

OLIVER TWIST;

OR, THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS.

BY BOZ.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

BOOK THE THIRD.

CHAPTER THE NINTH.

FATAL CONSEQUENCES.

It was nearly two hours before daybreak — the time which in the autumn of the year may be truly called the dead of night; when the streets are silent and deserted, when even sound appears to slumber, and profligacy and riot have staggered home to dream — it was at this still and silent hour that the Jew sat watching in his old lair, with face so distorted and pale, and eyes so red and bloodshot, that he looked less like a man than some hideous phantom, moist from the grave, and worried by an evil spirit.

He sat crouching over a cold hearth, wrapped in an old torn coverlet, with his face turned towards a wasting candle that stood upon a table by his side. His right hand was raised to his lips, and as, absorbed in thought, he bit his long black nails, he disclosed among his toothless gums a few such fangs as should have been a dog's or rat's.

Stretched on a mattress upon the floor lay Noah Claypole fast asleep. Towards him the old man sometimes directed his eyes for an instant, then brought them back again to the candle, which, with long-burnt wick drooping almost double, and hot grease falling down in clots upon the table, plainly showed that his thoughts were busy elsewhere.

Indeed they were. Mortification at the overthrow of his notable scheme, hatred of the girl who had dared to palter with strangers, an utter distrust of the sincerity of her refusal to yield him up, bitter disappointment at the loss of his revenge on Sikes, the fear of detection, and ruin, and death, and a fierce and deadly rage kindled by all, — these were the passionate considerations which, following close upon each other with rapid and ceaseless whirl, shot through the brain of Fagin, as every evil thought and blackest purpose lay working at his heart.

He sat without changing his attitude in the least, or appearing to take the smallest heed of time, until his quick ear seemed to be attracted by a footstep in the street.

"At last," muttered the Jew, wiping his dry and fevered mouth. "At last."

The bell rang gently as he spoke. He crept up stairs to the door, and presently returned, accompanied by a man muffled to the chin, who carried a bundle under one arm. Sitting down,

and throwing back his outer coat, the man displayed the burly frame of Sikes.

"There," he said, laying the bundle on the table. "Take care of that, and do the most you can with it. It's been trouble enough to get; I thought I should have been here three hours ago."

Fagin laid his hand upon the bundle, and, locking it in the cupboard, sat down again without speaking. But he did not take his eyes off the robber for an instant during this action, and now that they sat over against each other, face to face, he looked fixedly at him, with his lips quivering so violently, and his face so altered by the emotions which had mastered him, that the housebreaker involuntarily drew back his chair, and surveyed him with a look of real affright.

"Wot now?" cried Sikes. "Wot do you look at a man so for?—Speak, will you?"

The Jew raised his right hand, and shook his trembling forefinger in the air, but his passion was so great that the power of speech was for the moment gone.

"D—me!" said Sikes, feeling in his breast with a look of alarm. "He's gone mad. I must look to myself here."

"No, no," rejoined Fagin, finding his voice. "It's not—you're not the person, Bill. I've no—no fault to find with you."

"Oh, you haven't, haven't you?" said Sikes, looking sternly at him, and ostentatiously passing a pistol into a more convenient pocket. "That's lucky—for one of us. Which one that is, don't matter."

"I've got that to tell you, Bill," said the Jew, drawing his chair nearer, "will make you worse than me."

"Ay?" returned the robber, with an incredulous air. "Tell away. Look sharp, or Nance will think I'm lost."

"Lost!" cried Fagin. "She has pretty well settled that in her own mind already."

Sikes looked with an aspect of great perplexity into the Jew's face, and reading no satisfactory explanation of the riddle there, clenched his coat collar in his huge hand, and shook him soundly.

"Speak, will you!" he said; "or if you don't, it shall be for want of breath. Open your mouth, and say wot you've got to say in plain words. Out with it, you thundering old cur, out with it."

"Suppose that lad that's lying there——" Fagin began.

Sikes turned round to where Noah was sleeping, as if he had not previously observed him. "Well," he said, resuming his former position.

"Suppose that lad," pursued the Jew, "was to peach—blow upon us all—first seeking out the right folks for the purpose, and then having a meeting with 'em in the street to paint our

likenesses, describe every mark that they might know us by, and the crib where we might be most easily taken. Suppose he was to do all this, and, besides, to blow upon a plant we've all been in, more or less—of his own fancy; not grabbed, trapped, tried, earwigged by the parson, and brought to it on bread and water,—but of his own fancy; to please his own taste; stealing out at nights to find those most interested against us, and peaching to them. Do you hear me?" cried the Jew, his eyes flashing with rage. "Suppose he did all this, what then?"

