

CHAPTER XII.

"A NARROW escape, Humphrey!" said Edward, as he held his brother's hand.

"Yes, indeed, we may thank Heaven for our preservation," replied Humphrey. "And poor Smoker! Let us see if he is much hurt."

"I trust not," said Edward, going up to the dog, who remained quite still on the ground, with his tongue out, and panting violently.

They examined poor Smoker all over very carefully, and found that there was no external wound; but on Edward pressing his side, the animal gave a low howl.

"It is there where the horn of the bull took him," observed Humphrey.

"Yes," said Edward, pressing and feeling softly; "and he has two of his ribs broken. Humphrey, see if you can get him a little water; that will recover him more than anything else. The bull has knocked the breath out of his body. I think he will soon be well again, poor fellow."

Humphrey soon returned with some water from a neighbouring pool. He brought it in his hat, and gave it to the dog, who lapped it slowly at first, but afterwards much faster, and wagging his tail.

"He will do now," said Edward; "we must give him time to recover himself. Now then, let us examine our quarry. Why, Humphrey, what a quantity

of meat we have here! It will take three journeys to Lymington at least."

"Yes, and no time to lose, for the weather is getting warm already, Edward. Now, what to do? Will you remain while I go home for the cart?"

"Yes, it's no use both going. I will stay here and watch poor Smoker, and take off the skins ready by the time you are back again. Leave me your knife as well as my own, for one will soon be blunt."

Humphrey gave his knife to Edward, and taking up his gun, set off for the cottage. Edward had skinned two of the bulls before Humphrey's return; and Smoker, although he evidently was in great pain, was on his legs again. As soon as they had finished and quartered the beasts, the cart was loaded, and they returned home; they had to return a second time, and both the pony and they were very tired before they sat down to supper. They found the gipsy boy very much recovered, and in good spirits. Alice said that he had been amusing Edith and her by tossing up three potatoes at a time, and playing them like balls; and that he had spun a platter upon an iron skewer and balanced it on his chin. They gave him some supper, which he ate in the chimney-corner, looking up and staring every now and then at Edith, to whom he appeared very much attached already.

"Is it good?" said Humphrey to the boy, giving him another venison steak.

"Yes; not have so good supper in pit-hole," replied Pablo, laughing.

Early on the following morning Edward and Humphrey set off to Lymington with the cart laden with meat. Edward showed Humphrey all the shops and the streets they were in where the purchases were to be made—introduced him to the landlord of the hos-

telrie—and having sold their meat, they returned home. The rest of the meat was taken to Lymington and disposed of by Humphrey on the following day; and the day after that the three skins were carried to the town and disposed of.

“We made a good day’s work, Edward,” said Humphrey, as he reckoned up the money they had made.

“We earned it with some risk, at all events,” replied Edward; “and now, Humphrey, I think it is time that I keep my promise to Oswald, and go over to the Intendant’s house, and pay my visit to the young lady, as I presume she is—and certainly she has every appearance of being one. I want the visit to be over, as I want to be doing.”

“How do you mean, Edward?”

“I mean that I want to go out and kill some deer; but I will not do it till after I have seen her. When my visit is over, I intend to defy the Intendant and all his verderers.”

“But why should this visit prevent you going out this very day, if so inclined?”

“I don’t know, but she may ask me if I have done so, and I do not want to tell her that I have; neither do I want to say that I have not if I have; and therefore I shall not commence till after I have seen her.”

“When will you set off?”

“To-morrow morning; and I shall take my gun, although Oswald desired me not; but, after the fight we had with the wild cattle the other day, I don’t think it prudent to be unarmed; indeed, I do not feel comfortable without I have my gun at any time.”

“Well, I shall have plenty to do when you are away—the potatoes must be hoed up, and I shall see what I can make of Master Pablo. He appears well enough, and he has played quite long enough, so I shall take

him with me to the garden to-morrow, and set him to work. What a quantity of fruit there is a promise of in the orchard this year! And, Edward, if this boy turns out of any use, and is a help to me, I think that I shall take all the orchard into garden, and then enclose another piece of ground, and see if we cannot grow some corn for ourselves. It is the greatest expense that we have at present, and I should like to take my own corn to the mill to be ground."

