

CHAPTER V.

ISRAEL IN THE LION'S DEN.

Harassed day and night, hunted from food and sleep, driven from hole to hole like a fox in the woods, with no chance to earn an hour's wages, he was at last advised by one whose sincerity he could not doubt, to apply, on the good word of Sir John Millet, for a berth as laborer in the King's Gardens at Kew. There, it was said, he would be entirely safe, as no soldier durst approach those premises to molest any soul therein employed. It struck the poor exile as curious, that the very den of the British lion, the private grounds of the British King, should be commended to a refugee as his securest asylum.

His nativity carefully concealed, and being personally introduced to the chief gardener by one who well knew him; armed, too, with a line from Sir John, and recommended by his introducer as uncommonly expert at horticulture; Israel was soon installed as keeper of certain less private plants and walks of the park.

It was here, to one of his near country retreats, that, coming from perplexities of state--leaving far behind him the dingy old bricks of St. James--George the Third was wont to walk up and down beneath the long arbors formed by the interlockings of lofty trees.

More than once, raking the gravel, Israel through intervening foliage would catch peeps in some private but parallel walk, of that lonely figure, not more shadowy with overhanging leaves than with the shade of royal meditations.

Unauthorized and abhorrent thoughts will sometimes invade the best human heart. Seeing the monarch unguarded before him; remembering that the war was imputed more to the self-will of the King than to the willingness of parliament or the nation; and calling to mind all his own sufferings growing out of that war, with all the calamities of his country; dim impulses, such as those to which the regicide Ravallae yielded, would shoot balefully across the soul of the exile. But thrusting Satan behind him, Israel vanquished all such temptations. Nor did these ever more disturb him, after his one chance conversation with the monarch.

As he was one day gravelling a little by-walk, wrapped in thought, the King turning a clump of bushes, suddenly brushed Israel's person.

Immediately Israel touched his hat--but did not remove it--bowed, and was retiring; when something in his air arrested the King's attention.

"You ain't an Englishman,--no Englishman--no, no."

Pale as death, Israel tried to answer something; but knowing not what to say, stood frozen to the ground.

"You are a Yankee--a Yankee," said the King again in his rapid and half-stammering way.

Again Israel assayed to reply, but could not. What could he say? Could he lie to a King?

"Yes, yes,--you are one of that stubborn race,--that very stubborn race. What brought you here?"

"The fate of war, sir."

"May it please your Majesty," said a low cringing voice, approaching, "this man is in the walk against orders. There is some mistake, may it please your Majesty. Quit the walk, blockhead," he hissed at Israel.

It was one of the junior gardeners who thus spoke. It seems that Israel had mistaken his directions that morning.

"Slink, you dog," hissed the gardener again to Israel; then aloud to the King, "A mistake of the man, I assure your Majesty."

"Go you away--away with ye, and leave him with me," said the king.

Waiting a moment, till the man was out of hearing, the king again turned upon Israel.

"Were you at Bunker Hill?--that bloody Bunker Hill--eh, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fought like a devil--like a very devil, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Helped flog--helped flog my soldiers?"

"Yes, sir; but very sorry to do it."

"Eh?--eh?--how's that?"

"I took it to be my sad duty, sir."

"Very much mistaken--very much mistaken, indeed. Why do ye sir me?--eh?
I'm your king--your king."

"Sir," said Israel firmly, but with deep respect, "I have no king."

The king darted his eye incensedly for a moment; but without quailing, Israel, now that all was out, still stood with mute respect before him. The king, turning suddenly, walked rapidly away from Israel a moment, but presently returning with a less hasty pace, said, "You are rumored to be a spy--a spy, or something of that sort--ain't you? But I know you

are not--no, no. You are a runaway prisoner of war, eh? You have sought this place to be safe from pursuit, eh? eh? Is it not so?--eh? eh? eh?"

"Sir, it is."

"Well, ye're an honest rebel--rebel, yes, rebel. Hark ye, hark. Say nothing of this talk to any one. And hark again. So long as you remain here at Kew, I shall see that you are safe--safe."

"God bless your Majesty!"

"Eh?"

"God bless your noble Majesty?"

"Come--come--come," smiled the king in delight, "I thought I could conquer ye--conquer ye."

"Not the king, but the king's kindness, your Majesty."

"Join my army--army."

Sadly looking down, Israel silently shook his head.

"You won't? Well, gravel the walk then--gravel away. Very stubborn race--very stubborn race, indeed--very--very--very."

And still growling, the magnanimous lion departed. How the monarch came by his knowledge of so humble an exile, whether through that swift insight into individual character said to form one of the miraculous qualities transmitted with a crown, or whether some of the rumors prevailing outside of the garden had come to his ear, Israel could never determine. Very probably, though, the latter was the case, inasmuch as some vague shadowy report of Israel not being an Englishman, had, a little previous to his interview with the king, been communicated to several of the inferior gardeners. Without any impeachment of Israel's fealty to his country, it must still be narrated, that from this his familiar audience with George the Third, he went away with very favorable views of that monarch. Israel now thought that it could not be the warm heart of the king, but the cold heads of his lords in council, that persuaded him so tyrannically to persecute America. Yet hitherto the precise contrary of this had been Israel's opinion, agreeably to the popular prejudice throughout New England.

Thus we see what strange and powerful magic resides in a crown, and how subtly that cheap and easy magnanimity, which in private belongs to most kings, may operate on good-natured and unfortunate souls. Indeed, had it not been for the peculiar disinterested fidelity of our adventurer's patriotism, he would have soon sported the red coat; and perhaps under the immediate patronage of his royal friend, been advanced in time to no mean rank in the army of Britain. Nor in that case would we have had to follow him, as at last we shall, through long, long years of obscure and

penurious wandering.

Continuing in the service of the king's gardeners at Kew, until a season came when the work of the garden required a less number of laborers, Israel, with several others, was discharged; and the day after, engaged himself for a few months to a farmer in the neighborhood where he had been last employed. But hardly a week had gone by, when the old story of his being a rebel, or a runaway prisoner, or a Yankee, or a spy, began to be revived with added malignity. Like bloodhounds, the soldiers were once more on the track. The houses where he harbored were many times searched; but thanks to the fidelity of a few earnest well-wishers, and to his own unsleeping vigilance and activity, the hunted fox still continued to elude apprehension. To such extremities of harassment, however, did this incessant pursuit subject him, that in a fit of despair he was about to surrender himself, and submit to his fate, when Providence seasonably interposed in his favor.