

## CHAPTER II.

BEFORE Jacob is admitted to the presence of Miss Judith Villiers, we must give some account of the establishment at Arnwood. With the exception of one male servant, who officiated in the house and stable as his services might be required, every man of the household of Colonel Beverley had followed the fortunes of their master; and as none had returned, they, in all probability, had shared his fate. Three female servants, with the man above mentioned, composed the whole household. Indeed, there was every reason for not increasing the establishment; for the rents were either paid in part, or not paid at all. It was generally supposed that the property, now that the Parliament had gained the day, would be sequestrated, although such was not yet the case; and the tenants were unwilling to pay to those who were not authorized to receive, the rents which they might be again called upon to make good. Miss Judith Villiers, therefore, found it difficult to maintain the present household; and although she did not tell Jacob Armitage that such was the case, the fact was, that very often the venison which he brought to the mansion was all the meat that was in the larder. The three female servants held the offices of cook, attendant upon Miss Villiers, and housemaid; the children being under the care of no particular servant, and left much to themselves. There had been a

chaplain in the house; but he had quitted before the death of Mrs. Beverley, and the vacancy had not been filled up; indeed, it could not well be, for the one who left had not received his salary for many months, and Miss Judith Villiers expecting every day to be summoned by her relations to bring the children and join them, sat in her high chair waiting for the arrival of this summons, which from the distracted state of the times had never come.

As we have before said, the orphans were four in number; the two eldest were boys, and the youngest were girls. Edward, the eldest boy, was between thirteen and fourteen years old; Humphrey, the second, was twelve; Alice, eleven; and Edith, eight. As it is the history of these young persons which we are about to narrate, we shall say little about them at present, except that for many months they had been under little or no restraint, and less attended to. Their companions were Benjamin, the man who remained in the house, and old Jacob Armitage, who passed all the time he could spare with them. Benjamin was rather weak in intellect, and was a source of amusement rather than otherwise. As for the female servants, one was wholly occupied with her attendance on Miss Judith, who was very exacting, and had a high notion of her own consequence. The other two had more than sufficient employment; as, when there is no money to pay with, everything must be done at home. That, under such circumstances, the boys became boisterous and the little girls became romps, is not to be wondered at; but their having become so was the cause of Miss Judith seldom admitting them into her room. It is true that they were sent for once a day, to ascertain if they were in the house, or in existence, but soon dismissed and left to their own resources. Such was the neglect to which these young orphans were exposed. It must,

however, be admitted that this very neglect made them independent and bold, full of health from constant activity, and more fitted for the change which was soon to take place.

"Benjamin," said Jacob, as the other came to the door, "I must speak with the old lady."

"Have you brought any venison, Jacob?" said Benjamin, grinning, "else, I reckon, you'll not be over welcome."

"No, I have not; but it is an important business, so send Agatha to her directly."

"I will; and I'll not say anything about the venison."

In a few minutes, Jacob was ushered up by Agatha into Miss Judith Villiers's apartment. The old lady was about fifty years of age, very prim and starched, sitting in a high-backed chair, with her feet upon a stool, and her hands crossed before her, her black mittens reposing upon her snow-white apron.

The old forester made his obeisance.

"You have important business with us, I am told," observed Miss Judith.

"Most important, madam," replied Jacob. "In the first place, it is right that you should be informed that his Majesty King Charles has escaped from Hampton Court."

"His Majesty escaped!" replied the lady.

"Yes; and is supposed to be secreted somewhere in this neighbourhood. His Majesty is not in this house, madam, I presume?"

"Jacob, his Majesty is not in this house; if he were, I would suffer my tongue to be torn out sooner than I would confess it, even to you."

"But I have more for your private ear, madam."

"Agatha, retire; and, Agatha, be mindful that you go downstairs, and do not remain outside the door."

Agatha, with this injunction, bounced out of the room, slamming to the door so as to make Miss Judith start from her seat.

"Ill-mannered girl!" exclaimed Miss Judith. "Now, Jacob Armitage, you may proceed."

Jacob then entered into the detail of what he had overheard that morning, when he fell in with the troopers, concluding with the information that the mansion would be burnt down that very night. He then pointed out the necessity of immediately abandoning the house, as it would be impossible to oppose the troopers.

"And where am I to go to, Jacob?" said Miss Judith calmly.

"I hardly know, madam; there is my cottage, it is but a poor place, and not fit for one like you."

