

## OLIVER TWIST;

OR, THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS.

BY BOZ.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

BOOK THE SECOND.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

INVOLVES A CRITICAL POSITION.

"Who's that?" inquired Brittles, opening the door a little way with the chain up, and peeping out, shading the candle with his hand.

"Open the door," replied a man outside: "it's the officers from Bow-street that was sent to, to-day."

Much comforted by this assurance, Brittles opened the door to its full width, and confronted a portly man in a great coat, who walked in without saying anything more, and wiped his shoes on the mat as coolly as if he lived there.

"Just send somebody out to relieve my mate, will you, young man?" said the officer: "he's in the gig minding the prad. Have you got a coach'us here that you could put it up in for five or ten minutes?"

Brittles, replying in the affirmative, and pointing out the building, the portly man stepped back to the garden gate, and helped his companion to put up the gig, while Brittles lighted them in a state of great admiration. This done, they returned to the house, and, being shown into a parlour, took off their great-coats and hats, and showed like what they were. The man who had knocked at the door was a stout personage of middle height, aged about fifty, with shiny black hair, cropped pretty close, half whiskers, a round face, and sharp eyes. The other was a red-headed bony man, in top-boots, with a rather ill-favoured countenance, and a turned-up sinister-looking nose.

"Tell your governor that Blathers and Duff is here, will you?" said the stouter man, smoothing down his hair, and laying a pair of handcuffs on the table. "Oh! Good evening, master. Can I have a word or two with you in private, if you please?"

This was addressed to Mr. Losberne, who now made his appearance; and that gentleman, motioning Brittle, to retire, brought in the two ladies and shut the door.

"This is the lady of the house," said Mr. Losberne, motioning towards Mrs. Maylie.

Mr. Blathers made a bow, and, being desired to sit down, put his hat upon the floor, and, taking a chair, motioned Duff to do the same. The latter gentleman, who did not appear

quite so much accustomed to good society, or quite so much at his ease in it, one of the two, seated himself, after undergoing several muscular affections of the limbs, and forced the head of his stick into his mouth with some embarrassment.

"Now, with regard to this here robbery, master," said Blathers. "What are the circumstances?"

Mr. Losberne, who appeared desirous of gaining time, recounted them at great length and with much circumlocution: Messrs. Blathers and Duff looking very knowing meanwhile, and occasionally exchanging a nod.

"I can't say for certain till I see the place, of course," said Blathers; "but my opinion at once is,—I don't mind committing myself to that extent,—that this wasn't done by a yokel—eh, Duff?"

"Certainly not," replied Duff.

"And, translating the word yokel for the benefit of the ladies, I apprehend your meaning to be that this attempt was not made by a countryman?" said Mr. Losberne with a smile.

"That 's it, master," replied Blathers. "This is all about the robbery, is it?"

"All," replied the doctor.

"Now, what is this about this here boy that the servants are talking of?" said Blathers.

"Nothing at all," replied the doctor. "One of the frightened servants chose to take it into his head that he had something to do with this attempt to break into the house; but it's nonsense—sheer absurdity."

"Wery easy disposed of it is," remarked Duff.

"What he says is quite correct," observed Blathers, nodding his head in a confirmatory way, and playing carelessly with the handcuffs, as if they were a pair of castanets. "Who is the boy? What account does he give of himself? Where did he come from? He didn't drop out of the clouds, did he, master?"

"Of course not," replied the doctor with a nervous glance at the two ladies. "I know his whole history;—but we can talk about that presently. You would like to see the place where the thieves made their attempt, first, I suppose?"

"Certainly," rejoined Mr. Blathers. "We had better inspect the premises first, and examine the servants arterwards. That 's the usual way of doing business."

Lights were then procured, and Messrs. Blathers and Duff, attended by the native constable, Brittles, Giles, and everybody else in short, went into the little room at the end of the passage, and looked out at the window, and afterwards went round by way of the lawn, and looked in at the window, and after that had a candle handed out to inspect the shutter with, and after that a lantern to trace the footsteps with, and after that a pitchfork to poke the bushes with. This done amidst the breathless interest of all beholders, they came in again, and Mr. Giles and

Brittles were put through a melo-dramatic representation of their share in the previous night's adventures, which they performed some six times over, contradicting each other in not more than one important respect the first time, and in not more than a dozen the last. This consummation being arrived at, Blathers and Duff cleared the room, and held a long council together, compared with which, for secrecy and solemnity, a consultation of great doctors on the knottiest point in medicine would be mere child's play.

Meanwhile the doctor walked up and down the next room in a very uneasy state, and Mrs. Maylie and Rose looked on with anxious faces.

