

## CHAPTER V.

As we have before said, time passed rapidly; with the exception of one or two excursions after venison, they remained in the cottage, and Jacob never went to Lymington. The frost had broken up, the snow had long disappeared, and the trees began to bud. The sun became powerful, and in the month of May the forest began again to look green.

“And now, Edward,” said Jacob Armitage, one day at breakfast, “we will try for venison again to sell at Lymington, for I must purchase Humphrey’s cart and harness; so let us get our guns and go out this fine morning. The stags are mostly by themselves at this season, for the does are with their young calves. We must find the slot of a deer, and track him to his lair, and you shall have the first shot if you like; but that, however, depends more upon the deer than upon me.”

They had walked four or five miles when they came upon the slot or track of a deer; but Jacob’s practised eye pointed out to Edward that it was the slot of a young one, and not worth following. He explained to Edward the difference in the hoof-marks and other signs by which this knowledge was gained, and they proceeded onwards until they found another slot, which Jacob declared to be that of a warrantable stag—that is, one old enough to kill and to be good venison.

“ We must now track him to his lair, Edward.”

This took them about a mile further, when they arrived at a small thicket of thorns about an acre in extent.

“ Here he is, you see, Edward; let me now see if he is harboured.”

They walked round the thicket, and could not find any slot or track by which the stag had left the covert, and Jacob pronounced that the animal must be hid in it.

“ Now, Edward, do you stay here while I go back to the lee side of the covert: I will enter it with Smoker, and the stag will, in all probability, when he is roused, come out to breast the wind. You will then have a good shot at him. Recollect to fire so as to hit him behind the shoulder; if he is moving quick, fire a little before the shoulders; if slow, take aim accurately; but recollect, if I come upon him in the covert, I shall kill him if I can, for we want the venison, and then we will go after another to give you a chance.”

Jacob then left Edward, and went down to the lee side of the covert, where he entered it with Smoker. Edward was stationed behind a thorn-bush, which grew a few yards clear of the covert, and he soon heard the creaking of the branches.

A short time elapsed, and a fine stag came out at a trot; he turned his head, and was just bounding away, when Edward fired, and the animal fell. Remembering the advice of Jacob, Edward remained where he was, in silence reloading his piece, and was soon afterwards joined by Jacob and the dog.

“ Well done Edward!” said the forester, in a low voice, and covering his forehead to keep off the glare of the sun, he looked earnestly at a high brake between some thorn-trees, about half a mile to windward. “ I think I see something there—look, Edward, your eyes are

younger than mine. Is that the branch of a tree in the fern, or is it not?"

"I see what you mean," replied Edward. "It is not; it moves."

"I thought so, but my eyes are not so good as they once were. It's another stag, depend upon it; but how to get near him—we never can get across this patch of clear grass without being seen."

"No, we cannot get at him from this spot," replied Edward; "but if we were to fall back to leeward, and gain the forest again, I think that there are thorns sufficient from the forest to where he lies, to creep from behind one to the other, so as to get a shot at him; don't you?"

"It will require care and patience to manage that; but I think it might be done. I will try; it is my turn now, you know. You had better stay here with the dog, for only one can hide from thorn to thorn."

Jacob, ordering Smoker to remain, then set off. He had to make a circuit of three miles to get to the spot where the thorns extended from the forest, and Edward saw no more of him, although he strained his eyes, until the stag sprung out, and the gun was discharged. Edward perceived that the stag was not killed, but severely wounded, running towards the covert near which he was hid. "Down, Smoker," said he, as he cocked his gun. The stag came within shot, and was coming nearer, when, seeing Edward, it turned. Edward fired, and then cheered on the dog, who sprang after the wounded animal, giving tongue as he followed him. Edward, perceiving Jacob hastening towards him, waited for him.

"He's hard hit, Edward," cried Jacob, "and Smoker will have him; but we must follow as fast as we can."

They both caught up their guns and ran as fast as they

could, when, as they entered the wood, they heard the dog at bay.

"We shan't have far to go, Edward; the animal is done up, Smoker has him at bay."