"What then!" replied Sikes with a tremendous oath. "If he was left alive till I came, I'd grind his skull under the iron heel of my boot into as many grains as there are hairs upon his head."

"What if I did it!" cried the Jew, almost in a yell. "I, that know so much, and could hang so many besides myself!"

"I don't know," replied Sikes, clenching his teeth, and turning white at the mere suggestion. "I'd do something in the jail that 'ud get me put in irons; and if I was tried along with you, I'd fall upon you with them in the open court, and beat your brains out afore the people, I should have such strength," muttered the robber, poisoning his brawny arm, "that I could smash your head as if a loaded waggon had gone over it."

"You would?"

"Would I!" said the housebreaker. "Try me."

"If it was Charley, or the Dodger, or Bet, or ——"

"I don't care who," replied Sikes impatiently. "Whoever it was, I'd serve them the same."

Fagin again looked hard at the robber, and motioning him to be silent, stooped over the bed upon the floor, and shook the sleeper to rouse him. Sikes leant forward in his chair, looking on, with his hands upon his knees, as if wondering much what all this questioning and preparation was to end in.

"Bolter! Bolter! Poor lad!" said Fagin, looking up with an expression of devilish anticipation, and speaking slowly, and with marked emphasis. "He's tired — tired with watching for *her* so long,—watching for *her*, Bill."

"Wot d'ye mean?" asked Sikes, drawing back.

The Jew made no answer, but bending over the sleeper again, hauled him into a sitting posture. When his assumed name had been repeated several times, Noah rubbed his eyes, and giving a heavy yawn, looked sleepily about him.

"Tell me that again—once again, just for him to hear," said the Jew, pointing to Sikes as he spoke.

"Tell yer what?" asked the sleepy Noah, shaking himself pettishly.

"That about—NANCY," said the Jew, clutching Sikes by the wrist, as if to prevent his leaving the house before he had heard enough. "You followed her!"

"Yes."

"To London Bridge?"

"Yes."

"Where she met two people?"

"So she did."

"A gentleman, and a lady that she had gone to of her own accord before, who asked her to give up all her pals and Monks first, which she did; and to describe him, which she did; and to tell her what house it was that we meet at, and go to, which she did; and where it could be best watched from, which she did; and what time the people went there, which she did. She did all this. She told it all, every word, without a threat, without a murmur — she did — didn't she?" cried the Jew, half mad with fury.

"All right," replied Noah, scratching his head. "That's just what it was."

"What did they say about last Sunday?" demanded the Jew.

"About last Sunday," replied Noah, considering. "Why, I told yer that before."

"Again. Tell it again!" cried Fagin, tightening his grasp on Sikes, and brandishing his other hand aloft as the foam flew from his lips.

"They asked her," said Noah, who, as he grew more wakeful, seemed to have a dawning perception who Sikes was, "they asked her why she didn't come last Sunday as she promised. She said she couldn't—"

"Why — why?" interrupted the Jew, triumphantly. "Tell him that."

"Because she was forcibly kept at home by Bill, the man she had told them of before," replied Noah.

"What more of him?" cried the Jew. "What more of the man she had told them of before. Tell him that—tell him that."

"Why, that she couldn't very easily get out of doors unless he knew where she was going to," said Noah; "and so the first time she went to see the lady, she — ha! ha! ha! it made me laugh when she said it, that did, — she gave him a drink of laudanum."

"Hell's fire!" cried Sikes, breaking fiercely from the Jew. "Let me go!"

Flinging the old man from him, he rushed from the room, and darted wildly and furiously up the stairs.

"Bill, Bill!" cried the Jew, following him hastily. "A word. Only a word."

The word would not have been exchanged, but that the housebreaker was unable to open the door, on which he was expending fruitless oaths and violence when the Jew came panting up.

"Let me out!" said Sikes. "Don't speak to me — it's not safe. Let me out, I say."

“Here me speak a word,” rejoined the Jew, laying his hand upon the lock, “you won’t be——”

“Well,” replied the other.

“You won’t be—too—violent, Bill?” whined the Jew.

The day was breaking, and there was light enough for the men to see each other’s faces. They exchanged one brief glance; there was a fire in the eyes of both which could not be mistaken.

