

CHAPTER XXI.

THE winter set in very severe, and the falls of snow were very heavy and frequent. It was fortunate that Humphrey had been so provident in making so large a quantity of hay, or the stock would have been starved. The flock of goats in great part subsisted themselves on the bark of trees and moss; at night they had some hay given to them, and they did very well. It was hardly possible for Edward to come over to see his brother and sisters, for the snow was so deep as to render such a long journey too fatiguing for a horse. Twice or thrice after the snow fell he contrived to get over, but after that they knew that it was impossible, and they did not expect him. Humphrey and Pablo had little to do except attending to the stock, and cutting firewood to keep up their supply, for they now burnt it very fast. The snow lay several feet high round the cottage, being driven against it by the wind. They had kept a passage clear to the yard, and had kept the yard as clear of snow as possible; they could do no more. A sharp frost and clear weather succeeded to the snowstorms, and there appeared no chance of the snow melting away. The nights were dark and long, and their oil for their lamp was getting low. Humphrey was anxious to go to Lymington, as they required many things; but it was impossible to go anywhere except on foot, and walking was, from the depth of the

snow, a most fatiguing exercise. There was one thing, however, that Humphrey had not forgotten, which was, that he had told Edward that he would try and capture some of the forest ponies; and during the whole of the time since the heavy fall of snow had taken place he had been making his arrangements. The depth of the snow prevented the animals from obtaining any grass, and they were almost starved, as they could find nothing to subsist upon except the twigs and branches of trees which they could reach. Humphrey went out with Pablo, and found the herd, which was about five miles from the cottage, and near to Clara's cottage. He and Pablo brought with them as much hay as they could carry, and strewed it about so as to draw the ponies nearer to them, and then Humphrey looked for a place which would answer his purpose. About three miles from the cottage he found what he thought would suit him. There was a sort of avenue between two thickets, about a hundred yards wide, and the wind blowing through this avenue during the snowstorm had drifted the snow at one end of it, and right across it raised a large mound several feet high. By strewing small bundles of hay he drew the herd of ponies into this avenue, and in the avenue he left them a good quantity to feed upon every night for several nights, till at last the herd of ponies went there every morning.

"Now, Pablo, we must make a trial," said Humphrey. "You must get your lassos ready, in case they should be required. We must go to the avenue before daylight with the two dogs, tie one upon one side of the avenue, and the other on the other, that they may bark and prevent the ponies from attempting to escape through the thicket. Then we must get the ponies between us and the drift of snow which lies across the avenue, and try if we cannot draw them into the drift. If so, they

will plunge in so deep that some of them will not be able to get out before we have thrown the ropes round their necks."

"I see," said Pablo; "very good—soon catch them."

Before daylight they went with the dogs and a large bundle of hay, which they strewed nearer to the mound of drift snow. They then tied the dogs up on each side, ordering them to lie down and be quiet. They then walked through the thicket so as not to be perceived, until they considered that they were far enough from the drift snow. About daylight the herd came to pick up the hay as usual, and after they had passed them Humphrey and Pablo followed in the thicket, not wishing to show themselves till the last moment. While the ponies were busy with the hay they suddenly ran out into the avenue and separated, so as to prevent the ponies from attempting to gallop past them, shouting as loud as they could, as they ran up to the ponies, and calling to the dogs, who immediately set up barking on each side. The ponies, alarmed at the noise and the appearance of Humphrey and Pablo, naturally set off in the only direction which appeared to them to be clear, and galloped away over the mound of drift snow, with their tails streaming, snorting and plunging in the snow as they hurried along. But as soon as they arrived at the mound of drift snow they plunged first up to their bellies, and afterwards, as they attempted to force their way where the snow was deeper, many of them stuck fast altogether, and attempted to clear themselves in vain. Humphrey and Pablo, who had followed them as fast as they could run, now came up with them and threw the lasso over the neck of one, and ropes with slip nooses over two more, which were floundering in the snow there together. The remainder of the herd, after great exertions, got clear of the snow by turning round and

galloping back through the avenue. The three ponies captured made a furious struggle; but by drawing the ropes tight round their necks they were choked, and soon unable to move. They then tied their fore legs, and loosed the ropes round their necks, that they might recover their breath.

