

CHAPTER VI.

ISRAEL MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF CERTAIN SECRET FRIENDS OF AMERICA, ONE OF THEM BEING THE FAMOUS AUTHOR OF THE "DIVERSIONS OF PURLEY," THESE DESPATCH HIM ON A SLY ERRAND ACROSS THE CHANNEL.

At this period, though made the victims indeed of British oppression, yet the colonies were not totally without friends in Britain. It was but natural that when Parliament itself held patriotic and gifted men, who not only recommended conciliatory measures, but likewise denounced the war as monstrous; it was but natural that throughout the nation at large there should be many private individuals cherishing similar sentiments, and some who made no scruple clandestinely to act upon them.

Late one night while hiding in a farmer's granary, Israel saw a man with a lantern approaching. He was about to flee, when the man hailed him in a well-known voice, bidding him have no fear. It was the farmer himself. He carried a message to Israel from a gentleman of Brentford, to the effect, that the refugee was earnestly requested to repair on the following evening to that gentleman's mansion.

At first, Israel was disposed to surmise that either the farmer was playing him false, or else his honest credulity had been imposed upon by evil-minded persons. At any rate, he regarded the message as a decoy, and for half an hour refused to credit its sincerity. But at length he

was induced to think a little better of it. The gentleman giving the invitation was one Squire Woodcock, of Brentford, whose loyalty to the king had been under suspicion; so at least the farmer averred. This latter information was not without its effect.

At nightfall on the following day, being disguised in strange clothes by the farmer, Israel stole from his retreat, and after a few hours' walk, arrived before the ancient brick house of the Squire; who opening the door in person, and learning who it was that stood there, at once assured Israel in the most solemn manner, that no foul play was intended. So the wanderer suffered himself to enter, and be conducted to a private chamber in the rear of the mansion, where were seated two other gentlemen, attired, in the manner of that age, in long laced coats, with small-clothes, and shoes with silver buckles.

"I am John Woodcock," said the host, "and these gentlemen are Horne Tooke and James Bridges. All three of us are friends to America. We have heard of you for some weeks past, and inferring from your conduct, that you must be a Yankee of the true blue stamp, we have resolved to employ you in a way which you cannot but gladly approve; for surely, though an exile, you are still willing to serve your country; if not as a sailor or soldier, yet as a traveller?"

"Tell me how I may do it?" demanded Israel, not completely at ease.

"At that in good time," smiled the Squire. "The point is now--do you

repose confidence in my statements?"

Israel glanced inquiringly upon the Squire; then upon his companions; and meeting the expressive, enthusiastic, candid countenance of Horne Tooke--then in the first honest ardor of his political career--turned to the Squire, and said, "Sir, I believe what you have said. Tell me now what I am to do."

"Oh, there is just nothing to be done to-night," said the Squire; "nor for some days to come perhaps, but we wanted to have you prepared."

And hereupon he hinted to his guest rather vaguely of his general intention; and that over, begged him to entertain them with some account of his adventures since he first took up arms for his country. To this Israel had no objections in the world, since all men love to tell the tale of hardships endured in a righteous cause. But ere beginning his story, the Squire refreshed him with some cold beef, laid in a snowy napkin, and a glass of Perry, and thrice during the narration of the adventures, pressed him with additional draughts.

But after his second glass, Israel declined to drink more, mild as the beverage was. For he noticed, that not only did the three gentlemen listen with the utmost interest to his story, but likewise interrupted him with questions and cross-questions in the most pertinacious manner. So this led him to be on his guard, not being absolutely certain yet, as to who they might really be, or what was

their real design. But as it turned out, Squire Woodcock and his friends only sought to satisfy themselves thoroughly, before making their final disclosures, that the exile was one in whom implicit confidence might be placed.

And to this desirable conclusion they eventually came, for upon the ending of Israel's story, after expressing their sympathies for his hardships, and applauding his generous patriotism in so patiently enduring adversity, as well as singing the praises of his gallant fellow-soldiers of Bunker Hill, they openly revealed their scheme. They wished to know whether Israel would undertake a trip to Paris, to carry an important message--shortly to be received for transmission through them--to Doctor Franklin, then in that capital.

"All your expenses shall be paid, not to speak of a compensation besides," said the Squire; "will you go?"

"I must think of it," said Israel, not yet wholly confirmed in his mind. But once more he cast his glance on Horne Tooke, and his irresolution was gone.

The Squire now informed Israel that, to avoid suspicions, it would be necessary for him to remove to another place until the hour at which he should start for Paris. They enjoined upon him the profoundest secrecy, gave him a guinea, with a letter for a gentleman in White Waltham, a town some miles from Brentford, which point they begged him to reach

as soon as possible, there to tarry for further instructions.

Having informed him of thus much, Squire Woodcock asked him to hold out his right foot.

"What for?" said Israel.

"Why, would you not like to have a pair of new boots against your return?" smiled Horne Tooke.

"Oh, yes; no objection at all," said, Israel.

"Well, then, let the bootmaker measure you," smiled Horne Tooke.

"Do you do it, Mr. Tooke," said the Squire; "you measure men's parts better than I."

"Hold out your foot, my good friend," said Horne Tooke--"there--now let's measure your heart."

"For that, measure me round the chest," said Israel.

"Just the man we want," said Mr. Bridges, triumphantly.

"Give him another glass of wine, Squire," said Horne Tooke.

Exchanging the farmer's clothes for still another disguise, Israel now set out immediately, on foot, for his destination, having received minute directions as to his road, and arriving in White Waltham on the following morning was very cordially received by the gentleman to whom he carried the letter. This person, another of the active English friends of America, possessed a particular knowledge of late events in that land. To him Israel was indebted for much entertaining information. After remaining some ten days at this place, word came from Squire Woodcock, requiring Israel's immediate return, stating the hour at which he must arrive at the house, namely, two o'clock on the following morning. So, after another night's solitary trudge across the country, the wanderer was welcomed by the same three gentlemen as before, seated in the same room.

"The time has now come," said Squire Woodcock. "You must start this morning for Paris. Take off your shoes."

"Am I to steal from here to Paris on my stocking-feet?" said Israel, whose late easy good living at White Waltham had not failed to bring out the good-natured and mirthful part of him, even as his prior experiences had produced, for the most part, something like a contrary result.

"Oh, no," smiled Horne Tooke, who always lived well, "we have seven-league-boots for you. Don't you remember my measuring you?"

Hereupon going to the closet, the Squire brought out a pair of new

boots. They were fitted with false heels. Unscrewing these, the Squire showed Israel the papers concealed beneath. They were of a fine tissuey fibre, and contained much writing in a very small compass. The boots, it need hardly be said, had been particularly made for the occasion.

"Walk across the room with them," said the Squire, when Israel had pulled them on.

"He'll surely be discovered," smiled Horne Tooke. "Hark how he creaks."

"Come, come, it's too serious a matter for joking," said the Squire.

"Now, my fine fellow, be cautious, be sober, be vigilant, and above all things be speedy."

Being furnished now with all requisite directions, and a supply of money, Israel, taking leave of Mr. Tooke and Mr. Bridges, was secretly conducted down stairs by the Squire, and in five minutes' time was on his way to Charing Cross in London, where taking the post-coach for Dover, he thence went in a packet to Calais, and in fifteen minutes after landing, was being wheeled over French soil towards Paris. He arrived there in safety, and freely declaring himself an American, the peculiarly friendly relations of the two nations at that period, procured him kindly attentions even from strangers.