They hastened on another quarter of a mile, when they found that the stag had fallen on his knees, and had been seized by the throat by Smoker.

"Mind, Edward, now how I go up to him, for the wound from the horn of the deer is very dangerous."

Jacob advanced from behind the stag, and cut his throat with his hunting-knife. "He is a fine beast, and we have done well to-day; but we shall have two journeys to make to get all this venison home. I could not get a fair shot at him—and see, I have hit him here in the flank."

"And here is my ball in his throat," said Edward.

"So it is. Then it was a good shot that you made, and you are master of the hunt this day, Edward. Now, I'll remain, and you go home for White Billy. Humphrey is right about the cart. If we had one, we could have carried all home at once; but I must go now and cut the throat of the other stag which you killed so cleverly. You will be a good hunter one of these days, Edward. A little more knowledge, and a little more practice, and I will leave it all to you, and hang my gun up over the chimney."

It was late in the evening before they had made their two trips and taken all the venison home, and very tired were they before it was all safely housed. Edward was delighted with his success, but not more so than was old Jacob. The next morning, Jacob set off for Lymington, with the pony loaded with venison, which he sold, as well as two more loads which he promised to bring the next day, and the day after. He then looked out for a cart,

and was fortunate in finding a small one just fitted to the size of the pony, who was not tall, but very strong, as all New Forest ponies are. He also procured harness, and then put Billy in the cart to draw him home; but Billy did not admire being put in a cart, and for some time was very restive, and backed and reared, and went every way but the right. But by dint of coaxing and leading, he at last submitted, and went straight on; but then the noise of the cart behind him frightened him, and he ran away. At last, having tired himself out, he thought that he might as well go quietly in harness, as he could not get out of it; and he did so, and arrived safe at the cottage. Humphrey was delighted at the sight of the cart, and said that now he should get on well. The next day, Jacob contrived to put all the remainder of the venison in the cart, and White Billy made no more difficulty; he dragged it all to Lymington, and returned with the cart as quietly and cleverly as if he had been in harness all his life.

“Well, Edward, the venison paid for the cart, at all events,” said Jacob; “and now I will tell you all the news I collected while I was at Lymington. Captain Bur’y, who attempted to incite the people to rescue the King, has been hung, drawn, and quartered, as a traitor.”

“They are traitors who condemned him,” replied Edward, in wrath.

“Yes, so they are; but there is better news, which is, that the Duke of York has escaped to Holland.”

“Yes, that is good news; and the King?”

“He is still a prisoner in Carisbrook Castle. There are many rumours and talks, but no one knows what is true, and what is false; but depend upon it, this cannot last long, and the King will have his rights yet.”

Edward remained very grave for some time.

“ I trust in Heaven we all shall have our rights yet, Jacob,” said he at last. “ I wish I was a man! ”

Here the conversation ended, and they went to bed.

This was now a busy time at the cottage. The manure had to be got out of the stable and pig-sties, and carried out to the potato-ground and garden; the crops had to be put in; and the cart was now found valuable. After the manure had been carried out and spread, Edward and Humphrey helped Jacob to dig the ground, and then to put in the seed. The cabbage-plants of last year were then put out, and the turnips and carrots sown. Before the month was over, the garden and potato-field were cropped, and Humphrey took upon himself to weed and keep it clean. Little Edith had also employment now; for the hens began to lay eggs, and as soon as she heard them cackling, she ran for the eggs and brought them in; and before the month was over, Jacob had set four hens upon eggs. Billy, the pony, was now turned out to graze in the forest; he came home every night of his own accord.

“ I’ll tell you what we want,” said Humphrey, who took the command altogether over the farm; “ we want a cow.”

“ Oh, yes, a cow, cried Alice; “ I have plenty of time to milk her.”

“ Whose cows are those which I see in the forest sometimes? ” said Humphrey to Jacob.