"But will not growing corn require plough and horses?" said Edward.

"No; we will till it by hand: two of us can dig a great deal at odd times, and we shall have a better crop with the spade than with the plough. We have now so much manure that we can afford it."

"Well, if it is to be done, it should be done at once, Humphrey, before the people from the other side of the forest come and find us out, or they will dispute our right to the enclosure."

"The forest belongs to the King, brother, and not to the Parliament; and we are the King's liege men, and only look to him for permission," replied Humphrey. "But what you say is true: the sooner it is done the better, and I will about it at once."

"How much do you propose fencing in?"

"About two or three acres."

"But that is more than you can dig this year or the next."

"I know that; but I will manure it without digging, and the grass will grow so rich to what it will outside of the enclosure, that they will suppose it has been enclosed a long while."

"That's not a bad idea, Humphrey; but I advise you to look well after that boy, for he is of a bad race, and has not been brought up, I am afraid, with too strict

notions of honesty. Be careful, and tell your sisters also to be cautious not to let him suppose that we have any money in the old chest, till we find out whether he is to be trusted or not."

"Better not let him know it under any circumstances," replied Humphrey. "He may continue honest if not tempted by the knowledge that there is anything worth stealing."

"You are right, Humphrey. Well, I will be off to-morrow morning and get this visit over. I hope to be able to get all the news from her, now that her father is away."

"I hope to get some work out of this Master Pablo," replied Humphrey. "How many things I could do, if he would only work! Now, I'll tell you one thing. I will dig a sawpit and get a saw, and then I can cut out boards, and build anything we want. The first time I go to Lymington I will buy a saw—I can afford it now; and I'll make a carpenter's bench for the first thing, and then, with some more tools, I shall get on; and then, Edward, I'll tell you what else I will do."

"Then, Humphrey," replied Edward, laughing, "you must tell me some other time, for it is now very late, and I must go to bed, as I have to rise early. I know you have so many projects in your mind that it would take half the night to listen to them."

"Well, I believe what you say is true," replied Humphrey, "and it will be better to do one thing at a time than to talk about doing a hundred; so we will, as you say, to bed."

At sunrise Edward and Humphrey were both up. Alice came out when they tapped at her door, as she would not let Edward go without his breakfast. Edith joined them, and they went to prayers. While they were so employed, Pablo came out and listened to what

was said. When prayers were over, Humphrey asked Pablo if he knew what they had been doing.

"No, not much; suppose you pray sun to shine."

"No, Pablo," said Edith; "pray to God to make us good."

"You bad then?" said Pablo. "Me not bad."

"Yes, Pablo, everybody very bad," said Alice; "but if we try to be good, God forgives us."

The conversation was then dropped, and as soon as Edward had made his breakfast he kissed his sisters, and wished Humphrey farewell.

Edward threw his gun over his arm, and calling his puppy, which he had named Holdfast, bade Humphrey and his sisters farewell, and set off on his journey across the forest.

Holdfast, as well as Humphrey's puppy, which had been named Watch, had grown very fine young animals. The first had been named Holdfast, because it would seize the pigs by the ears and lead them into the sty; and the other, because it was so alert at the least noise; but, as Humphrey said, Watch ought to have learnt to lead the pigs, it being more in his line of business than Holdfast's, which was to be brought up for hunting in the forest, while Watch was being educated as a house and farmyard dog.

Edward had refused to take the pony, as Humphrey required it for the farm work, and the weather was so fine that he preferred walking—the more so as it would enable him on his return across the forest to try for some venison, which he could not have done if he had been mounted on Billy's back. Edward walked quick, followed by his dog, which he had taught to keep to heel. He felt happy, as people do who have no cares, from the fine weather—the deep green of the verdure chequered by the flowers in bloom, and the majestic scenery

