care much about leaving them, as he was very unkindly treated. In reply to the question as to whether he would like to remain with them, and work with them on the farm, he replied that he should like it very much if they would be kind to him, and not make him work too hard; that he would cook the dinner, and catch them rabbits and birds, and make a great many things.

“Will you be honest, if we keep you, and not tell lies?” said Edward.

The lad thought a little while, and then nodded his head in the affirmative.

“Well, Pablo, we will try you, and if you are a good lad, we will do all we can to make you happy,” said Edward; “but if you behave ill, we shall be obliged to turn you out of doors: do you understand?”

“Be as good as I can,” replied Pablo; and here the conversation ended for the present.

Pablo was a very short-built lad, of apparently fifteen or sixteen years of age, very dark in complexion, but

very handsome in features, with beautiful white teeth and large dark eyes; and there was certainly something in his intelligent countenance which recommended him, independent of his claim to their kindness from his having been left thus friendless in consequence of his misadventure. Humphrey was particularly pleased with and interested about him, as the lad had so nearly lost his life through his means.

"I really think, Edward," said Humphrey, as they were standing outside of the door of the cottage, "that the lad may be very useful to us, and I sincerely hope that he may prove honest and true. We must first get him into health and spirits, and then I will see what he can do."

"The fact is, my dear Humphrey, we can do no otherwise: he is separated from his friends, and does not know where to go. It would be inhuman, as we have been the cause of his misfortune, to turn him away; but although I feel this, I do not feel much security as to his good behaviour and being very useful. I have always been told that these gipsies were vagrants, who lived by stealing all they could lay their hands upon; and if he has been brought up in that way I fear that he will not easily be reformed. However, we can but try, and hope for the best."

"What you say is very just, Edward; at the same time there is an honest look about this lad, although he is a gipsy, that makes me put a sort of confidence in him. Admitting that he has been taught to do wrong, do you not think that, when told the contrary, he may be persuaded to do right?"

"It is not impossible, certainly," replied Edward; "but, Humphrey, be on the safe side, and do not trust him too far until you know more of him."

"That I most certainly will not," replied Humphrey.

"When do you purpose going over to the keeper's cottage, Edward?"

"In a day or two; but I am not exactly in a humour now to be very civil to the Roundheads, although the one I have promised to visit is a lady, and a very amiable, pretty little girl in the bargain."

"Why, Edward, what has made you feel more opposed to them than usual?"

"In the first place, Humphrey, the murder of the King—for it was murder, and nothing better—I cannot get that out of my head; and yesterday I obtained what I consider as almost a gift from Heaven; and if it is so, it was not given but with the intention that I should make use of it."

"And what was that, Edward?"

"Our gallant father's sword, which he drew so nobly and so well in defence of his sovereign, Humphrey, and which I trust his son may one day wield with equal distinction, and, it may be, better fortune. Come in with me, and I will show it to you."

Edward and Humphrey went into the bedroom, and Edward brought out the sword, which he had placed by his side on the bed.

"See, Humphrey, this was our father's sword; and," continued Edward, kissing the weapon, "I trust I may be permitted to draw it to revenge his death, and the death of one whose life ever should have been sacred."

"I trust that you will, my dear brother," replied Humphrey; "you will have a strong arm and a good cause. Heaven grant that both may prosper! But tell me how you came by it?"

Edward then related all that had passed during his visit with Oswald to Lymington, not forgetting to tell him of Benjamin's appearance, and the arrangements he had made relative to the sale of the venison.

As soon as dinner was over, Edward and Humphrey took down their guns, having agreed that they would go and hunt the wild cattle.

"Humphrey, have you any idea where the herd of cattle are feeding at this time?"

"I know where they were feeding yesterday and the day before, and I do not think that they will have changed their ground; for the grass is yet very young, and only grown on the southern aspects. Depend upon it, we shall fall in with them not four miles from where we now are, if not nearer."

"We must stalk them as we do the deer, must we not? They won't allow us to approach within shot, Humphrey, will they?" said Edward.

"We have to take our chance, Edward; they will allow us to advance within shot, but the bulls will then advance upon us, while the herd increase their distance. On the other hand, if we stalk them, we may kill one, and then the report of the gun will frighten the others away. In the first instance there is a risk; in the second there is none, but there is more fatigue and trouble. Choose as you please; I will act as you decide."

"Well, Humphrey, since you give me the choice, I think that this time I shall take the bull by the horns, as the saying is—that is, if there are any trees near us, for if the herd are in an open place I would not run such a risk; but if we can fire upon them and fall back upon a tree in case of a bull charging, I will take them openly."

"With all my heart, Edward: I think it will be very hard, if, with our two guns and Smoker to back us, we do not manage to be masters of the field. However, we must survey well before we make our approach; and if we can get within shot without alarming or irritating them, we of course will do so."

"The bulls are very savage at this spring-time," observed Edward.

"They are so at all times, as far as I can see of them," replied Humphrey; "but we are near to them now I should think—yes, there is the herd."

"There they are, sure enough," replied Edward: "now we have not to do with deer, and need not be so very cautious; but still the animals are wary, and keep a sharp lookout. We must approach them quietly, by slipping from tree to tree. Smoker, to heel!—down—quiet, Smoker—good dog!"