"Upon my word," he said, making a halt after a great number of very rapid turns, "I hardly know what to do."

"Surely," said Rose, "the poor child's story, faithfully repeated to these men, will be sufficient to exonerate him."

"I doubt it, my dear young lady," said the doctor, shaking his head. "I don't think it would exonerate him, either with them or with legal functionaries of a higher grade. What is he, after all, they would say—a runaway. Judged by mere worldly considerations and probabilities, his story is a very doubtful one."

"You credit it, surely?" interrupted Rose in haste.

"I believe it, strange as it is, and perhaps may be an old fool for doing so," rejoined the doctor; "but I don't think it is exactly the tale for a practised police officer, nevertheless."

"Why not?" demanded Rose.

"Because, my pretty cross-examiner," replied the doctor, "because, viewed with their eyes, there are so many ugly points about it; he can only prove the parts that look bad, and none of those that look well. Confound the fellows, they will have of the why and the wherefore, and take nothing for granted. On his own showing, you see, he has been the companion of thieves for some time past; he has been carried to a police-office on a charge of picking a gentleman's pocket, and is taken away forcibly from that gentleman's house to a place which he cannot describe or point out, and of the situation of which he has not the remotest idea. He is brought down to Chertsey by men who seem to have taken a violent fancy to him, whether he will or no, and put through a window to rob a house, and then, just at the very moment when he is going to alarm the inmates, and so do the very thing that would set him all to rights, there rushes into the way that blundering dog of a half-bred butler and shoots him, as if on purpose to prevent his doing any good for himself. Don't you see all this?"

"I see it, of course," replied Rose, smiling at the doctor's impetuosity; "but still I do not see anything in it to criminate the poor child."

"No," replied the doctor; "of course not! Bless the bright

eyes of your sex! They never see, whether for good or bad, more than one side of any question; and that is, invariably, the one which first presents itself to them."

Having given vent to this result of experience, the doctor put his hands into his pockets, and walked up and down the room with even greater rapidity than before.

"The more I think of it," said the doctor, "the more I see that it will occasion endless trouble and difficulty to put these men into possession of the boy's real story. I am certain it will not be believed; and, even if they can do nothing to him in the end, still the dragging it forward, and giving publicity to all the doubts that will be cast upon it, must interfere materially with your benevolent plan of rescuing him from misery."

"Oh! what is to be done?" cried Rose. "Dear, dear! why did they send for these people?"

"Why, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Maylie. "I would not have had them here for the world!"

"All I know is," said Mr. Losberne at last, sitting down with a kind of desperate calmness, "that we must try and carry it off with a bold face, that's all! The object is a good one, and that must be the excuse. The boy has strong symptoms of fever upon him, and is in no condition to be talked to any more; that's one comfort. We must make the best of it we can; and, if bad's the best, it's no fault of ours. Come in."

"Well, master," said Blathers, entering the room, followed by his colleague, and making the door fast before he said any more. "This warn't a put-up thing."

"And what the devil's a put-up thing!" demanded the doctor impatiently.

"We call it a put-up robbery, ladies," said Blathers, turning to them, as if he compassionated their ignorance, but had a contempt for the doctor's "when the servants is in it."

"Nobody suspected them in this case," said Mrs. Maylie.

"Wery likely not, ma'am," replied Blathers, "but they might have been in it, for all that."

"More likely on that wery account," said Duff.

"We find it was a town hand," said Blathers, continuing his report; "for the style of work is first-rate."

"Wery pretty indeed, it is," remarked Duff in an under tone.

"There was two of 'em in it," continued Blathers, "and they had a boy with 'em; that's plain, from the size of the window. That's all to be said at present. We'll see this lad that you've got up stairs at once, if you please."

"Perhaps they will take something to drink first, Mrs. Maylie?" said the doctor, his face brightening up as if some new thought had occurred to him.

"Oh! To be sure!" exclaimed Rose eagerly. "You shall have it immediately, if you will."

"Why, thank you, Miss!" said Blathers, drawing his coat-sleeve across his mouth: "it's dry work this sort of duty. Anything that's handy, Miss; don't put yourself out of the way on our accounts."

"What shall it be?" asked the doctor, following the young lady to the sideboard.

"A little drop of spirits, master, if it's all the same," replied Blathers. "It's a cold ride from London, ma'am, and I always find that spirits comes home warmer to the feelings."

This interesting communication was addressed to Mrs. Maylie, who received it very graciously. While it was being conveyed to her, the doctor slipped out of the room.