"So I should presume, Jacob Armitage; neither shall I accept your offer. It would ill befit the dignity of a Villiers to be frightened out of her abode by a party of rude soldiers. Happen what will, I shall not stir from this—no, not even from this chair. Neither do I consider the danger so great as you suppose. Let Benjamin saddle, and be prepared to ride over to Lymington immediately. I will give him a letter to the magistrate there, who will send us protection."

"But, madam, the children cannot remain here. I will not leave them here. I promised the colonel——"

"Will the children be in more danger than I shall be, Jacob Armitage?" replied the old lady stiffly. "They dare not ill-treat me—they may force the buttery and drink the ale—they may make merry with that and the venison which you have brought with you, I presume, but they will hardly venture to insult a lady of the house of Villiers."

"I fear they will venture anything, madam. At all

events, they will frighten the children, and for one night they will be better in my cottage."

"Well, then, be it so; take them to your cottage, and take Martha to attend upon the Miss Beverleys. Go down now, and desire Agatha to come to me, and Benjamin to saddle as fast as he can."

Jacob left the room, satisfied with the permission to remove the children. He knew that it was useless to argue with Miss Judith, who was immovable when once she had declared her intentions. He was debating in his own mind whether he should acquaint the servants with the threatened danger; but he had no occasion to do so, for Agatha had remained at the door while Jacob was communicating the intelligence, and as soon as he had arrived at that portion of it by which she learnt that the mansion was to be burnt down that night, had run off to the kitchen to communicate the intelligence to the other servants.

"I'll not stay to be burnt to death," exclaimed the cook, as Jacob came in. "Well, Mr. Armitage, this is pretty news you have brought. What does my lady say?"

"She desires that Benjamin saddles immediately, to carry a letter to Lymington; and you, Agatha, are to go upstairs to her."

"But what does she mean to do? Where are we to go?" exclaimed Agatha.

"Miss Judith intends to remain where she is."

"Then she will remain alone, for me," exclaimed the housemaid, who was admired by Benjamin. "It's bad enough to have little victual and no wages; but as for being burnt to death—Benjamin, put a pillion behind your saddle, and I'll go to Lymington with you. I won't be long in getting my bundle."

Benjamin, who was in the kitchen with the maids at the

time that Jacob entered, made a sign significant of consent, and went away to the stable. Agatha went up to her mistress in a state of great perturbation, and the cook also hurried away to her bedroom.

"They'll all leave he;" thought Jacob; "well, my duty is plain! I'll not leave the children in the house." Jacob then went in search of them, and found them playing in the garden. He called the two boys to him, and told them to follow him. "Now, Master Edward," said he, "you must prove yourself your father's own son. We must leave this house immediately; come up with me to your rooms, and help me to pack up yours and your sisters' clothes, for we must go to my cottage this night. There is no time to be lost."

"But why, Jacob? I must know why."

"Because the Parliamentary troopers will burn it down this night."

"Burn it down! Why, the house is mine, is it not? Who dares to burn down this house?"

"They will dare it, and will do it."

"But we will fight them, Jacob; we can bolt and bar; I can fire a gun, and hit too, as you know; then there's Benjamin and you."

"And what can you and two men do against a troop of horse, my dear boy? If we could defend the place against them, Jacob Armitage would be the first; but it is impossible, my dear boy. Recollect your sisters. Would you have them burnt to death, or shot by these wretches? No, no, Master Edward; you must do as I say, and lose no time. Let us pack up what will be most useful, and load White Billy with the bundles; then you must all come to the cottage with me, and we will make it out how we can."

"That will be jolly!" said Humphrey; "come, Edward."

But Edward Beverley required more persuasion to abandon the house; at last old Jacob prevailed, and the clothes were put up in bundles as fast as they could collect them.

"Your aunt said Martha was to go with your sisters, but I doubt if she will," observed Jacob, "and I think we shall have no room for her, for the cottage is small enough."

"Oh no, we don't want her," said Humphrey; "Alice always dresses Edith and herself too, ever since mamma died."

"Now we will carry down the bundles, and you make them fast on the pony while I go for your sisters."

"But where does Aunt Judith go?" inquired Edward.

"She will not leave the house, Master Edward; she intends to stay and speak to the troopers."

"And so an old woman like her remains to face the enemy, while I run away from them!" replied Edward. "I will not go."

"Well, Master Edward," replied Jacob, "you must do as you please; but it will be cruel to leave your sisters here; they and Humphrey must come with me, and I cannot manage to get them to the cottage without you go with us; it is not far, and you can return in a very short time."

To this Edward consented. The pony was soon loaded, and the little girls, who were still playing in the garden, were called in by Humphrey. They were told that they were going to pass the night in the cottage, and were delighted at the idea.

