

CHAPTER XIII.

As soon as he was out of the Intendant's house Edward hastened to the cottage of Oswald Partridge, whom he found waiting for him; for the verderer had not failed to deliver his message.

"You have had a long talk with Mistress Patience," said Oswald, after the first greeting; "and I am glad of it, as it gives you consequence here. The Round-head rascal whom you met was inclined to be very precise about doing his duty, and insisted that he was certain that you were on the lookout for deer; but I stopped his mouth by telling him that I often took you out with me, as you were the best shot in the whole forest, and that the Intendant knew that I did so. I think that if you were caught in the act of killing a deer you had better tell them that you killed it by my request; and I will bear you out, if they bring you to the Intendant, who will, I'm sure, thank me for saying so. You might kill all the deer in the forest, after what you have done for him."

"Many thanks; but I do not think I can take advantage of your offer. Let them catch me if they can, and if they do catch me, let them take me if they can."

"I see, sir, that you will accept no favour from the Roundheads," replied Oswald. "However, as I am now head keeper, I shall take care that my men do not interfere with you, if I can help it. All I wish is to prevent

any insult or indignity being offered to you—they not being aware who you are, as I am.”

“Many thanks, Oswald. I must take my chance.”

Edward then told Oswald of their having taken the gipsy boy in the pit, at which he appeared much amused.

“What is the name of the verderer whom I met in the forest?” inquired Edward.

“James Corbould. He was discharged from the army,” replied Oswald.

“I do not like his appearance,” said Edward.

“No; his face tells against him,” replied Oswald.

“But I know nothing of him. he has been here little more than a fortnight.”

“Can you give me a corner to put my head in to-night, Oswald? for I shall not start till to-morrow morning.”

“You may command all I have, sir,” replied Oswald.

“But I fear there is little more than a hearty welcome. I have no doubt that you could be lodged at the Intendant’s house if you choose.”

“No, Oswald; the young lady is alone, and I will not trust to Phœbe’s accommodation again. I will stay here, if you will permit me.”

“And welcome, sir. I will put your puppy in the kennel at once.”

Edward remained that night at Oswald’s, and at daylight he rose, and having taken a slight breakfast, throwing his gun over his shoulder, went to the kennel for Holdfast, and set off on his return home.

“That’s a very nice little girl,” were the words which Edward found himself constantly saying to himself as he walked along; “and she is of a grateful disposition, or she would not have behaved as she has done towards me—supposing me to be of mean birth.” And then he thought of what she had told him relative to her father,

and Edward felt his animosity against a Roundhead wasting fast away. "I am not likely to see her again very soon," thought Edward, "unless, indeed, I am brought to the Intendant as a prisoner." Thus thinking upon one subject or another, Edward had gained above eight miles of his journey across the forest, when he thought that he was sufficiently far away to venture to look out for some venison. Remembering there was a thicket not far from him, in which there was a clear pool of water, Edward thought it very likely that he might find a stag there cooling himself, for the weather was now very warm at noonday. He therefore called Holdfast to him, and proceeded cautiously towards the thicket. As soon as he arrived at the spot he crouched and crept silently through the underwood. At last he arrived close to the cleared spot by the pool. There was no stag there, but fast asleep upon the turf lay James Corbould, the sinister-looking verderer who had accosted him in the forest on the previous day. Holdfast was about to bark, when Edward silenced him, and then advanced to where the verderer was lying, and who, having no dog with him to give notice of Edward's approach, still remained snoring with the sun shining on his face. Edward perceived that his gun was under him on the grass. He took it up, gently opened the pan and scattered the powder, and then laid it down again; for Edward said to himself, "That man has come out after me, that I am certain; and as there are no witnesses, he may be inclined to be mischievous, for a more wretched looking person I never saw. Had he been deer-hunting he would have brought his dog; but he is man-hunting, that is evident. Now I will leave him, and should he fall in with anything, he will not kill at first shot, that's certain; and if he follows me, I shall have the same chance of escape as anything else he may fire at." Edward

then walked out of the covert, thinking that if ever there was a face which proclaimed a man to be a murderer, it was that of James Corbould. As he was threading his way, he heard the howl of a dog, and on looking round, perceived that Holdfast was not with him. He turned back, and Holdfast came running to him. The fact was that Holdfast had smelt some meat in the pocket of the verderer, and had been putting his nose in to ascertain what it was. In so doing he had wakened up Corbould, who had saluted him with a heavy blow on the head. This occasioned the puppy to give the howl, and also occasioned Corbould to seize his gun and follow stealthily in the track of the dog, which he well knew to be the one he had seen the day before with Edward.