which met his eye on every side. His heart was as buoyant as his steps; as he walked along, the light summer breeze fanning his face. His thoughts, however, which had been more of the chase than anything else, suddenly changed, and he became serious. For some time he had heard no political news of consequence, or what the Commons were doing with the King. This reverie naturally brought to his mind his father's death, the burning of his property, and its sequestration. His cheeks coloured with indignation, and his brow was moody. Then he built castles for the future. He imagined the King released from his prison, and leading an army against his oppressors; he fancied himself at the head of a troop of cavalry, charging the Parliamentary horse. Victory was on his side. The King was again on his throne, and he was again in possession of the family estate. He was rebuilding the hall, and somehow or another it appeared to him that Patience was standing by his side, as he gave directions to the artificers, when his reverie was suddenly disturbed by Holdfast barking and springing forward in advance.

Edward, who had by this time got over more than half his journey, looked up, and perceived himself confronted by a powerful man, apparently about forty years of age, and dressed as a verderer of the forest. He thought at the time that he had seldom seen a person with a more sinister and forbidding countenance.

"How now, young fellow, what are you doing here?" said the man, walking up to him, and cocking the gun which he held in his hand as he advanced.

Edward quietly cocked his own gun, which was loaded, when he perceived that hostile preparation on the part of the other person, and then replied, "I am walking across the forest, as you may perceive."

"Yes, I perceive you are walking, and you are walk-

ing with a dog and a gun ; you will now be pleased to walk with me. Deer-stealers are not any longer permitted to range this forest."

"I am no deer-stealer," replied Edward. "It will be quite sufficient to give me that title when you find me with venison in my possession ; and as for going with you, that I certainly shall not. Sheer off, or you may meet with harm."

"Why, you young good-for-nothing, if you have not venison, it is not from any will not to take it ; you are out in pursuit of it, that is clear. Come, come, you've the wrong person to deal with : my orders are to take up all poachers, and take you I will."

"If you can," replied Edward. "But you must first prove that you are able so to do. My gun is as good and my aim is as sure as yours, whoever you may be. I tell you again I am no poacher, nor have I come out to take the deer, but to cross over to the Intendant's cottage, whither I am now going. I tell you thus much, that you may not do anything foolish ; and having said this, I advise you to think twice before you act once. Let me proceed in peace, or you may lose your place, if you do not, by your own rashness, lose your life."

There was something so cool and so determined in Edward's quiet manner that the verderer hesitated. He perceived that any attempt to take Edward would be at the risk of his own life ; and he knew that his orders were to apprehend all poachers, but not to shoot people. It was true that resistance with firearms would warrant his acting in self-defence ; but admitting that he should succeed, which was doubtful, still Edward had not been caught in the act of killing venison, and he had no witnesses to prove what had occurred. He also knew that the Intendant had given very strict orders as to the shedding of blood which he was most averse to,

under any circumstances ; and there was something in Edward's appearance and manner so different from a common person that he was puzzled. Moreover, Edward had stated that he was going to the Intendant's house. All things considered, as he found that bullying would not succeed, he thought it advisable to change his tone, and therefore said,—

“ You tell me that you are going to the Intendant's house ; you have business there, I presume ? If I took you prisoner, it is there I should have conducted you ; so, young man, you may now walk on before me.”

“ I thank you,” replied Edward, “ but walk on before you I will not ; but if you choose to half-cock your gun again, and walk by my side, I will do the same. Those are my terms, and I will listen to no other ; so be pleased to make up your mind, as I am in haste.”

The verderer appeared very indignant at this reply, but after a time said, “ Be it so.”

Edward then uncocked his gun, with his eyes fixed upon the man, and the verderer did the same ; and then they walked side by side, Edward keeping at the distance of three yards from him, in case of treachery.

After a few moments' silence the verderer said,—

“ You tell me you are going to the Intendant's house : he is not at home.”

“ But young Mistress Patience is, I presume,” said Edward.

“ Yes,” replied the man, who, finding that Edward appeared to know so much about the Intendant's family, began to be more civil—“ yes, she is at home, for I saw her in the garden this morning.”

“ And Oswald, is he at home ? ” rejoined Edward.

“ Yes, he is. You appear to know our people, young man. Who may you be, if it is a fair question ? ”

“ It would have been a fair question had you treated

me fairly," replied Edward; "but as it is no concern of yours, I shall leave you to find it out."