"Now, Master Edward," said Jacob, "will you take your sisters by the hand and lead them to the cottage? Here is the key of the door; Master Humphrey can lead the pony; and Master Edward," continued Jacob, taking him aside, "I'll tell you one thing which I will not mention

before your brother and sisters: the troopers are all about the New Forest, for King Charles has escaped, and they are seeking for him. You must not, therefore, leave your brother and sisters till I return. Lock the cottage door as soon as it is dark. You know where to get a light, over the cupboard; and my gun is loaded, and hangs above the mantelpiece. You must do your best, if they attempt to force an entrance; but above all, promise me not to leave them till I return. I will remain here to see what I can do with your aunt; and when I come back, we can then decide how to act."

This latter ruse of Jacob's succeeded. Edward promised that he would not leave his sisters, and it wanted but a few minutes of twilight when the little party quitted the mansion of Arnwood. As they went out of the gates they were passed by Benjamin, who was trotting away with Martha behind him on a pillion, holding a bundle as large as herself. Not a word was exchanged, and Benjamin and Martha were soon out of sight.

"Why, where can Martha be going?" said Alice. "Will she be back when we come home to-morrow?"

Edward made no reply, but Humphrey said, "Well, she has taken plenty of clothes in that huge bundle, for one night, at least."

Jacob, as soon as he had seen the children on their way, returned to the kitchen, where he found Agatha and the cook collecting their property, evidently bent upon a hasty retreat.

"Have you seen Miss Judith, Agatha?"

"Yes; and she told me that she should remain, and that I should stand behind her chair, that she might receive the troopers with dignity; but I don't admire the plan. They might leave her alone, but I am sure that they will be rude to me."



"When did Benjamin say he would be back?"

"He don't intend coming back. He said he would not, at all events, till to-morrow morning, and then he would ride out this way, to ascertain if the report was false or true. But Martha has gone with him."

"I wish I could persuade the old lady to leave the house," said Jacob thoughtfully. "I fear they will not pay her the respect that she calculates upon. Go up, Agatha, and say I wish to speak with her."

"No, not I; I must be off, for it is dark already."

"And where are you going, then?"

"To Gossip Allwood's. It's a good mile, and I have to carry my things."

"Well, Agatha, if you'll take me up to the old lady, I'll carry your things for you."

Agatha consented, and as soon as she had taken up the lamp, for it was now quite dark, Jacob was once more introduced.

"I wish, madam," said Jacob, "you would be persuaded to leave the house for this night."

"Jacob Armitage, leave this house I will not, if it were filled with troopers; I have said so."

"But, madam——"

"No more, sir; you are too forward," replied the old lady haughtily.

"But, madam——"

"Leave my presence, Jacob Armitage, and never appear again. Quit the room, and send Agatha here."

"She has left, madam, and so has the cook, and Martha went away behind Benjamin; when I leave, you will be alone."

"They have dared to leave?"

"They dared not stay, madam."

"Leave me, Jacob Armitage, and shut the door when

you go out." Jacob still hesitated. "Obey me instantly," said the old lady; and the forester, finding all remonstrance useless, went out, and obeyed her last commands by shutting the door after him.

Jacob found Agatha and the other maid in the courtyard; he took up their packages, and, as he promised, accompanied them to Gossip Allwood, who kept a small ale-house about a mile distant.

"But, mercy on us! what will become of the children?" said Agatha as they walked along, her fears for herself having, up to this time, made her utterly forgetful of them. "Poor things! and Martha has left them."

"Yes, indeed; what will become of the dear babes?" said the cook, half crying.

Now, Jacob, knowing that the children of such a Malignant as Colonel Beverley would have sorry treatment if discovered, and knowing also that women were not always to be trusted, determined not to tell them how they were disposed of. He therefore replied,—

"Who would hurt such young children as those? No, no, they are safe enough; even the troopers would protect them."

"I should hope so," replied Agatha.

"You may be sure of that; no man would hurt babies," replied Jacob. "The troopers will take them with them to Lymington, I suppose. I've no fear for them; it's the proud old lady whom they will be uncivil to."