"Ah!" said Mr. Blathers, not holding his wine-glass by the stem, but grasping the bottom between the thumb and fore-finger of his left hand, and placing it in front of his chest. "I have seen a good many pieces of business like this in my time, ladies."

"That crack down in the back lane at Edmonton, Blathers," said Mr. Duff, assisting his colleague's memory.

"That was something in this way, warn't it?" rejoined Mr. Blathers; "that was done by Conkey Chickweed, that was."

"You always gave that to him," replied Duff. "It was the Family Pet, I tell you, and Conkey hadn't any more to do with it than I had."

"Get out!" retorted Mr. Blathers: "I know better. Do you mind that time Conkey was robbed of his money, though? What a start that was! better than any novel-book I ever see!"

"What was that?" inquired Rose, anxious to encourage any symptoms of good humour in the unwelcome visitors.

"It was a robbery, Miss, that hardly anybody would have been down upon," said Blathers. "This here Conkey Chickweed——"

"Conkey means Nosey, ma'am," interposed Duff.

"Of course the lady knows that, don't she?" demanded Mr. Blathers. "Always interrupting you are, partner. This here Conkey Chickweed, Miss, kept a public-house over Battle-bridge way, and had a cellar where a good many young lords went to see cockfighting, and badger-drawing, and that; and a very intellectual manner the sports was conducted in, for I've seen 'em off'en. He warn't one of the family at that time; and one night he was robbed of three hundred and twenty-seven guineas in a canvas-bag, that was stole out of his bedroom in the dead of night by a tall man with a black patch over his eye, who had concealed himself under the bed, and, after committing the robbery, jumped slap out of window, which was only a story high. He was very quick about it. But Conkey was quick, too, for he was woke by the noise, and, darting out of bed, fired a blunderbuss arter him, and roused the neighbourhood. They set

up a hue-and-cry directly, and, when they came to look about 'em, found that Conkey had hit the robber; for there was traces of blood all the way to some palings a good distance off, and there they lost 'em. However he had made off with the blunt, and, consequently, the name of Mr. Chickweed, licensed witler, appeared in the Gazette among the other bankrupts; and all manner of benefits and subscriptions, and I don't know what all, was got up for the poor man, who was in a very low state of mind about his loss, and went up and down the streets for three or four days, pulling his hair off in such a desperate manner that many people was afraid he might be going to make away with himself. One day he come up to the office all in a hurry, and had a private interview with the magistrate, who, after a good deal of talk, rings the bell, and orders Jem Spyers in. (Jem was a active officer,) and tells him to go and assist Mr. Chickweed in apprehending the man that robbed his house. 'I see him, Spyers,' said Chickweed, 'pass my house yesterday morning.'—'Why didn't you up, and collar him?' says Spyers.—'I was so struck all of a heap that you might have fractured my skull with a toothpick,' says the poor man; 'but we're sure to have him, for between ten and eleven o'clock at night he passed again.' Spyers no sooner heard this, than he put some clean linen and a comb in his pocket, in case he should have to stop a day or two; and away he goes, and sets himself down at one of the public-house windows behind a little red curtain, with his hat on, all ready to bolt at a moment's notice. He was smoking his pipe here late at night, when all of a sudden Chickweed roars out—'Here he is! Stop thief! Murder!' Jem Spyers dashed out; and there he sees Chickweed tearing down the street full-cry. Away goes Spyers; on keeps Chickweed; round turn the people; everybody roars out 'Thieves!' and Chickweed himself keeps on shouting all the time like mad. Spyers loses sight of him a minute as he turns a corner,—shoots round—sees a little crowd—dives in. 'Which is the man?'—'D—me!' says Chickweed, 'I've lost him again!'

"It was a remarkable occurrence, but he warn't to be seen nowhere, so they went back to the public house, and next morning Spyers took his old place, and looked out from behind the curtain for a tall man with a black patch over his eye, till his own two eyes ached again. At last he couldn't help shutting 'em to ease 'em a minute, and the wery moment he did so, he hears Chickweed roaring out, 'Here he is!' Off he starts once more, with Chickweed half way down the street ahead of him; and, after twice as long a run as the yesterday's one, the man's lost again! This was done once or twice more, till one half the neighbours gave out that Mr. Chickweed had been robbed by the devil who was playing tricks with him arterwards, and the other half that poor Mr. Chickweed had gone mad with grief."

"What did Jem Spyers say?" inquired the doctor, who had

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George Cruikshank

*Oliver waited on by the Bow-Street Runners*



returned to the room shortly after the commencement of the story.