“I mean,” said Fagin, showing that he felt all disguise was now useless, “not too violent for safety. Be crafty, Bill, and not too bold.”

Sikes made no reply, but, pulling open the door, of which the Jew had turned the lock, dashed into the silent streets.

Without one pause or moment’s consideration, without once turning his head to the right or left, or raising his eyes to the sky, or lowering them to the ground, but looking straight before him with savage resolution, his teeth so tightly compressed that the strained jaw seemed starting through his skin, the robber held on his headlong course, nor muttered a word, nor relaxed a muscle, until he reached his own door. He opened it softly with a key, strode lightly up the stairs, and entering his own room, double-locked the door, and, lifting a heavy table against it, drew back the curtain of the bed.

The girl was lying half-dressed upon it. He had wakened her from her sleep, for she raised herself with a hurried and startled look.

“Get up,” said the man.

“It is you, Bill,” said the girl, with an expression of pleasure at his return.

“It is,” was the reply. “Get up.”

There was a candle burning, but the man hastily drew it from the candlestick, and hurled it under the grate. Seeing the faint light of early day without, the girl rose to undraw the curtain.

“Let it be,” said Sikes, thrusting his hand before her. “There’s light enough for wot I’ve got to do.”

“Bill,” said the girl, in the low voice of alarm, “why do you look like that at me?”

The robber sat regarding her for a few seconds with dilated nostrils and heaving breast, and then, grasping her by the head and throat, dragged her into the middle of the room, and, looking once towards the door, placed his heavy hand upon her mouth.

“Bill, Bill—” gasped the girl, wrestling with the strength of mortal fear, “—I—I won’t scream, or cry—not once,—hear me—speak to me—tell me what I have done!”

“You know, you she-devil!” returned the robber, suppressing his breath. “You were watched to-night; every word you said was heard.”

“Then, spare my life, for the love of Heaven, as I spared yours,” rejoined the girl, clinging to him. “Bill, dear Bill!

you cannot have the heart to kill me! Oh, think of all I have given up only this one night for you! You *shall* have time to think, and save yourself this crime! I will not loose my hold; you cannot throw me off. Bill! Bill! for dear God's sake, for your own, for mine, stop before you spill my blood. I have been true to you; upon my guilty soul I have."

The man struggled violently to release his arms, but those of the girl were clasped round his, and, tear her as he would, he could not tear them away.

"Bill," cried the girl, striving to lay her head upon his breast, "the gentleman, and that dear lady, told me to-night of a home in some foreign country, where I could end my days in solitude and peace. Let me see them again, and beg them on my knees to show the same mercy and goodness to you, and let us both leave this dreadful place, and far apart lead better lives, and forget how we have lived, except in prayers, and never see each other more. It is never too late to repent. They told me so—I feel it now—but we must have time—a little, little time!"

The housebreaker freed one arm, and grasped his pistol. The certainty of immediate detection if he fired, flashed across his mind, even in the midst of his fury, and he beat it twice with all the force he could summon, upon the upturned face that almost touched his own.

She staggered and fell, nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead, but raising herself with difficulty on her knees, drew from her bosom a white handkerchief—Rose Maylie's own—and holding it up in her folded hands as high towards Heaven as her feeble strength would let her, breathed one prayer for mercy to her Maker.

It was a ghastly figure to look upon. The murderer staggering backward to the wall, and shutting out the sight with his hand, seized a heavy club and struck her down.

CHAPTER THE TENTH.

THE FLIGHT OF SIKES.

OF all bad deeds that under cover of the darkness had been committed within wide London's bounds since night hung over it, that was the worst;—of all the horrors that rose with an ill scent upon the morning air, that was the foulest and most cruel.

The sun—the bright sun, that brings back not light alone, but new life, and hope, and freshness to man—burst upon the crowded city in clear and radiant glory. Through costly-coloured glass and paper-mended window, through cathedral dome and rotten crevice, it shed its equal ray. It lighted up the room where the murdered woman lay. It did. He tried to shut it out, but it would stream in. If the sight had been a ghastly one in the dull morning, what was it now in all that brilliant light!

He had not moved: he had been afraid to stir. There had

been a moan and motion of the hand ; and with terror added to hate he had struck and struck again. Once he threw a rug over it ; but it was worse to fancy the eyes, and imagine them moving towards him, than to see them glaring upwards, as if watching the reflection of the pool of gore that quivered and danced in the sunlight on the ceiling. He had plucked it off again. And there was the body—mere flesh and blood, no more—but *such* flesh, and *such* blood !