“ If they belong to anybody, they belong to the King,” replied Jacob; “ but they are cattle which have strayed and found their way to the forest, and have remained here ever since. They are rather wild and savage, and you must be careful how you go too near them, as the bulls will run at you. They increase very fast; there were

but six a few years ago, and now there are at least fifty in the herd."

"Well, I'll try and get one, if I can," said Humphrey.

"You will be puzzled to do that, boy," replied Jacob; "and as I said before, beware of the bulls."

"I don't want a bull," replied Humphrey; "but a cow would give us milk, and then we should have more manure for the garden. My garden will then grow more potatoes."

"Well, Humphrey, if you can catch a cow, no one will interfere; but I think you will not find it very easy, and you may find it very dangerous."

"I'll look out for one," replied Humphrey, "anyhow. Alice, if we only had a cow, wouldn't that be jolly?"

The crops were now all up, and as the days began to be long, the work became comparatively light and easy. Humphrey was busy making a little wheelbarrow for Edith, that she might barrow away the weeds as he hoed them up; and at last this great performance was completed, much to the admiration of all, and much to his own satisfaction. Indeed, when it is recollected that Humphrey had only the handsaw and axe, and that he had to cut down the tree, and then to saw it into plank, it must be acknowledged that it required great patience and perseverance even to make a wheelbarrow; but Humphrey was not only persevering, but was full of invention. He had built up a hen-house with fir poles, and made the nests for the hens to lay and hatch in, and they now had between forty and fifty chickens running about. He had also divided the pig-sty, so that the sow might be kept apart from the other pigs; and they expected very soon to have a litter of young pigs. He had transplanted the wild strawberries from the forest, and had, by manure, made them large and good; and he had also a fine crop of onions in the garden, from seed which Jacob had bought at

Lymington; now Humphrey was very busy cutting down some poles in the forest to make a cow-house, for he declared that he would have a cow somehow or another. June arrived, and it was time to mow down grass to make into hay for the winter, and Jacob had two scythes. He showed the boys how to use them, and they soon became expert; and as there was plenty of long grass at this time of the year, and they could mow when they pleased, they soon had White Billy in full employment carrying the hay home. The little girls helped to make it, for Humphrey had made them two rakes. Jacob thought that there was hay enough made, but Humphrey said that there was enough for the pony, but not enough for the cow.

“But where is the cow to come from, Humphrey?”

“Where the venison comes from,” replied he—“out of the forest.”

So Humphrey continued to mow and make hay, while Edward and Jacob went out for venison. After all the hay was made and stacked, Humphrey found out a method of thatching with fern, which Jacob had never thought of; and when that was done, they commenced cutting down fern for fodder. Here again Humphrey would have twice as much as Jacob had ever cut before, because he wanted litter for the cow. At last it became quite a joke between him and Edward, who, when he brought home more venison than would keep in the hot weather, told Humphrey that the remainder was for the cow. Still Humphrey would not give up the point, and every morning and evening he would be certain to be absent an hour or two, and it was found out he was watching the herd of wild cattle who were feeding: sometimes they were very near, at others a long way off. He used to get up into the trees, and examine them as they passed under him, without perceiving him. One night



Humphrey returned very late, and the next morning he was off before daylight. Breakfast was over, and Humphrey did not make his appearance, and they could not tell what was the matter. Jacob felt uneasy, but Edward laughed, and said, -

“ Oh, depend upon it, he'll come back and bring the cow with him.”

Hardly had Edward said these words, when in came Humphrey red with perspiration.

“ Now then, Jacob and Edward, come with me; we must put Billy in the cart, and take Smoker and a rope with us. Take your guns too, for fear of accident.”

“ Why, what's the matter? ”

“ I'll tell you as we go along; but I must put Billy in the cart, for there is no time to be lost.”

Humphrey disappeared, and Jacob said to Edward,—

“ What can it be? ”

“ It can be nothing but the cow he is so mad about,” replied Edward. “ However, when he comes with the pony, we shall know; let us take our guns and the dog Smoker as he wishes.”

Humphrey now drove up the pony and cart, and they set off.

“ Well, I suppose you'll tell us now what we are going for? ” said Edward.