“Get them now, Massa Humphrey,” said Pablo.

“Yes. But our work is not yet over, Pablo: we must get them home. How shall we manage that?”

“Suppose they no eat to-day and to-morrow, get very tame.”

“I believe that will be the best way; they cannot get loose again, do all they can.”

“No, sir; but get one home to-day. This very fine pony; suppose we try him.”

Pablo then put the halter on, and tied the end shore to the fore leg of the pony, so that it could not walk without keeping its head close to the ground; if it raised its head, it was obliged to lift up its leg. Then he put the lasso round its neck to choke it if it was too unruly; and having done that, he cast loose the ropes which had tied its fore legs together.

“Now, Massa Humphrey, we get him home somehow. First I go loose the dogs; he ’fraid of the dogs, and run t’other way.”

The pony, which was an iron-gray and very handsome, plunged furiously and kicked behind; but it could not do so without falling down, which it did several times before Pablo returned with the dogs. Humphrey held one part of the lasso on one side, and Pablo on the other, keeping the pony between them; and with the dogs barking at it behind, they contrived, with a great deal of exertion and trouble, to get the pony to the cottage. The poor animal, driven in this way on three legs, and every now and then choked with the lasso,

was covered with foam before they arrived. Billy was turned out of his stable to make room for the newcomer, who was fastened securely to the manger, and then left without food, that he might become tame. It was too late then, and they were too tired themselves, to go for the other two ponies; so they were left lying on the snow all night, and the next morning they found they were much tamer than the first; and during the day, following the same plan, they were both brought to the stable and secured alongside of the other. One was a bay pony with black legs, and the other a brown one. The bay pony was a mare, and the other two horses. Alice and Edith were delighted with the new ponies, and Humphrey was not a little pleased that he had succeeded in capturing them, after what had passed between Edward and him. After two days' fasting the poor animals were so tame that they ate out of Pablo's hand, and submitted to be stroked and caressed; and before they were a fortnight in the stable Alice and Edith could go up to them without danger. They were soon broken in, for the yard being full of muck, Pablo took them into it and mounted them. They plunged and kicked at first, and tried all they could to get rid of him, but they sank so deep into the muck that they were soon tired out; and after a month they were all three tolerably quiet to ride.

The snow was so deep all over the country that there was little communication with the metropolis. The Intendant's letter spoke of King Charles raising another army in Holland, and that his adherents in England were preparing to join him as soon as he marched southward.

"I think, Edward," said the Intendant, "that the King's affairs do now wear a more promising aspect; but there is plenty of time yet. I know your anxiety

to serve your King, and I cannot blame it. I shall not prevent your going, although, of course, I must not be cognizant of your having so done. When the winter breaks up I shall send you to London. You will then be able better to judge of what is going on, and your absence will not create any suspicion; but you must be guided by me."

"I certainly will, sir," replied Edward. "I should indeed like to strike one blow for the King, come what will."

"All depends upon whether they manage affairs well in Scotland; but there is so much jealousy and pride, and I fear treachery also, that it is hard to say how matters may end."

It was soon after this conversation that a messenger arrived from London with letters announcing that King Charles had been crowned in Scotland with great solemnity and magnificence.

"The plot thickens," said the Intendant; "and by this letter from my correspondent, Ashley Cooper, I find that the King's army is well appointed, and that David Lesley is lieutenant-general, Middleton commands the horse, and Wemyss the artillery. That Wemyss is certainly a good officer, but was not true to the late king; may he behave better to the present! Now, Edward, I shall send you to London, and I will give you letters to those who will advise you how to proceed. You may take the black horse; he will bear you well. You will, of course, write to me; for Sampson will go with you, and you can send him back when you consider that you do not require or wish for his presence. There is no time to be lost, for, depend upon it, Cromwell, who is still at Edinburgh, will take the field as soon as he can. Are you ready to start to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, sir, quite ready."