He struck a light, kindled a fire, and thrust the club into it. There was human hair upon the end which blazed and shrunk into a light cinder, and, caught by the air, whirled up the chimney. Even that frightened him, sturdy as he was ; but he held the weapon till it broke, and then piled it on the coals to burn away, and smoulder into ashes. He washed himself and rubbed his clothes ; there were spots that would not be removed, but he cut the pieces out, and burnt them. How those stains were dispersed about the room ! The very feet of the dog were bloody.

All this time he had never once turned his back upon the corpse ; no, not for a moment. Such preparations completed, he moved backwards towards the door, dragging the dog with him, lest he should carry out new evidences of the crime into the streets. He shut the door softly, locked it, took the key, and left the house.

He crossed over, and glanced up at the window, to be sure that nothing was visible from the outside. There was the curtain still drawn, which she would have opened to admit the light she never saw again. It lay nearly under there. *He* knew that. God, how the sun poured down upon the very spot !

The glance was instantaneous. It was a relief to have got free of the room. He whistled on the dog, and walked rapidly away.

He went through Islington ; strode up the hill at Highgate, on which stands the stone in honour of Whittington ; turned down to Highgate Hill, unsteady of purpose, and uncertain where to go ; struck off to the right again almost as soon as he began to descend it, and taking the foot-path across the fields, skirted Caen Wood, and so came out on Hampstead Heath. Traversing the hollow by the Vale of Health, he mounted the opposite bank, and crossing the road which joins the villages of Hampstead and Highgate, made along the remaining portion of the heath to the fields at North End, in one of which he laid himself down under a hedge and slept.

Soon he was up again, and away—not far into the country, but back towards London by the high-road—then back again—then over another part of the same ground as he had already traversed—then wandering up and down in fields, and lying on ditches' brinks to rest, and starting up to make for some other spot and do the same, and ramble on again.

Where could he go, that was near and not too public, to

get some meat and drink? Hendon. That was a good place, not far off, and out of most people's way. Thither he directed his steps,—running sometimes, and sometimes, with a strange perversity, loitering at a snail's pace, or stopping altogether and idly breaking the hedges with his stick. But when he got there, all the people he met—the very children at the doors—seemed to view him with suspicion. Back he turned again, without the courage to purchase bit or drop, though he had tasted no food for many hours; and once more he lingered on the heath, uncertain where to go.

He wandered over miles and miles of ground, and still came back to the old place; morning and noon had passed, and the day was on the wane, and still he rambled to and fro, and up and down, and round and round, and still lingered about the same spot. At last he got away, and shaped his course for Hatfield.

It was nine o'clock at night when the man, quite tired out, and the dog limping and lame from the unaccustomed exercise, turned down the hill by the church of the quiet village, and plodding along the little street, crept into a small public-house, whose scanty light had guided them to the spot. There was a fire in the tap-room, and some country labourers were drinking before it. They made room for the stranger, but he sat down in the farthest corner, and ate and drank alone, or rather with his dog, to whom he cast a morsel of food from time to time.

The conversation of the men assembled here, turned upon the neighbouring land and farmers, and, when those topics were exhausted, upon the age of some old man who had been buried on the previous Sunday; the young men present considering him very old, and the old men present declaring him to have been quite young—not older, one white-haired grandfather said, than he was—with ten or fifteen years of life in him at least—if he had taken care; if he had taken care.

There was nothing to attract attention or excite alarm in this. The robber, after paying his reckoning, sat silent and unnoticed in his corner, and had almost dropped asleep, when he was half wakened by the noisy entrance of a new-comer.

This was an antic fellow, half pedlar and half mountebank, who travelled about the country on foot to vend hones, strops, razors, wash-balls, harness-paste, medicines for dogs and horses, cheap perfumery, cosmetics, and such like wares, which he carried in a case slung to his back. His entrance was the signal for various homely jokes with the countrymen, which slackened not until he had made his supper, and opened his box of treasures, when he ingeniously contrived to unite business with amusement.

“And what be that stoof—good to eat, Harry?” asked a grinning countryman, pointing to some composition cakes in one corner.