Edward and Humphrey stopped to load their guns, and then approached the herd in the manner which had been proposed, and were very soon within two hundred yards of the cattle, behind a large oak, when they stopped to reconnoitre. The herd contained about seventy head of cattle of various sizes and ages. They were feeding in all directions, scattered, as the young grass was very short; but although the herd was spread over many acres of land, Edward pointed out to Humphrey that all the full-grown large bulls were on the outside, as if ready to defend the others in case of attack.

"Humphrey," said Edward, "one thing is clear—as the herd is placed at present we must have a bull or nothing. It is impossible to get within shot of the others without passing a bull, and depend upon it our passage will be disputed; and moreover, the herd will take to flight, and we shall get nothing at all."

"Well," replied Humphrey, "beef is beef; and, as they say, beggars must not be choosers, so let it be a bull, if it must be so."

"Let us get nearer to them, and then we will decide what we shall do. Steady, Smoker!"

They advanced gradually, hiding from tree to tree,

until they were within eighty yards of one of the bulls. The animal did not perceive them, and as they were now within range, they again stepped behind the tree to consult.

"Now, Edward, I think that it would be best to separate. You can fire from where we are, and I will crawl through the fern, and get behind another tree."

"Very well, do so," replied Edward; "if you can manage, get to that tree with the low branches, and then perhaps you will be within shot of the white bull, which is coming down in this direction. Smoker, lie down! He cannot go with you, Humphrey; it will not be safe."

The distance of the tree which Humphrey ventured to get to was about one hundred and fifty yards from where Edward was standing. Humphrey crawled along for some time in the fern, but at last he came to a bare spot of about ten yards wide, which they were not aware of, and where he could not be concealed. Humphrey hesitated, and at last decided upon attempting to cross it. Edward, who was one moment watching the motions of Humphrey and at another that of the two animals nearest to them, perceived that the white bull farthest from him, but nearest to Humphrey, threw its head in the air, pawed with his foot, and then advanced with a roar to where Humphrey was on the ground, still crawling towards the tree, having passed the open spot, and being now not many yards from the tree. Perceiving the danger that his brother was in, and that, moreover, Humphrey himself was not aware of it, he hardly knew how to act. The bull was too far from him to fire at it with any chance of success; and how to let Humphrey know that the animal had discovered him and was making towards him, without calling out, he did not know. All this was the thought

of a moment, and then Edward determined to fire at the bull nearest to him, which he had promised not to do till Humphrey was also ready to fire; and after firing, to call Humphrey. He, therefore, for one moment turned away from his brother, and, taking aim at the bull, fired his gun; but probably from his nerves being a little shaken at the idea of Humphrey being in danger, the wound was not mortal, and the bull galloped back to the herd, which formed a close phalanx about a quarter of a mile distant. Edward then turned to, where his brother was, and perceived that the bull had not made off with the rest of the cattle, but was within thirty yards of Humphrey, and advancing upon him, and that Humphrey was standing up beside the tree with his gun ready to fire. Humphrey fired, and, as it appeared, he also missed his aim; the animal made at him; but Humphrey, with great quickness, dropped his gun, and, swinging by the lower boughs, was into the tree, and out of the bull's reach in a moment. Edward smiled when he perceived that Humphrey was safe; but still he was a prisoner, for the bull went round and round the tree roaring and looking up at Humphrey. Edward thought a minute, then loaded his gun, and ordered Smoker to run in to the bull. The dog, who had only been restrained by Edward's keeping him down at his feet, sprang forward to the attack. Edward had intended, by calling to the dog, to induce the bull to follow it till within gunshot; but before the bull had been attacked, Edward observed that one or two more of the bulls had left the herd, and were coming at a rapid pace towards him. Under these circumstances Edward perceived that his only chance was to climb into a tree himself, which he did, taking good care to take his gun and ammunition with him. Having safely fixed himself in a forked

bough, Edward then surveyed the position of the parties. There was Humphrey in the tree, without his gun. The bull who had pursued Humphrey was now running at Smoker, who appeared to be aware that he was to decoy the bull towards Edward, for he kept retreating towards him. In the meantime the two other bulls were quite close at hand, mingling their bellowing and roaring with the first; and one of them as near to Edward as the first bull, which was engaged with Smoker. At last one of the advancing bulls stood still, pawing the ground as if disappointed at not finding an enemy, not forty yards from where Edward was perched. Edward took good aim, and when he fired the bull fell dead. Edward was reloading his piece when he heard a howl, and looking round saw Smoker flying up in the air, having been tossed by the first bull; and at the same time he observed that Humphrey had descended from the tree, recovered his gun, and was now safe again upon the lower bough. The first bull was advancing again to attack Smoker, who appeared incapable of getting away, so much was he injured by the fall, when the other bull, who apparently must have been an old antagonist of the first, roared and attacked him; and now the two boys were up in the tree, the two bulls fighting between them, and Smoker lying on the ground, panting and exhausted. As the bulls, with locked horns, were furiously pressing each other, both guns were discharged, and both animals fell. After waiting a little while to see if they rose again, or if any more of the herd came up, Edward and Humphrey descended from the trees and heartily shook hands.