"I fear that you cannot go over to the cottage to bid farewell to your sisters; but perhaps it is better that you should not."

"I think so too, sir," replied Edward. "Now that the snow has nearly disappeared, I did think of going over, having been so long absent; but I must send Oswald over instead."

"Well, then, leave me to write my letters, and do you prepare your saddle-bags. Patience and Clara will assist you. Tell Sampson to come to me."

Edward went to Patience and Clara, and told them that he was to set off for London on the following morning, and was about to make his preparations.

"How long do you remain, Edward?" inquired Patience.

"I cannot tell. Sampson goes with me, and I must, of course, be guided by your father. Do you know where the saddle-bags are, Patience?"

"Yes; Phœbe shall bring them to your room."

"And you and Clara must come and give me your assistance."

"Certainly we will, if you require it; but I did not know that your wardrobe was so extensive."

"You know that it is anything but extensive, Patience; but that is the reason why your assistance is more required. A small wardrobe ought at least to be in good order; and what I would require is that you would look over the linen, and where it requires a little repair you will bestow upon it your charity."

"That we will do, Clara," replied Patience. "So get your needles and thread, and let us send him to London with whole linen.—We will come when we are ready, sir."

"I don't like his going to London at all," said Clara; "we shall be so lonely when he has gone."

Edward had left the room, and having obtained the saddle-bags from Phœbe, had gone up to his chamber. The first thing that he laid hold of was his father's sword. He took it down, and having wiped it carefully, he kissed it, saying, "God grant that I may do credit to it, and prove as worthy to wield it as was my brave father!" He had uttered these words aloud; and again taking the sword and laying it down on the bed, turned round, and perceived that Patience had, unknown to him, entered the room, and was standing close to him. Edward was not conscious that he had spoken aloud, and therefore merely said, "I was not aware of your presence, Patience. Your foot is so light."

"Whose sword is that, Edward?"

"It is mine; I bought it at Lymington."

"But what makes you have such an affection for that sword?"

"Affection for it?"

"Yes; as I came into the room you kissed it as fervently as——"

"As a lover would his mistress, I presume you would say," replied Edward.

"Nay, I meant not to use such vain words. I was about to say, as a Catholic would a relic. I ask you again, why so? A sword is but a sword. You are about to leave this on a mission of my father's. You are not a soldier, about to engage in strife and war; if you were, why kiss your sword?"

"I will tell you. I do love this sword. I purchased it, as I told you, at Lymington, and they told me that it belonged to Colonel Beverley. It is for his sake that I love it. You know what obligations our family were under to him."

"This sword was, then, wielded by Colonel Beverley,

the celebrated Cavalier, was it?" said Patience, taking it from off the bed and examining it.

"Yes, it was; and here, you see, are his initials upon the hilt."

"And why do you take it to London with you? Surely it is not the weapon which should be worn by a secretary, Edward? It is too large and cumbrous, and out of character."

"Recollect that till these last few months I have been a forester, Patience, and not a secretary. Indeed, I feel that I am more fit for active life than the situation which your father's kindness has bestowed upon me. I was brought up, as you have heard, to follow to the wars, had my patron lived."

Patience made no reply. Clara now joined them, and they commenced the task of examining the linen; and Edward left the room, as he wished to speak with Oswald. They did not meet again till dinner-time. Edward's sudden departure had spread a gloom over them all; even the Intendant was silent and thoughtful. In the evening he gave Edward the letters which he had written, and a considerable sum of money, telling him where he was to apply if he required more for his expenses. The Intendant cautioned him on his behaviour in many points, and also relative to his dress and carriage during his stay in the metropolis.

"If you should leave London, there will be no occasion—nay, it would be dangerous to write to me. I shall take it for granted that you will retain Sampson till your departure, and when he returns here I shall presume that you have gone north. I will not detain you longer, Edward. May Heaven bless and protect you!"