“This,” said the fellow, producing one, “this is the infallible

and invaluable composition for removing all sorts of stain, rust, dirt, mildew, spick, speck, spot, or spatter, from silk, satin, linen, cambric, cloth, crape, stuff, carpet, merino, muslin, bombazine, or woollen stuff. Wine-stains, fruit-stains, beer-stains, water-stains, paint-stains, pitch-stains, any stains—all come out at one rub with the infallible and invaluable composition. If a lady stains her honour, she has only need to swallow one cake, and she's cured at once—for it's poison. If a gentleman wants to prove his, he has only need to bolt one little square, and he has put it beyond question—for it's quite as satisfactory as a pistol-bullet, and a great deal nastier in the flavour, consequently the more credit in taking it. One penny a-square. With all these virtues, one penny a square."

There were two buyers directly, and more of the listeners plainly hesitated. The vender observing this, increased in loquacity.

"It's all bought up as fast as it can be made," said the fellow. "There are fourteen water-mills, six steam-engines, and a galvanic battery always a-working upon it, and they can't make it fast enough, though the men work so hard that they die off, and the widows is pensioned directly with twenty pound a-year for each of the children, and a premium of fifty for twins. One penny a square—two halfpence is all the same, and four farthings is received with joy. One penny a square. Wine-stains, fruit-stains, beer-stains, water-stains, paint-stains, pitch-stains, mud-stains, blood-stains—here is a stain upon the hat of a gentleman in company that I'll take clean out before he can order me a pint of ale."

"Ha!" cried Sikes starting up. "Give that back."

"I'll take it clean out, sir," replied the man, winking to the company, "before you can come across the room to get it. Gentlemen all, observe the dark stain upon this gentleman's hat, no wider than a shilling, but thicker than a half-crown. Whether it is a wine-stain, fruit-stain, beer-stain, water-stain, paint-stain, pitch-stain, mud-stain, or blood-stain—"

The man got no farther, for Sikes with a hideous imprecation overthrew the table, and tearing the hat from him, burst out of the house.

With the same perversity of feeling, and irresolution that had fastened upon him, despite himself, all day, the murderer, finding that he was not followed, and that they most probably considered him some drunken sullen fellow, turned back up the town, and getting out of the glare of the lamps of a stage-coach that was standing in the street, was walking past, when he recognised the mail from London, and saw that it was standing at the little post-office. He almost knew what was to come, but he crossed over and listened.

The guard was standing at the door waiting for the letter-bag. A man dressed like a gamekeeper came up at the mo-

ment, and he handed him a basket which lay ready on the pavement.

"That's for your people," said the guard. "Now, look alive in there, will you. Damn that 'ere bag, it warn't ready night afore last: this won't do, you know."

"Anything new up in town, Ben?" asked the gamekeeper, drawing back to the window-shutters, the better to admire the horses.

"No, nothing that I knows on," replied the man, pulling on his gloves. "Corn's up a little. I heerd talk of a murder, too, down Spitalfields way, but I don't reckon much upon it."

"Oh, that's quite true," said a gentleman inside, who was looking out of the window. "And a very dreadful murder it was."

"Was it, sir?" rejoined the guard, touching his hat. "Man or woman, pray, sir?"

"A woman," replied the gentleman. "It is supposed—"

"Now, Ben," cried the coachman impatiently.

"Damn that 'ere bag," said the guard; "are you gone to sleep in there?"

"Coming," cried the office-keeper, running out.

"Coming," growled the guard. "Ah, and so's the young 'ooman of property that's going to take a fancy to me, but I don't know when. Here, give hold. All ri—ight!"

The horn sounded a few cheerful notes, and the coach was gone.

Sikes remained standing in the street, apparently unmoved by what he had just heard, and agitated by no stronger feeling than a doubt where to go. At length he went back again, and took the road which leads from Hatfield to St. Albans.

He went on doggedly; but as he left the town behind him, and plunged further and further into the solitude and darkness of the road, he felt a dread and awe creeping upon him which shook him to the core. Every object before him, substance or shadow, still or moving, took the semblance of some fearful thing; but these fears were nothing, compared to the sense that haunted him of that morning's ghastly figure following at his heels. He could trace its shadow in the gloom, supply the smallest item of the outline, and note how stiff and solemn it seemed to stalk along. He could hear its garments rustling in the leaves, and every breath of wind came laden with that last low cry. If he stopped, it did the same. If he ran, it followed—not running too, that would have been a relief, but like a corpse endowed with the mere machinery of life, and borne upon one slow melancholy wind that never rose or fell.

At times he turned with desperate determination, resolved to beat this phantom off, though it should look him dead; but the hair rose from his head, and his blood stood still; for it had turned with him, and was behind him then. He had kept it

before him that morning, but it was behind him now—always. He leant his back against a bank, and felt that it stood above him, visibly out against the cold night-sky. He threw himself upon the road—on his back upon the road. At his head it stood, silent, erect, and still—a living grave-stone, with its epitaph in blood.