“ Yes, I will. You know I've been watching the cattle for a long while, because I wanted a cow. I have been in a tree when they have passed under me several times, and I observed that one or two of the heifers were very near calving. Yesterday evening I thought one could not help calving very soon indeed, and as I was watching, I saw that she was uneasy, and that she at last left the herd and went into a little copse of wood. I remained three hours to see if she came out again, and she did not. It

was dark when I came home, as you know. This morning I went before daylight and found the herd. She is very remarkable, being black and white spotted; and, after close examination, I found that she was not with the herd, so I am sure that she went into the copse to calve, and that she has calved before this."

"Well, that may be," replied Jacob; "but now I do not understand what we are to do."

"Nor I," replied Edward.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what I hope to do. I have got the pony and cart to take the calf home with us, if we can get it—which I think we can. I have got Smoker to worry the heifer and keep her employed while we put the calf in the cart; a rope that we may tie the cow, if we can; and you with your guns must keep off the herd, if they come to her assistance. Now do you understand my plan?"

"Yes, and I think it very likely to succeed, Humphrey," replied Jacob, "and I give you credit for the scheme. We will help you all we can. Where is the copse?"

"Not half a mile further," replied Humphrey, "We shall soon be there."

On their arrival, they found that the herd were feeding at a considerable distance from the copse, which was perhaps as well.

"Now," said Jacob, "I and Edward will enter into the copse with Smoker, and you follow us, Humphrey. I will make Smoker seize the heifer if necessary; at all events he will keep her at bay—that is, if she is here. First let us walk round the copse and find her *slot*, as we call the track of a deer. See, here is her footing. Now let us go in."

They advanced cautiously into the thicket, following the track of the heifer, and at last came upon her. Apparently she had not calved more than an hour, and was

licking the calf, which was not yet on its legs. As soon as the animal perceived Jacob and Edward she shook her head, and was about to run at them; but Jacob told Smoker to seize her, and the dog flew at her immediately. The attack of the dog drove back the heifer quite into the thicket, and as the dog bounded round her, springing this way and that way to escape her horns, the heifer was soon separated from the calf.

“Now then, Edward and Humphrey,” said Jacob, advancing between the heifer and the calf, “lift up the calf between you and put it in the cart. Leave Smoker and me to manage the mother.”

The boys put their arms under the stomach of the calf and carried it away. The heifer was at first too busy defending herself against the dog to perceive that the calf was gone; when she did, Jacob called Smoker to him, so as to bring him between the heifer and where the boys were going out of the thicket. At last the heifer gave a loud bellow, and rushed out of the thicket in pursuit of her calf, checked by Smoker, who held on to her ear, and sometimes stopped her from advancing.

“Hold her, Smoker,” said Jacob, who now went back to help the boys. “Hold her, boy.—Is the calf in the cart?”

“Yes, and tied fast,” replied Edward; “and we are in the cart, too.”

“That’s right,” replied Jacob. “Now I’ll get in too, and let us drive off. She’ll follow us, depend upon it.—Here, Smoker! Smoker! let her alone.”

Smoker, at this command, came bounding out of the copse, followed by the heifer, lowing most anxiously. Her lowing was responded to by the calf in the cart, and she ran wildly up to it.

“Drive off, Humphrey,” said Jacob; “I think I heard

the lowing of the heifer answered by some of the herd, and the sooner we are off the better."

Humphrey, who had the reins, drove off; the heifer followed, at one time running at the dog, at another putting her head almost into the hind part of the cart; but the lowing of the heifer was now answered by deeper tones, and Jacob said,—

"Edward, get your gun ready, for I think the herd is following. Do not fire, however, till I tell you. We must be governed by circumstances. It won't do to lose the pony, or to run any serious risk, for the sake of the heifer and calf. Drive fast, Humphrey."

A few minutes afterwards they perceived at about a quarter of a mile behind them, not the whole herd, but a single bull, who was coming up at a fast trot with his tail in the air, and tossing his head, lowing deeply in answer to the heifer.