So saying, the Intendant went away to his own room.

“Kind and generous man!” thought Edward; “how much did I mistake you when we first met!”

Taking up the letters and bag of money, which still remained on the table, Edward went to his room, and having placed the letters and money in the saddle-bag, he commended himself to the Divine Protector and retired to rest.

Before daylight the sound of Sampson’s heavy travelling boots below roused up Edward, and he was soon dressed. Taking his saddle-bags on his arm, he walked softly downstairs, that he might not disturb any of the family; but when he was passing the sitting-room he perceived that there was a light in it, and on looking in, that Patience was up and dressed. Edward looked surprised, and was about to speak, when Patience said,—

“I rose early, Edward, because, when I took leave of you last night, I forgot a little parcel that I wanted to give you before you went. It will not take much room, and may beguile a weary hour. It is a little book of meditations. Will you accept it, and promise me to read it when you have time?”

“I certainly will, my dear Patience—if I may venture on the expression—read it, and think of you.”

“Nay, you must read it and think of what it contains,” replied Patience.

“I will, then. I shall not need the book to remind me of Patience Heatherstone, I assure you.”

“And now, Edward, I do not pretend to surmise the reason of your departure, nor would it be becoming in me to attempt to discover what my father thinks proper to be silent upon; but I must beg you to promise one thing.”

“Name it, dear Patience,” replied Edward. “My heart is so full at the thought of leaving you that I feel I can refuse you nothing.”

“It is this: I have a presentiment, I know not why, that you are about to encounter danger. If so, be prudent—be prudent for the sake of your dear sisters—be prudent for the sake of all your friends, who would regret you; promise me that.”

“I do promise you most faithfully, Patience, that I will ever have my sisters and you in my thoughts, and will not be rash under any circumstances.”

“Thank you, Edward. May God bless you and preserve you!”

Edward first kissed Patience's hand, that was held in his own; but perceiving the tears starting in her eyes, he kissed them off, without any remonstrance on her part, and then left the room. In a few moments more he was mounted on a fine powerful black horse, and, followed by Sampson, on his road to London.

We will pass over the journey, which was accomplished without any event worthy of remark. Edward had from the commencement called Sampson to his side, that he might answer the questions he had to make upon all that he saw, and which the reader must be aware was quite new to one whose peregrinations had been confined to the New Forest and the town adjacent. Sampson was a very powerful man, of a cool and silent character, by no means deficient in intelligence, and trustworthy withal. He had long been a follower of the Intendant, and had served in the army. He was very devout, and generally, when not addressed, was singing hymns in a low voice.

On the evening of the second day they were close to the metropolis, and Sampson pointed out to Edward St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, and other objects worthy of note.

“And where are we to lodge, Sampson?” inquired Edward.

“The best hotel that I know of for man and beast is the ‘Swan with Three Necks,’ in Holborn. It is not over-frequented by roisterers, and you will there be quiet, and if your affairs demand it, unobserved.”

“That will suit me, Sampson. I wish to observe, and not be observed, during my stay in London.”

Before dark they had arrived at the hotel, and the horses were in the stable. Edward had procured an apartment to his satisfaction, and feeling fatigued with his two days’ travelling, had gone to bed.

The following morning he examined the letters which had been given to him by the Intendant, and inquired of Sampson if he could direct him on his way. Sampson knew London well, and Edward set out to Spring Gardens to deliver a letter, which the Intendant informed him was confidential, to a person of the name of Langton. Edward knocked and was ushered in, Sampson taking a seat in the hall while Edward was shown into a handsomely-furnished library, where he found himself in the presence of a tall, spare man, dressed after the fashion of the Roundheads of the time. He presented the letter. Mr. Langton bowed, and requested Edward to sit down; and after Edward had taken a chair he then seated himself and opened the letter.