Let no man talk of murderers escaping justice, and hint that Providence must sleep. There were twenty score of violent deaths in one long minute of that agony of fear.

There was a shed in a field he passed that offered shelter for the night. Before the door were three tall poplar trees, which made it very dark within, and the wind moaned through them with a dismal wail. He *could not* walk on till daylight came again, and here he stretched himself close to the wall—to undergo new torture.

For now a vision came before him, as constant and more terrible than that from which he had escaped. Those widely-staring eyes, so lustreless and so glassy, that he had better borne to see than think upon, appeared in the midst of the darkness; light in themselves, but giving light to nothing. There were but two, but they were everywhere. If he shut out the sight, there came the room with every well-known object—some, indeed, that he would have forgotten if he had gone over its contents from memory—each in its accustomed place. The body was in *its* place, and its eyes were as he saw them when he stole away. He got up and rushed into the field without. The figure was behind him. He re-entered the shed, and shrunk down once more. The eyes were there before he had lain himself along.

And here he remained in such terror as none but he can know, trembling in every limb, and the cold sweat starting from every pore, when suddenly there arose upon the night-wind the noise of distant shouting, and the roar of voices mingled in alarm and wonder. Any sound of men in that lonely place, even though it conveyed a real cause of alarm, was something to him. He regained his strength and energy at the prospect of personal danger, and springing to his feet, rushed into the open air.

The broad sky seemed on fire. Rising into the air with showers of sparks, and rolling one above the other, were sheets of flame, lighting the atmosphere for miles round, and driving clouds of smoke in the direction where he stood. The shouts grew louder as new voices swelled the roar, and he could hear the cry of Fire mingled with the ringing of an alarm-bell, the fall of heavy bodies, and the crackling of flames as they twined round some new obstacle, and shot aloft as though refreshed by food. The noise increased as he looked. There were people there—men and women—light, bustle. It was like new life to him. He darted onward—straight, headlong—dashing through

brier and brake, and leaping gate and fence as madly as the dog who careered with loud and sounding bark before him.

He came upon the spot. There were half-dressed figures tearing to and fro, some endeavouring to drag the frightened horses from the stables, others driving the cattle from the yard and out-houses, and others coming laden from the burning pile amidst a shower of falling sparks, and the tumbling down of red-hot beams. The apertures, where doors and windows stood an hour ago, disclosed a mass of raging fire; walls rocked and crumbled into the burning well; the molten lead and iron poured down, white-hot, upon the ground. Women and children shrieked, and men encouraged each other with noisy shouts and cheers. The clanking of the engine-pumps, and the spitting and hissing of the water as it fell upon the blazing wood, added to the tremendous roar. He shouted too till he was hoarse; and flying from memory and himself, plunged into the thickest of the throng.

Hither and thither he dived that night—now working at the pumps, and now hurrying through the smoke and flame, but never ceasing to engage himself wherever noise and men were thickest. Up and down the ladders, upon the roofs of buildings, over floors that quaked and trembled with his weight, under the lee of falling bricks and stones,—in every part of that great fire was he; but he bore a charmed life, and had neither scratch nor bruise, nor weariness nor thought, till morning dawned again, and only smoke and blackened ruins remained.

This mad excitement over, there returned with tenfold force the dreadful consciousness of his crime. He looked suspiciously about him, for the men were conversing in groups, and he feared to be the subject of their talk. The dog obeyed the significant beck of his finger, and they drew off stealthily together. He passed near an engine where some men were seated, and they called to him to share in their refreshment. He took some bread and meat; and as he drank a draught of beer, heard the firemen, who were from London, talking about the murder. "He has gone to Birmingham, they say," said one: "but they'll have him yet, for the scouts are out, and by to-morrow night there'll be a cry all through the country."

He hurried off and walked till he almost dropped upon the ground, then lay down in a lane, and had a long, but broken and uneasy sleep. He wandered on again, irresolute and undecided, and oppressed with the fear of another solitary night.

Suddenly he took the desperate resolution of going back to London.

"There's somebody to speak to there, at all events," he thought. "A good hiding-place, too. They'll never expect to nab me there after this country scent. Why can't I lay by for a week or so, and forcing blunt from Fagin, get abroad to France! D—me, I'll risk it."

