

## CHAPTER VIII.

EDWARD put the pony to a trot, and in two hours was on the other side of the New Forest. The directions given to him by Jacob were not forgotten, and before it was noon he found himself at the gate of the keeper's house. Dismounting, and hanging the bridle of the pony over the rail, he walked through a small garden, neatly kept, but, so early in the year, not over gay, except that the crocus and snowdrops were peeping. He rapped at the door with his knuckles, and a girl of about fourteen, very neatly dressed, answered the summons.

"Is Oswald Partridge at home, maiden?" said Edward.

"No, young man, he is not. He is in the forest."

"When will he return?"

"Towards the evening is his time, unless he is more than usually successful."

"I have come some distance to find him," replied Edward; "and it would vex me to return without seeing him. Has he a wife, or any one that I could speak to?"

"He has no wife but I am willing to deliver a message."

"I am come about some dogs which he promised to Jacob Armitage, my relation; but the old man is too unwell, and has been for some time, to come himself for them, and he has sent me."

"There are dogs, young and old, large and small, in the kennels; so far do I know, and no more."

"I fear then I must wait till his return," replied Edward.

"I will speak to my father," replied the young girl, "if you will wait one moment."

In a minute or two the girl returned, saying that her father begged that he would walk in, and he would speak with him. Edward bowed, and followed the young girl, who led the way to a room, in which was seated a man dressed after the fashion of the Roundheads of the day. His steeple-crowned hat lay on the chair, with his sword beneath it. He was sitting at a table covered with papers.

"Here is the youth, father," said the girl; and having said this, she crossed the room and took a seat by the side of the fire. The man, or we should rather say gentleman—for he had the appearance of one, notwithstanding the sombre and peculiar dress he wore, continued to read a letter which he had just opened; and Edward, who feared himself the prisoner of a Roundhead, when he only expected to meet a keeper, was further irritated by the neglect shown towards him by the party. Forgetting that he was, by his own assertion, not Edward Beverley, but the relative of one Jacob Armitage, he coloured up with anger as he stood at the door. Fortunately the time that it took the other party to read through the letter gave Edward also time for recollecting the disguise under which he appeared; the colour subsided from his cheeks, and he remained in silence, occasionally meeting the look of the little girl, who, when their eyes met, immediately withdrew her glance.

"What is your business, young man?" at last said the gentleman at the table.

"I came, sir, on private business with the keeper, Oswald Partridge, to obtain two young hounds, which he promised to my grandfather, Jacob Armitage."

“ Armitage! ” said the other party, referring to a list on the table; “ Armitage—Jacob—yes—I see he is one of the verderers. Why has he not been here to call upon me? ”

“ For what reason should he call upon you, sir? ” replied Edward.

“ Simply, young man, because the New Forest is, by the Parliament, committed to my charge. Notice has been given for all those who were employed to come here, that they might be permitted to remain, or be discharged, as I may deem most advisable.”

“ Jacob Armitage has heard nothing of this, sir,” replied Edward. “ He was a keeper, appointed under the King. For two or three years his allowances have never been paid, and he has lived in his own cottage which was left to him by his father, being his own property.”

“ And pray, may I ask, young man, do you live with Jacob Armitage? ”

“ I have done so for more than a year.”

“ And as your relation has received no pay and allowances, as you state, pray, by what means has he maintained himself? ”

“ How have the other keepers maintained themselves? ” replied Edward.

“ Do not put questions to me, sir,” replied the gentleman: “ but be pleased to reply to mine. What has been the means of subsistence of Jacob Armitage? ”

“ If you think that he has no means of subsistence, sir, you are mistaken,” replied Edward. “ We have land of our own, which we cultivate; we have our pony and our cart; we have our pigs and our cows.”

“ And they have been sufficient? ”

“ Had the patriarchs more? ” replied Edward.

“ You are pithy at reply, young man; but I know

something of Jacob Armitage, and we know," continued he, putting his finger close to some writing opposite the name on the list, "with whom he has associated, and with whom he has served. Now allow me to put one question. You have come, you say, for two young hounds. Are their services required for your pigs and cows, and to what uses are they to be put?"

"We have as good a dog as there is in the forest," replied Edward, "but we wished to have others, in case we should lose him."

"As good a dog as in the forest—good for what?"

"For hunting."

"Then you acknowledge that you do hunt?"