The conversation here ended, and in due time they arrived at the inn. Jacob had just put the bundles down on the table, when the clattering of horses' hoofs was heard. Shortly afterwards, the troopers pulled their horses up at the door, and dismounted. Jacob recognized the party he had met in the forest, and among them

Southwold. The troopers called for ale, and remained some time in the house, talking and laughing with the women, especially Agatha, who was a very good-looking girl. Jacob would have retreated quietly, but he found a sentinel posted at the door to prevent the egress of any person. He reseated himself, and while he was listening to the conversation of the troopers, he was recognized by Southwold, who accosted him. Jacob did not pretend not to know him, as it would have been useless; and Southwold put many questions to him as to who were resident at Arnwood. Jacob replied that the children were there, and a few servants, and he was about to mention Miss Judith Villiers, when a thought struck him—he might save the old lady.

“You are going to Arnwood, I know,” said Jacob, “and I have heard who you are in search of. Well, Southwold, I’ll give you a hint. I may be wrong; but if you should fall in with an old lady or something like one when you go to Arnwood, mount her on your crupper, and away with her to Lymington as fast as you can ride. You understand me.” Southwold nodded significantly, and squeezed Jacob’s hand.

“One word, Jacob Armitage; if I succeed in the capture by your means, it is but fair that you should have something for your hint. Where can I find you the day after to-morrow?”

“I am leaving the country this night, and go I must. I am in trouble, that’s the fact; when all is blown over I will find you out. Don’t speak to me any more just now.” Southwold again squeezed Jacob’s hand, and left him. Shortly afterwards the order was given to mount, and the troopers set off.

Armitage followed slowly and unobserved. They arrived at the mansion and surrounded it. Shortly after-

wards he perceived the glare of torches, and in a quarter of an hour more thick smoke rose up in the dark but clear sky; at last the flames burst forth from the lower windows of the mansion, and soon afterwards they lighted up the country round to some distance.

"It is done," thought Jacob, and he turned to bend his hasty steps towards his own cottage, when he heard the galloping of a horse and violent screams; a minute afterwards James Southwold passed him with the old lady tied behind him, kicking and struggling as hard as she could. Jacob smiled, as he thought that he had by his little stratagem saved the old woman's life, for that Southwold imagined that she was King Charles dressed up as an old woman was evident; and he then returned as fast as he could to the cottage.

In half an hour Jacob had passed through the thick woods which were between the mansion and his own cottage, occasionally looking back, as the flames of the mansion rose higher and higher, throwing their light far and wide. He knocked at the cottage door; Smoker, a large dog, cross-bred between the fox and bloodhound, growled till Jacob spoke to him, and then Edward opened the door.

"My sisters are in bed and fast asleep, Jacob," said Edward, "and Humphrey has been nodding this half-hour; had he not better go to bed before we go back?"

"Come out, Master Edward," replied Jacob, "and look." Edward beheld the flames and fierce light between the trees, and was silent.

"I told you that it would be so, and you would all have been burnt in your beds, for they did not enter the house to see who was in it, but fired it as soon as they had surrounded it."

“And my aunt!” exclaimed Edward, clasping his hands.

“Is safe, Master Edward, and by this time at Lymington.”

“We will go to her to-morrow.”

“I fear not; you must not risk so much, Master Edward. These Levellers spare nobody, and you had better let it be supposed that you are all burnt in the house.”

“But my aunt knows the contrary, Jacob.”

“Very true; I quite forgot that.” And so Jacob had. He expected that the old woman would have been burnt, and then nobody would have known of the existence of the children; he forgot, when he planned to save her, that she knew where the children were.

“Well, Master Edward, I will go to Lymington to-morrow and see the old lady; but you must remain here, and take charge of your sisters till I come back, and then we will consider what is to be done. The flames are not so bright as they were.”

“No. It is my house that these Roundheads have burned down,” said Edward, shaking his fist.

“It was your house, Master Edward, and it was your property; but how long it will be so remains to be seen. I fear it will be forfeited.”

“Woe to the people who dare take possession of it!” cried Edward; “I shall, if I live, be a man one of these days.”

“Yes, Master Edward, and then you will reflect more than you do now, and not be rash. Let us go into the cottage, for it’s no use remaining out in the cold; the frost is sharp to-night.”

Edward slowly followed Jacob into the cottage. His little heart was full. He was a proud boy and a good

boy, but the destruction of the mansion had raised up evil thoughts in his heart—hatred to the Covenanters, who had killed his father, and now burnt the property—revenge upon them (how, he knew not); but his hand was ready to strike, young as he was. He lay down on the bed, but he could not sleep. He turned and turned again, and his brain was teeming with thoughts and plans of vengeance. Had he said his prayers that night, he would have been obliged to repeat, “Forgive us, as we forgive them who trespass against us.” At last he fell fast asleep, but his dreams were wild, and he often called out during the night, and woke his brother and sisters.