He acted upon this impulse without delay, and choosing the least frequented roads began his journey back, resolved to lie concealed within a short distance of the metropolis, and entering it at dusk by a circuitous route, to proceed straight to that part of it which he had fixed on for his destination.

The dog, though,—if any descriptions of him were out, it would not be forgotten that the dog was missing, and had probably gone with him. This might lead to his apprehension as he passed along the streets. He resolved to drown him, and walked on looking about for a pond; picking up a heavy stone, and tying it to his handkerchief as he went.

The animal looked up into his master's face while these preparations were making,—and, whether his instinct apprehended something of their purpose, or the robber's sidelong look at him was sterner than ordinary,—skulked a little farther in the rear than usual, and cowered as he came more slowly along. When his master halted at the brink of a pool, and looked round to call him, he stopped outright.

“Do you hear me call ‘come here?’” cried Sikes, whistling.

The animal came up from the very force of habit; but as Sikes stooped to attach the handkerchief to his throat, he uttered a low growl and started back.

“Come back,” said the robber, stamping on the ground. The dog wagged his tail, but moved not. Sikes made a running noose, and called him again.

The dog advanced, retreated, paused an instant, turned and scoured away at his hardest speed.

The man whistled again and again, and sat down and waited in the expectation that he would return. But no dog appeared, and he resumed his journey.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH.

MONKS AND MR. BROWNLOW AT LENGTH MEET. THEIR CONVERSATION, AND THE INTELLIGENCE THAT INTERRUPTS IT.

THE twilight was beginning to close in, when Mr. Brownlow alighted from a hackney-coach at his own door, and knocked softly. The door being opened, a sturdy man got out of the coach and stationed himself on one side of the steps, while another man who had been seated on the box dismounted too, and stood upon the other side. At a sign from Mr. Brownlow, they helped out a third man, and taking him between them, hurried him into the house. This man was Monks.

They walked in the same manner up the stairs without speaking, and Mr. Brownlow, preceding them, led the way into a back-room. At the door of this apartment, Monks, who had ascended with evident reluctance, stopped. The two men looked to the old gentleman, as if for instructions.

“He knows the alternative,” said Mr. Brownlow. “If he hesitates or moves a finger but as you bid him, drag him into



Lilies attempting to destroy his dog.



the street, call for the aid of the police, and impeach him as a felon in my name."

"How dare you say this of me?" said Monks.

"How dare you urge me to it, young man?" replied Mr. Brownlow, confronting him with a steady look. "Are you mad enough to leave this house? Unhand him. There, sir. You are free to go, and we to follow. But I warn you, by all I hold most solemn and most sacred, that the instant you set foot in the street, that instant will I have you apprehended on a charge of fraud and robbery. I am resolute and immovable. If you are determined to be the same, your blood be upon your own head!"

"By what authority am I kidnapped in the street, and brought here by these dogs?" asked Monks, looking from one to the other of the men who stood beside him.

"By mine," replied Mr. Brownlow. "Those persons are indemnified by me. If you complain of being deprived of your liberty—you had power and opportunity to retrieve it as you came along, but you deemed it advisable to remain quiet—I say again, throw yourself for protection upon the law. I will appeal to the law too; but when you have gone too far to recede, do not sue to me for leniency when the power will have passed into other hands, and do not say I plunged you down the gulf into which you rushed yourself."

Monks was plainly disconcerted, and alarmed besides. He hesitated.

"You will decide quickly," said Mr. Brownlow, with perfect firmness and composure. "If you wish me to prefer my charges publicly, and consign you to a punishment, the extent of which, although I can, with a shudder, foresee, I cannot control, once more, I say, you know the way. If not, and you appeal to my forbearance, and the mercy of those you have deeply injured, seat yourself without a word in that chair. It has waited for you two whole days."

Monks muttered some unintelligible words, but wavered still.

"You will be prompt," said Mr. Brownlow. "A word from me, and the alternative has gone for ever."

Still the man hesitated.

"I have not the inclination to parley farther," said Mr. Brownlow, "and, as I advocate the dearest interests of others, I have not the right."

"Is there—" demanded Monks with a faltering tongue,—
"is there—no middle course?"

"None; emphatically none."

Monks looked at the old gentleman with an anxious eye; but, reading in his countenance nothing but severity and determination, walked into the room, and, shrugging his shoulders, sat down.

"Lock the door on the outside," said Mr. Brownlow to the attendants, "and come when I ring."

The men obeyed, and the two were left alone together.