"I acknowledge nothing for Jacob Armitage, he may answer for himself," replied Edward; "but allow me to assure you, that if he has killed venison, no one can blame him."

"Perhaps you will explain why?"

"Nothing is more easy. Jacob Armitage served King Charles, who employed him as a verderer in the forest, and paid him his wages. Those who should not have done so, rebelled against the King, took his authority from him, and the means of paying those he employed. They were still servants of the King, for they were not dismissed; and, having no other means of support, they considered that their good master would be but too happy that they should support themselves by killing, for their subsistence, that venison which they could no longer preserve for him without eating some themselves."

"Then you admit that Jacob Armitage has killed the deer in the forest?"

"I admit nothing for Jacob Armitage."

"You admit that you have killed it yourself?"

"I shall not answer that question, sir. In the first

place, I am not here to criminate myself; and, in the next, I must know by what authority you have the right to inquire."

"Young man," replied the other in a severe tone, "if you wish to know my authority, rnalapert as you are" (at this remark Edward started, yet, recollecting himself, he compressed his lips and stood still), "this is my commission, appointing me the agent of Parliament to take charge and superintend the New Forest, with power to appoint and dismiss those whom I please. I presume you must take my word for it, as you cannot read and write."

Edward stepped up to the table, and very quietly took up the paper and read it. "You have stated what is correct, sir," said he, laying it down; "and the date of it is, I perceive, on the 20th of the last month of December. It is, therefore, but eighteen days old."

"And what inference would you draw from that, young man?" replied the gentleman, looking up to him with some astonishment.

"Simply this, sir—that Jacob Armitage has been laid up with rheumatism for three months, during which time he certainly has not killed any venison. Now, sir, until the Parliament took the forest into their hands, it undoubtedly belonged to his Majesty, if it does not now; therefore Jacob Armitage, for whatever slaughter he may have committed, is, up to the present, only answerable to his sovereign, King Charles."

"It is easy to perceive the school in which you have been brought up, young man, even if there was not evidence on this paper that your forefather served under the cavalier Colonel Beverley, and has brought you up to his way of thinking."

"Sir, it is a base dog that bites the hand that feeds him," replied Edward with warmth. "Jacob Armitage, and his

father before him, were retainers in the family of Colonel Beverley; they were indebted to him for the situation they now hold in the forest; indebted to him for everything; they revere his name, they uphold the cause for which he fell, as I *do*."

"Young man, if you do not speak advisedly, at all events you speak gratefully; neither have I a word of disrespect to offer to the memory of Colonel Beverley, who was a gallant man, and true to the cause which he espoused, although it was not a holy one; but in my position, I cannot, in justice to those whom I serve, give places and emolument to those who have been, and still are, as I may judge by your expressions, adverse to the present government."

"Sir," replied Edward, "your language, with respect to Colonel Beverley, has made me feel respect for you, which I confess I did not at first; what you say is very just; not that I think you harm Jacob Armitage; as, in the first place, I know that he would not serve under you; and, in the next, that he is too old and infirm to hold the situation; neither has he occasion for it, as his cottage and land are his own, and you cannot remove him."

"He has the title, I presume?" replied the gentleman.

"He has the title given to his grandfather, long before King Charles was born, and I presume the Parliament do not intend to invalidate the acts of former kings."

"May I inquire what relation you are to Jacob Armitage?"

"I believe, I have before said, his grandson."

"You live with him?"

"I do."

"And if the old man dies, will inherit his property?"

Edward smiled, and looking at the young girl, said,—

"Now, I ask you, maiden, if your father does not presume upon his office."

The young girl laughed, and said,—

"He is in authority."

"Not over me, certainly, and not over my grandfather, for he has dismissed him."

"Were you brought up at the cottage, young man?"

"No, sir, I was brought up at Arnwood. I was a play-mate of the children of Colonel Beverley."

"Educated with them?"

"Yes, for, as far as my wilfulness would permit, the chaplain was always ready to give me instruction."

"Where were you when Arnwood was burnt down?"

"I was at the cottage at that time," replied Edward, grinding his teeth and looking wildly.

"Nay, nay, I can forgive any expression of feeling on your part, my young man, when that dreadful and disgraceful deed is brought to your memory. It was a stain that can never be effaced—a deed most diabolical, and what we thought would call down the vengeance of Heaven. If prayers could avert, or did avert it, they were not wanting on our side."