Edward waited for a short time, and not perceiving that Corbould made his appearance, continued on his way home, having now given up all thoughts of killing any venison. He walked fast, and was within six miles of the cottage, when he stopped to drink at a small rill of water, and then sat down to rest himself for a short time. While so doing, he fell into one of his usual reveries, and forgot how time passed away. He was, however, aroused by a low growl on the part of Holdfast, and it immediately occurred to him that Corbould must have followed him. Thinking it as well to be prepared, he quietly loaded his gun, and then rose up to reconnoitre. Holdfast sprang forward, and Edward, looking in the direction, perceived Corbould partly hidden behind a tree, with his gun levelled at him. He heard the trigger pulled, and snap of the lock, but the gun did not go off; and then Corbould made his appearance, striking at Holdfast with the butt-end of his gun. Edward advanced to him and desired him to desist, or it would be the worse for him.

"Indeed, younker! it may be the worse for you," cried Corbould.

"It might have been if your gun had gone off," replied Edward.

"I did not aim at you; I aimed at the dog, and I will kill the brute if I can."

"Not without danger to yourself; but it was not him that you aimed at—your gun was not pointed low enough to hit the dog—it was levelled at me, you sneaking wretch; and I have only to thank my own prudence and your sleepy head for having escaped with my life. I tell you candidly that I threw the powder out of your pan while you were asleep. If I served you as you deserve, I should now put my bullet into you; but I cannot kill a man who is defenceless—and that saves your life. But set off as fast as you can away from me, for if you follow me I will show no more forbearance. Away with you directly," continued Edward, raising his gun to his shoulder and pointing it to Corbould; "if you do not be off, I'll fire."

Corbould saw that Edward was resolute, and thought proper to comply with his request. He walked away till he considered himself out of gunshot, and then commenced a torrent of oaths and abusive language, with which we shall not offend our readers. Before he went further, he swore that he would have Edward's life before many days had passed, and then shaking his fist he went away. Edward remained where he was standing till the man was fairly out of sight, and then proceeded on his journey. It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon, and Edward, as he walked on, said to himself, "That man must be of a very wicked disposition, for I have offended him in nothing except in not submitting to be made his prisoner; and is that an offence to take a man's life for? He is a dangerous

man, and will be more dangerous after being again foiled by me as he has been to-day. I doubt if he will go home. I am almost sure that he will turn and follow me when he thinks that he can without my seeing him; and if he does, he will find out where our cottage is—and who knows what mischief he may not do, and how he may alarm my little sisters? I'll not go home till dark; and I'll now walk in another direction, that I may mislead him." Edward then walked away more to the north, and every half-hour shifted his course, so as to be walking in a very different direction from where the cottage stood. In the meantime it grew gradually dark; and as it became so, every now and then when Edward passed a large tree, he turned round behind it and looked to see if Corbould was following him. At last, just as it was dark, he perceived the figure of a man at no great distance from him, who was following him, running from tree to tree, so as to make his approach. "Oh, you are there!" thought Edward. "Now will I give you a nice dance, and we will see whose legs are tired soonest. Let me see—where am I?" Edward looked round, and then perceived that he was close to the clump of trees where Humphrey had made his pitfall for the cattle, and there was a clear spot of about a quarter of a mile between it and where he now stood. Edward made up his mind, and immediately walked out to cross the clearing, calling Holdfast to heel. It was now nearly dark, for there was only the light of the stars; but still there was sufficient light to see his way. As Edward crossed the cleared spot, he once looked round, and perceived that Corbould was following him, and nearer than he was before, trusting probably to the increased darkness to hide his approach. "That will do," thought Edward. "Come along, my fine fellow." And Edward walked on till he came to the pitfall; there he

stopped and looked round, and soon discovered the vorderer at a hundred yards' distance. Edward held his dog by the mouth that he should not growl or bark, and then went on in a direction so as to bring the pitfall exactly between Corbould and himself. Having done so, he proceeded at a more rapid pace; and Corbould, following him, also increased his, till he arrived at the pitfall, which he could not perceive, and fell into it headlong; and as he fell into the pit, at the same time Edward heard the discharge of his gun, the crash of the small branches laid over it, and a cry on the part of Corbould. "That will do," thought Edward. "Now you may lie there as long as the gipsy did, and that will cool your courage. Humphrey's pitfall is full of adventure. In this case it has done me a service. Now I may turn and go home as fast as I can. Come, Holdfast, old boy; we both want our suppers. I can answer for one, for I could eat the whole of that pasty which Oswald set before me this morning." Edward walked at a rapid pace, quite delighted at the issue of the adventure. As he arrived near to the cottage, he found Humphrey outside, with Pablo, on the lookout for him. He soon joined them, and soon after embraced Alice and Edith, who had been anxiously waiting for his return, and who had wondered at his being out so late. "Give me my supper, my dear girls," said Edward, "and then you shall know all about it."