This reply puzzled the man still more, and he now, from the tone of authority assumed by Edward, began to imagine that he had made some mistake, and that he was speaking to a superior, although clad in a forester's dress. He therefore answered humbly, observing that he had only been doing his duty.

Edward walked on without making any reply.

As they arrived within a hundred yards of the Intendant's house, Edward said,—

"I have now arrived at my destination, and am going into that house, as I told you. Do you choose to enter it with me, or will you go to Oswald Partridge and tell him that you have met with Edward Armitage in the forest, and that I should be glad to see him? I believe you are under his orders, are you not?"

"Yes, I am," replied the verderer, "and as I suppose that all's right, I shall go and deliver your message."

Edward then turned away from the man, and went into the wicket-gate of the garden, and knocked at the door of the house. The door was opened by Patience Heatherstone herself, who said, "Oh, how glad I am to see you! Come in." Edward took off his hat and bowed. Patience led the way into her father's study, where Edward had been first received.

"And now," said Patience, extending her hand to Edward, "thanks, many thanks, for your preserving me from so dreadful a death. You don't know how unhappy I have been at not being able to give you my poor thanks for your courageous behaviour."

Her hand still remained in Edward's while she said this.

"You rate what I did too highly," replied Edward; "I would have done the same for any one in such dis-

tress: it was my duty as a—man”—cavalier he was about to say, but he checked himself.

“Sit down,” said Patience, taking a chair; “nay, no ceremony. I cannot treat as an inferior one to whom I owe such a debt of gratitude.”

Edward smiled as he took his seat.

“My father is as grateful to you as I am—I’m sure that he is; for I heard him when at prayer call down blessings on your head. What can he do for you? I begged Oswald Partridge to bring you here, that I might find out. O sir, do pray let me know how we can show our gratitude by something more than words.”

“You have shown it already, Mistress Patience,” replied Edward. “Have you not honoured a poor forester with your hand in friendship, and even admitted him to sit down before you?”

“He who has preserved my life at the risk of his own becomes to me as a brother—at least I feel as a sister towards him. A debt is still a debt, whether indebted to a king or to a——”

“Forester, Mistress Patience—that is the real word that you should not have hesitated to have used. Do you imagine that I am ashamed of my calling?”

“To tell you candidly the truth, then,” replied Patience, “I cannot believe that you are what you profess to be. I mean to say that, although a forester now, you were never brought up as such. My father has an opinion allied to mine.”

“I thank you both for your good opinion of me, but I fear that I cannot raise myself above the condition of a forester; nay, from your father’s coming down here, and the new regulations, I have every chance of sinking down to the lower grade of a deer-stealer and poacher. Indeed, had it not been that I had my gun with me,

I should have been seized as such this very day as I came over."

"But you were not shooting the deer, were you, sir?" inquired Patience.

"No, I was not; nor have I killed any since last I saw you."

"I am glad that I can say that to my father," replied Patience; "it will much please him. He said to me that he thought you capable of much higher employment than any that could be offered here, and only wished to know what you would accept. He has interest—great interest—although just now at variance with the rulers of this country, on account of the——"

"Murder of the King you would or should have said, Mistress Patience. I have heard how much he was opposed to that foul deed, and I honour him for it."

"How kind, how truly kind you are to say so!" said Patience, the tears starting in her eyes. "What pleasure to hear my father's conduct praised by you!"

"Why, of course, Mistress Patience, all of my way of thinking must praise him. Your father is in London, I hear?"

"Yes, he is; and that reminds me that you must want some refreshment after your walk. I will call Phœbe." So saying, Patience left the room.

The fact was, Mistress Patience was reminded that she had been sitting with a young man some time, and alone with him—which was not quite proper in those times—and when Phœbe appeared with the cold viands she retreated out of hearing, but remained in the room.

Edward partook of the meal offered him in silence, Patience occupying herself with her work, and keeping her eyes fixed on it, unless when she gave a slight glance

at the table to see if anything was required. When the meal was over Phœbe removed the tray, and then Edward rose to take his leave.