Edward remained silent: this admission on the part of the Roundhead prevented an explosion on his part. He felt that all were not so bad as he had imagined. After a long pause, he said,—

"When I came here, sir, it was to seek Oswald Part-ridge, and obtain the hounds which he had promised us; but I presume that my journey is now useless."

"Why so?"

"Because you have the control of the forest, and will not permit dogs for the chase to be given away to those who are not employed by the powers that now govern."

"You have judged correctly, in so far that my duty is

to prevent it; but as the promise was made previous to the date of my commission, I presume," said he, smiling, "you think I have no right to interfere, as it will be an *ex post facto* case, if I do: I shall not therefore interfere, only I must point out to you, that the laws are still the same relative to those who take the deer in the forest by stealth—you understand me?"

"Yes, sir, I do; and if you will not be offended, I will give you a candid reply."

"Speak then."

"I consider that the deer in this forest belong to King Charles, who is my lawful sovereign, and I own no authority but from him. I hold myself answerable to him alone for any deer I may kill, and I feel sure of his permission and full forgiveness for what I may do."

"That may be your opinion, my good sir, but it will not be the opinion of the ruling powers; but if caught, you will be punished, and that by me, in pursuance of the authority vested in me."

"Well, sir; if so, so be it. You have dismissed the Armitages on account of their upholding the king, and you cannot, therefore, be surprised that they uphold him more than ever. Nor can you be surprised if a dismissed verderer becomes a poacher."

"Nor can you be surprised, if a poacher is caught, that he incurs the penalty," replied the Roundhead. "So now there's an end of our argument. If you go into the kitchen, you will find wherewithal to refresh the outward man, and if you wish to remain till Oswald Partridge comes home, you are welcome."

Edward, who felt indignant at being dismissed to the kitchen, nodded his head and smiled upon the little girl, and left the room. "Well," thought he, as he went along the passage, "I came here for two puppies, and I have



found a Roundhead. I don't know how it is, but I am not so angry with him as I thought I should be. That little girl had a nice smile—she was quite handsome when she smiled. Oh, this is the kitchen, to which," thought he, "the lord of Arnwood is dismissed by a Covenanter and Roundhead, probably a tradesman or outlaw, who has served the cause. Well, be it so; as Humphrey says, 'I'll bide my time.' But there is no one here, so I'll try if there is a stable for White Billy, who is tired, I presume, of being at the gate."

Edward returned by the way he came went out of the front door, and through the garden to where the pony was made fast, and led him away in search of a stable. He found one behind the house, and filling the rack with hay, returned to the house, and seated himself at a porch which was at the door which led to the back premises—for the keeper's house was large and commodious. Edward was in deep thought, when he was roused by the little girl, the daughter of the newly-appointed Intendant of the forest, who said,—

"I am afraid, young sir, you have had but sorry welcome in the kitchen, as there was no one to receive you. I was not aware that Phœbe had gone out. If you will come with me, I may, perhaps, find you refreshment."

"Thanks, maiden; you are kind and considerate to an avowed poacher," replied Edward.

"Oh, but you will not poach, I'm sure; and if you do, I'll beg you off if I can," replied the girl, laughing.

Edward followed her into the kitchen, and she soon produced a cold fowl and a venison pasty, which she placed on the table; she then went out and returned with a jug of ale.

“ There,” said she, putting it on the table, “ that is all that I can find.”

“ Your father’s name is Heatherstone, I believe. It was on the warrant.”

“ Yes, it is.”

“ And yours? ”

“ The same as my father’s, I should presume.”

“ Yes, but your baptismal name? ”

“ You ask strange questions, young sir; but still I will answer you that. My baptismal name is Patience.”

“ I thank you for your condescension,” replied Edward. “ You live here? ”

“ For the present, good sir; and now I leave you.”

“ That’s a nice little girl,” thought Edward, “ although she is the daughter of a Roundhead; and she calls me sir.” I cannot, therefore, look like Jacob’s grandson, and must be careful.” Edward then set to with a good appetite at the viands which had been placed before him, and had just finished a hearty meal when Patience Heatherstone again came in and said,—

“ Oswald Partridge is now coming home.”

“ I thank you, maiden,” replied Edward. “ May I ask a question of you? Where is the King now? ”

“ I have heard that he resides at Hurst Castle,” replied the girl; “ but,” added she in a low tone, “ all attempts to see him would be useless, and only hurt him and those who made the attempt.” Having said this, she left the room.