“You are right welcome, Master Armitage,” said Mr. Langton. “I find that, young as you appear to be, you are in the whole confidence of our mutual friend Master Heatherstone. He hints at your being probably obliged to take a journey to the north, and that you will be glad to take charge of any letters which I may have to send in that direction. I will have them ready for you; and in case of need they will be such as will give a colouring to your proceeding, provided you may not choose to reveal your true object. How wears our good friend Heatherstone and his daughter?”

“Quite well, sir.”

“And he told me in one of his former letters that he had the daughter of our poor friend Ratcliffe with him. Is it not so?”

“It is, Master Langton; and a gentle, pretty child as you wish to see.”

“When did you arrive in London?”

“Yesterday evening, sir.”

“And do you propose any stay?”

“That I cannot answer, sir. I must be guided by your advice. I have nought to do here, unless it be to deliver some three or four letters, given me by Mr. Heatherstone.”

“It is my opinion, Master Armitage, that the less you are seen in this city the better. There are hundreds employed to find out newcomers, and to discover from their people, or by other means, for what purpose they may have come; for you must be aware, Master Armitage, that the times are dangerous and people’s minds are various. In attempting to free ourselves from what we considered despotism, we have created for ourselves a worse despotism, and one that is less endurable. It is to be hoped that what has passed will make not only kings but subjects wiser than they have been. Now what do you propose—to leave this instantly?”

“Certainly, if you think it advisable.”

“My advice, then, is to leave London immediately. I will give you letters to some friends of mine in Lancashire and Yorkshire; in either county you can remain unnoticed, and make what preparations you think necessary. But do nothing in haste—consult well, and be guided by them, who will, if it is considered advisable and prudent, join with you in your project. I need say no more. Call upon me to-morrow morning,

an hour before noon, and I will have letters ready for you."

Edward rose to depart, and thanked Mr. Langton for his kindness.

"Farewell, Master Armitage," said Langton. "Tomorrow at the eleventh hour."

Edward then quitted the house, and delivered the other letters of credence. The only one of importance at the moment was the one of credit; the others were to various members of the Parliament, desiring them to know Master Armitage as a confidential friend of the Intendant, and in case of need to exert their good offices in his behalf. The letter of credit was upon a Hamburg merchant, who asked Edward if he required money. Edward replied that he did not at present, but that he had business to do for his employer in the north, and might require some when there, if it was possible to obtain it so far from London.

"When do you set out, and to what town do you go?"

"That I cannot well tell till to-morrow."

"Call before you leave this, and I will find some means of providing for you as you wish."

Edward then returned to the hotel. Before he went to bed he told Sampson that he found that he had to leave London on Mr. Heatherstone's affairs, and might be absent some time; he concluded by observing that he did not consider it necessary to take him with him, as he could dispense with his services, and Mr. Heatherstone would be glad to have him back.

"As you wish, sir," replied Sampson. "When am I to go back?"

"You may leave to-morrow as soon as you please. I have no letter to send. You may tell them that I am well, and will write as soon as I have anything positive to communicate."

Edward then made Sampson a present, and wished him a pleasant journey.

At the hour appointed on the following day Edward repaired to Mr. Langton, who received him very cordially.

"I am all ready for you, Master Armitage. There is a letter to two Catholic ladies in Lancashire, who will take great care of you; and here is one to a friend of mine in Yorkshire. The ladies live about four miles from the town of Bclton, and my Yorkshire friend in the city of York. You may trust to either of them. And now farewell; and if possible, leave London before nightfall—the sooner the better. Where is your servant?"

"He has returned to Master Heatherstone this morning."

"You have done right. Lose no time to leave London, and don't be in a hurry in your future plans. You understand me. If any one accosts you on the road, put no trust in any professions. You, of course, are going down to your relations in the north. Have you pistols?"

"Yes, sir; I have a pair which did belong to the unfortunate Mr. Ratcliffe."

"Then they are good ones, I'll answer for it. No man was more particular about his weapons, or knew how to use them better. Farewell, Master Armitage, and may success attend you!"

Mr. Langton held out his hand to Edward, who respectfully took his leave.