"This is pretty treatment, sir," said Monks, throwing down his hat and cloak, "from my father's oldest friend."

"It is because I was your father's oldest friend, young man," returned Mr. Brownlow. "It is because the hopes and wishes of young and happy years were bound up with him, and that fair creature of his blood and kindred who rejoined her God in youth, and left me here a solitary, lonely man; it is because he knelt with me beside his only sister's death-bed when he was yet a boy, on the morning that would—but Heaven willed otherwise—have made her my young wife; it is because my seared heart clung to him from that time forth through all his trials and errors, till he died; it is because old recollections and associations fill my heart, and even the sight of you brings with it old thoughts of him; it is all these things that move me to treat you gently now—yes, Edward Leeford, even now—and blush for your unworthiness who bear the name."

"What has the name to do with it?" asked the other, after contemplating, half in silence, and half in dogged wonder, the agitation of his companion. "What is the name to me?"

"Nothing," replied Mr. Brownlow, "nothing to you. But it was *hers*; and even at this distance of time brings back to me, an old man, the glow and thrill which I once felt only to hear it repeated by a stranger. I am very glad you have changed it—very—very."

"This is all mighty fine," said Monks (to retain his assumed designation) after a long silence, during which he had jerked himself in sullen defiance to and fro, and Mr. Brownlow had sat shading his face with his hand. "But, what do you want with me?"

"You have a brother," said Mr. Brownlow, rousing himself, "—a brother, the whisper of whose name in your ear, when I came behind you in the street, was in itself almost enough to make you accompany me hither in wonder and alarm."

"I have no brother," replied Monks. "You know I was an only child. Why do you talk to me of brothers? You know that as well as I."

"Attend to what I do know, and you may not," said Mr. Brownlow. "I shall interest you by and by. I know that of the wretched marriage, into which family pride, and the most sordid and narrowest of all ambition, forced your unhappy father when a mere boy, you were the sole and most unnatural issue," returned Mr. Brownlow.

"I don't care for hard names," interrupted Monks, with a jeering laugh. "You know the fact, and that's enough for me."

"But I also know," pursued the old gentleman, "the misery, the slow torture, the protracted anguish of that ill-assorted union; I know how listlessly and wearily each of that wretched pair dragged on their heavy chain through a world that was

poisoned to them both; I know how cold formalities were succeeded by open taunts; how indifference gave place to dislike, dislike to hate, and hate to loathing, until at last they wrenched the clanking bond asunder, and retiring a wide space apart, carried each a galling fragment, of which nothing but death could break the rivets, to hide it in new society, beneath the gayest looks they could assume. Your mother succeeded; she forgot it soon: but it rusted and cankered at your father's heart for years."

"Well, they were separated," said Monks, "and what of that?"

"When they had been separated for some time," returned Mr. Brownlow, "and your mother, wholly given up to continental frivolities, had utterly forgotten the young husband ten good years her junior, who, with prospects blighted, lingered on at home, he fell among new friends. *This* circumstance, at least, you know already."

"Not I," said Monks, turning away his eyes, and beating his foot upon the ground, as a man who is determined to deny everything. "Not I."

"Your manner, no less than your actions, assures me that you have never forgotten it, or ceased to think of it with bitterness," returned Mr. Brownlow. "I speak of fifteen years ago, when you were not more than eleven years old, and your father but one-and-thirty—for he was, I repeat, a boy, when *his* father ordered him to marry. Must I go back to events that cast a shade upon the memory of your parent, or will you spare it, and disclose to me the truth?"

"I have nothing to disclose," rejoined Monks in evident confusion. "You must talk on if you will."

"These new friends, then," said Mr. Brownlow, "were a naval officer, retired from active service, whose wife had died some half a year before, and left him with two children—there had been more, but, of all their family happily but two survived. They were both daughters; one a beautiful creature of nineteen, and the other a mere child of two or three years old. They resided," said Mr. Brownlow, without seeming to hear the interruption, "in a part of the country to which your father, in his wandering, had repaired, and where he had taken up his abode. Acquaintance, intimacy, friendship, fast followed on each other. Your father was gifted as few men are—he had his sister's soul and person. As the old officer knew him more and more, he grew to love him. I would that it had ended there. His daughter did the same."

The old gentleman paused; Monks was biting his lips, with his eyes fixed upon the floor; seeing this, he immediately resumed.

"The end of a year found him contracted, solemnly contracted, to that daughter; the object of the first true, ardent, only passion of a guileless, untried girl."