"There's only one, after all," said Jacob; "I suppose the heifer is his favourite. Well, we can manage him.—Smoker, come in. Come in, sir, directly," cried Jacob, perceiving that the dog was about to attack the bull.

Smoker obeyed, and the bull advanced till he was within a hundred yards.

"Now, Edward, do you fire first—aim for his shoulder. Humphrey, pull up."

Humphrey stopped the pony, and the bull continued to advance, but seemed puzzled whom to attack, unless it was the dog. As soon as the bull was within sixty yards, Edward fired, and the animal fell down on its knees, tearing the ground with its horns.

"That will do," said Jacob. "Drive on again, Humphrey; we will have a look at that fellow by-and-by. At present we had better get home, as others may come.

He's up again, but he is at a standstill. I have an idea that he is hit hard."

The cart drove on, followed by the heifer; but no more of the wild herd made their appearance, and they very soon gained the cottage.

"Now, then, what shall we do?" said Jacob. "Come, Humphrey, you have had all the ordering of this, and have done it well."

"Well, Jacob, we must now drive the cart into the yard, and shut the gate upon the cow, till I am ready."

"That's easy done, by setting Smoker at her," replied Jacob; "but mercy on us, there's Alice and Edith running out!—the heifer may kill them! Go back, Alice! run quite into the cottage, and shut the door till we come."

Alice and Edith hearing this, and Edward also crying out to them, made a hasty retreat to the cottage. Humphrey then backed the cart against the paling of the yard, so as to enable Edward to get on the other side of it, ready to open the gate. Smoker was set at the heifer, and, as before, soon engaged her attention; so that the gate was opened and the cart drove in, and the gate closed again, before the heifer could follow.

"Well, Humphrey, what next?"

"Why, now lift the calf out and put it into the cow-house. I will go into the cow-house with a rope and a slip-knot at the end of it, get upon the beam above, and drop it over her horns as she's busy with the calf, which she will be as soon as you let her in. I shall pass the end of the rope outside, for you to haul up when I am ready, and then we shall have her fast, till we can secure her properly. When I call out 'ready,' do you open the gate and let her in. You can do that and jump into the cart afterwards, for fear she may run at you; but I don't think

that she will, for it's the calf she wants, and not either of you."

As soon as Humphrey was ready with the rope, he gave the word, and the gate was opened; the cow ran in immediately, and hearing her calf bleat, went into the cow-house, the door of which was shut upon her. A minute afterwards Humphrey cried out to them to haul upon the rope, which they did.

"That will do," said Humphrey from the inside; "now make the rope fast, and then you may come in."

They went in, and found the heifer drawn close to the side of the cow-house by the rope which was round her horns, and unable to move her head.

"Well, Humphrey, that's very clever; but now what's to be done?"

"First I'll saw off the tips of her horns, and then if she does run at us, she won't hurt us much. Wait till I go for the saw."

As soon as the ends of her horns were sawed off, Humphrey took another piece of rope, which he fastened securely round her horns, and then made the other end fast to the side of the building, so that the animal could move about a little and eat out of the crib.

"There," said Humphrey; "now time and patience will do the rest. We must coax her, and handle her, and soon shall tame her. At present let us leave her with the calf. She has a yard of rope, and that is enough for her to lick her calf, which is all she requires at present. To-morrow we will cut some grass for her."

They then went out, shutting the cow-house door.

"Well, Humphrey, you've beat us, after all, and have the laugh on your side now," said Jacob. "'Where there's a will, there's a way,' that's certain; and I assure you, that when you were making so much hay, and

gathering so much litter, and building a cow-house, I had no more idea that we should have a cow than that we should have an elephant; and I will say that you deserve great credit for your way of obtaining it."

"That he certainly does," replied Edward. "You have more genius than I have, brother. But dinner must be ready, if Alice has done her duty. What think you, Jacob, shall we after dinner go and look after that bull?"

"Yes, by all means. He will not be bad eating, and I can sell all I can carry in the cart at Lymington. Besides, the skin is worth money."