"Nay, do not go yet ; I have much to say first. Let me again ask you how we can serve you."

"I never can take any office under the present rulers of the nation. So that question is at rest."

"I was afraid you would answer so," replied Patience gravely. "Do not think I blame you ; for many are there already who would gladly retrace their steps if it were possible. They little thought, when they opposed the King, that affairs would have ended as they have done. Where do you live, sir ?"

"At the opposite side of the forest, in a house belonging to me now, but which was inherited by my grandfather."

"Do you live alone ? surely not."

"No, I do not."

"Nay, you may tell me anything, for I would never repeat what might hurt you, or you might not wish to have known."

"I live with my brother and two sisters, for my grandfather is lately dead."

"Is your brother younger than you are ?"

"He is."

"And your sisters, what are their ages ?"

"They are younger still."

"You told my father that you lived upon your farm ?"

"We do."

"Is it a large farm ?"

"No ; very small."

"And does that support you ?"

"That and killing wild cattle has lately."

"Yes, and killing deer also until lately ?"

"You have guessed right."

"You were brought up at Arnwood, you told my father; did you not?"

"Yes, I was brought up there, and remained there until the death of Colonel Beverley."

"And you were educated, were you not?"

"Yes; the chaplain taught me what little I do know."

"Then, if you were brought up in the house and educated by the chaplain, surely Colonel Beverley never intended you for a forester?"

"He did not. I was to have been a soldier as soon as I was old enough to bear arms."

"Perhaps you are distantly related to the late Colonel Beverley?"

"No, I am not *distantly* related," replied Edward, who began to feel uneasy at this close cross-examination; "but still, had Colonel Beverley been alive, and the King still required his services, I have no doubt that I should have been serving under him at this time. And now, Mistress Patience, that I have answered so many questions of yours, may I be permitted to ask a little about yourself in return? Have you any brothers?"

"None; I am an only child."

"Have you only one parent alive?"

"Only one."

"What families are you connected with?"

Patience looked up with surprise at this last question.

"My mother's name was Cooper; she was sister to Sir Anthony Ashley Cooper, who is a person well known."

"Indeed! Then you are of gentle blood?"

"I believe so," replied Patience, with surprise.

"Thank you for your condescension, Mistress Patience. And now, if you will permit me, I will take my leave."

"Before you go, let me once more thank you for saving a worthless life," said Patience. "Well, you must come again when my father is here. He will be but too

glad to have an opportunity of thanking one who has preserved his only child. Indeed, if you knew my father, you would feel as much regard for him as I do. He is very good, although he looks so stern and melancholy; but he has seldom smiled since my poor mother's death."

"As to your father, Mistress Patience, I will think as well as I can of one who is joined to a party which I hold in detestation. I can say no more."

"I must not say all that I know, or you would perhaps find out that he is not quite so wedded to that party as you suppose. Neither his brother-in-law nor he are great friends of Cromwell's, I can assure you; but this in confidence."

"That raises him in my estimation. But why, then, does he hold office?"

"He did not ask it—it was given to him, I really believe, because they wished him out of the way; and he accepted it because he was opposed to what was going on, and wished himself to be away. At least I infer so much from what I have learnt. It is not an office of power or trust which leagues him with the present Government."

"No; only one which opposes him to me and my malpractices," replied Edward, laughing. "Well, Mistress Patience, you have shown great condescension to a poor forester, and I return you many thanks for your kindness towards me. I will now take my leave."

"And when will you come and see my father?"

"I cannot say. I fear that I shall not be able very soon to look in his injured face, and it will not be well for a poacher to come near him," replied Edward. "However, some day I may be taken and brought before you as a prisoner, you know, and then he is certain to see me."

"I will not tell you to kill deer," replied Patience;

“but if you do kill them, no one shall harm you—or I know little of my power or my father’s. Farewell, then, sir; and once more gratitude and thanks.”

Patience held out her hand again to Edward, who this time, like a true Cavalier, raised it respectfully to his lips. Patience coloured a little, but did not attempt to withdraw it; and Edward, with a low obeisance, quitted the room.