As soon as Edward had satisfied his craving appetite—for he had not, as my readers must recollect, eaten anything since his departure early in the morning from the house of Oswald Partridge—he entered into a narrative of the events of the day. They all listened with great interest; and when Edward had finished, Pablo, the gipsy boy, jumped up, and said,—

"Now he is in the pit, to-morrow morning I take gun and shoot him."

"No, no, Pablo, you must not do that," replied Edward, laughing.

"Pablo," said little Edith, "go and sit down; you must not shoot people."

"He shoot Master then," said Pablo. "He very bad man."

"But if you shoot him, you will be a bad boy, Pablo," replied Edith, who appeared to have assumed an authority over him. Pablo did not appear to understand this, but he obeyed the order of his little mistress, and resumed his seat at the chimney corner.

"But, Edward," said Humphrey, "what do you propose to do?"

"I hardly know. My idea was to let him remain there for a day or two, and then send to Oswald to let him know where the fellow was."

"The only objection to that is," replied Humphrey, "that you say his gun went off as he fell into the pit. It may be probable that he is wounded, and if so he might die if he is left there."

"You are right, Humphrey—that is possible; and I would not have the life of a fellow-creature on my conscience."

"I think it would be advisable, Edward, that I should set off early to-morrow on the pony, and see Oswald, tell him all that has occurred, and show him where the pitfall is."

"I believe that would be the best plan, Humphrey."

"Yes," said Alice; "it would be dreadful that a man should die in so wicked a state. Let him be taken out, and perhaps he will repent."

"Won't God punish him, brother?" said Edith.

"Yes, my dear, sooner or later the vengeance of

Heaven overtakes the wicked. But I am very tired after so long a walk. Let us go to prayers, and then to bed."

The danger that Edward had incurred that day was felt strongly by the whole party; and, with the exception of Pablo, there was earnest devotion and gratitude to Heaven when their orisons were offered up.

Humphrey was off before daybreak, and at nine o'clock had arrived at the cottage of Oswald, by whom he was warmly greeted before the cause of his unexpected arrival was made known. Oswald was greatly annoyed at Humphrey's narration, and appeared to be very much of the opinion of Pablo, which was to leave the scoundrel where he was; but on the remonstrance of Humphrey he set off with two of the other verderers, and before nightfall Humphrey arrived at the pitfall, where they heard Corbould groaning below.

"Who's there?" said Oswald, looking into the pit.

"It's me—it's Corbould," replied the man.

"Are you hurt?"

"Yes, badly," replied Corbould. "When I fell, my gun went off, and the ball has gone through my thigh. I have almost bled to death."

Humphrey went for the ladder, which was at hand, and with much exertion on the part of the whole four of them they contrived to drag out Corbould, who groaned heavily with pain. A handkerchief was tied tightly round his leg to prevent any further bleeding, and they gave him some water, which revived him.

"Now, what's to be done?" said Oswald. "We can never get him home."

"I will tell you," said Humphrey, walking with him aside. "It will not do for any of these men to know our cottage, and we cannot take them there. Desire them to remain with the man, while you go for a cart

to carry him home. We will go to the cottage, give Billy his supper, and then return with him in the cart, and bring your men something to eat. Then I will go with you, and bring the cart back again before daylight. It will be a night's walk, but it will be the safest plan."

"I think so too," replied Oswald, who desired the men to wait till his return, as he was going to borrow a cart; and then set off with Humphrey.

As soon as they arrived at the cottage, Humphrey gave the pony to Pablo to put into the stable and feed, and then communicated to Edward the state of Corbould.

"It's almost a pity that he had not killed himself outright," observed Oswald. "It would have been justice to him for attempting your life without any cause. He is a bloodthirsty scoundrel, and I wish he was anywhere but where he is. However, the Intendant shall know of it, and I have no doubt that he will be discharged."

"Do nothing in a hurry, Oswald," replied Edward. "At present let him give his own version of the affair; for he may prove more dangerous when discharged than when under your control. Now sit down and take your supper. Billy must have an hour to get his, and therefore there is no hurry for you."

"That is your gipsy lad, Edward, is he not?" said Oswald.

"Yes."

"I like the boy's looks; but they are a queer race. You must not trust him too much," continued Oswald, in an undertone, "until you have tried him and are satisfied of his fidelity. They are very excitable, and capable of strong attachment if well treated. That I know, for I did a gipsy a good turn once, and it proved to be the saving of my life afterwards."

"Oh, tell us how, Oswald," said Alice.

"It is too long a story now, my dear little lady,"

replied Oswald; "but I will another time. Whatever he may do, do not strike him; for they never forgive a blow, I am told, by those who know them, and it never does them any good. As I said before, they are a queer race."

"He will not be beaten by us," replied Humphrey, "depend upon it, unless Edith slaps him; for she is the one who takes most pains with him, and I presume he would not care much about her little hand."

"No, no," replied Oswald, laughing, "Edith may do as she pleases. What does he do for you?"

"Oh, nothing as yet, for he is hardly recovered, poor fellow," replied Humphrey. "He follows Edith, and helps her to look for the eggs; and last night he set some springes after his own fashion, and certainly beat me, for he took three rabbits and a hare, while I, with all my traps, only took one rabbit."

"I think you had better leave that part of your livelihood entirely to him. He has been bred up to it, Humphrey, and it will be his amusement. You must not expect him to work very hard; they are not accustomed to it. They live a roving life, and never work if they can help it. Still, if you make him fond of you, he may be very useful, for they are very clever and handy."

"I hope to make him useful," replied Humphrey, "but still I will not force him to do what he does not like. He is very fond of the pony already, and likes to take care of him."

"Bring him over to me one of these days, so that he may know where to find me. It may prove of consequence if you have a message to send and cannot come yourselves."

"That is very true," replied Edward. "I will not forget it.—Humphrey, shall you or I go with the cart?"

"Humphrey, by all means. It will not do for them to suppose I had the cart from you, Edward. They do not know Humphrey, and he will be off again in the morning before they are up."

"Very true," replied Edward.

"And it is time for us to set off," replied Oswald. "Will Mistress Alice oblige me with something for my men to eat, for they have fasted the whole day?"

"Yes," replied Alice. "I will have it ready before the pony is in the cart.—Edith dear, come with me."

Humphrey then went out to harness the pony, and when all was ready he and Oswald set off again.

When they arrived at the pitfall, they found Corbould lying between the two other verderers, who were sitting by his side. Corbould was much recovered since his wound had been bound up, and he was raised up and put on the fodder which Humphrey had put into the cart; and they proceeded on their journey to the other side of the forest, the verderers eating what Humphrey had brought for them as they walked along. It was a tedious and painful journey for the wounded man, who shrieked out when the cart was jolted by the wheel getting into a rut or hole; but there was no help for it, and he was very much exhausted when they arrived, which was not till past midnight. Corbould was then taken to his cottage and put on the bed, and another verderer sent for a surgeon. Those who had been with Oswald were glad to go to bed, for it had been a fatiguing day. Humphrey remained with Oswald for three hours, and then again returned with Billy, who, although he had crossed the forest three times in the twenty-four hours, appeared quite fresh and ready to go back again.

"I will let you know how he gets on, Humphrey, and what account he gives of his falling into the pit; but you must not expect me for a fortnight at least."

Humphrey wished Oswald good-bye; and Billy was so anxious to get back to his stable that Humphrey could not keep him at a quiet pace. "Horses, and all animals, indeed, know that there is no place like home. It is a pity that men, who consider themselves much wiser, have not the same consideration," thought Humphrey as the pony trotted along. Humphrey thought a good deal about the danger that Edward had been subjected to, and said to himself, "I really think that I should be more comfortable if Edward was away. I am always in a fidget about him. I wish the new king, who is now in France, would raise an army and come over. It is better that Edward should be fighting in the field than remain here and risk being shot as a deer-stealer, or put in prison. The farm is sufficient for us all; and when I have taken in more ground, it will be more than sufficient, even if I do not kill the wild cattle. I am fit for the farm, but Edward is not. He is thrown away, living in this obscurity, and he feels it. He will always be in hot water some way or another, that is certain. What a narrow escape he has had with that scoundrel, and yet how little he cares for it! He was intended for a soldier, that is evident; and if ever he is one, he will be in his element, and distinguish himself, if it pleases God to spare his life. I'll persuade him to stay at home a little while to help me to enclose the other piece of ground, and after that is done, I'll dig a saw-pit, and see if I can coax Pablo to saw with me. I must go to Lymington and buy a saw. If I once could get the trees sawed up into planks, what a quantity of things I could make, and how I could improve the place!"

Thus thought Humphrey as he went along. He was all for the farm and improvements, and was always calculating when he should have another calf or a fresh litter of pigs. His first idea was that he would make

Pablo work hard ; but the advice he had received from Oswald was not forgotten, and he now was thinking how he should coax Pablo into standing below in the saw-pit, which was not only hard work, but disagreeable, from the sawdust falling into the eyes. Humphrey's cogitations were interrupted by a halloo, and turning round in the direction of the voice, he perceived Edward, and turned the cart to join him.

" You're just in time, Humphrey ; I have some provision for Alice's larder. I took my gun and came out on the path which I knew you would return on, and I have killed a young buck. He is good meat, and we are scarce of provisions."

Humphrey helped Edward to put the venison in the cart, and they returned to the cottage, which was not more than three miles off. Humphrey told Edward the result of his journey, and then proposed that Edward should stop at home for a few days and help him with the new enclosure. To this Edward cheerfully consented ; and as soon as they arrived at the cottage, and Humphrey had had his breakfast, they took their axes and went out to fell at a cluster of small spruce firs about a mile off.