"Jem Spyers," resumed the officer, "for a long time said nothing at all, and listened to everything without seeming to, which showed he understood his business. But one morning he walked into the bar, and, taking out his snuff-box, said, 'Chickweed, I've found out who's done this here robbery.'—'Have you?' said Chickweed. 'Oh, my dear Spyers, only let me have vengeance, and I shall die contented! Oh, my dear Spyers, where is the villain?'—'Come!' said Spyers, offering him a pinch of snuff, 'none of that gammon! You did it yourself.' So he had, and a good bit of money he had made by it, too; and nobody would ever have found it out if he hadn't been so precious anxious to keep up appearances, that's more!" said Mr. Blathers, putting down his wine-glass, and clinking the handcuffs together.

"Very curious, indeed," observed the doctor. "Now, if you please, you can walk up stairs."

"If you please, sir," returned Mr. Blathers. And, closely following Mr. Losberne, the two officers ascended to Oliver's bedroom, Mr. Giles preceding the party with a lighted candle.

Oliver had been dozing, but looked worse, and was more feverish than he had appeared yet. Being assisted by the doctor, he managed to sit up in bed for a minute or so, and looked at the strangers without at all understanding what was going forward, and, in fact, without seeming to recollect where he was, or what had been passing.

"This," said Mr. Losberne, speaking softly, but with great vehemence notwithstanding, "this is the lad, who, being accidentally wounded by a spring-gun in some boyish trespass on Mr. What-d'ye-call-him's grounds at the back here, comes to the house for assistance this morning, and is immediately laid hold of, and maltreated by that ingenious gentleman with the candle in his hand, who has placed his life in considerable danger, as I can professionally certify."

Messrs. Blathers and Duff looked at Mr. Giles as he was thus recommended to their notice, and the bewildered butler gazed from them towards Oliver, and from Oliver towards Mr. Losberne, with a most ludicrous mixture of fear and perplexity.

"You don't mean to deny that, I suppose?" said the doctor, laying Oliver gently down again.

"It was all done for the—for the best, sir!" answered Giles.

"I am sure I thought it was the boy, or I wouldn't have meddled with him. I am not of an inhuman disposition, sir."

"Thought it was what boy?" inquired the senior officer.

"The housebreaker's boy, sir!" replied Giles. "They—they certainly had a boy."

"Well, do you think so now?" inquired Blathers.

"Think what, now?" replied Giles, looking vacantly at his questioner.

"Think it's the same boy, stupid-head?" rejoined Mr. Blathers impatiently.

"I don't know; I really don't know," said Giles, with a rueful countenance. "I couldn't swear to him."

"What do you think?" asked Mr. Blathers.

"I don't know what to think," replied poor Giles. "I don't think it is the boy; indeed I'm almost certain that it isn't. You know it can't be."

"Has this man been a-drinking, sir?" inquired Blathers, turning to the doctor.

"What a precious muddle-headed chap you are!" said Duff, addressing Mr. Giles with supreme contempt.

Mr. Losberne had been feeling the patient's pulse during this short dialogue; but he now rose from the chair by the bedside, and remarked, that if the officers had any doubts upon the subject they would perhaps like to step into the next room, and have Brittles before them.

Acting upon this suggestion, they accordingly adjourned to a neighbouring apartment, where Mr. Brittles being called in, involved himself and his respected superior in such a wonderful maze of fresh contradictions and impossibilities as tended to throw no particular light upon anything save the fact of his own strong mystification; except, indeed, his declarations that he shouldn't know the real boy if he were put before him that instant; that he had only taken Oliver to be he because Mr. Giles had said he was, and that Mr. Giles had five minutes previously admitted in the kitchen that he began to be very much afraid he had been a little too hasty.

Among other ingenious surmises, the question was then raised whether Mr. Giles had really hit anybody, and upon examination of the fellow pistol to that which he had fired, it turned out to have no more destructive loading than gunpowder and brown paper:—a discovery which made a considerable impression on everybody but the doctor, who had drawn the ball about ten minutes before. Upon no one, however, did it make a greater impression than on Mr. Giles himself, who, after labouring for some hours under the fear of having mortally wounded a fellow-creature, eagerly caught at this new idea, and favoured it to the utmost. Finally, the officers, without troubling themselves very much about Oliver, left the Chertsey constable in the house, and took up their rest for that night in the town, promising to return next morning.

With the next morning there came a rumour that two men and a boy were in the cage at Kingston, who had been apprehended over-night under suspicious circumstances; and to Kingston Messrs. Blathers and Duff journeyed accordingly. The suspicious circumstances, however, resolving themselves, on investigation, into the one fact that they had been discovered sleeping under a haystack, which, although a great crime, is

only punishable by imprisonment, and is, in the merciful eye of the English law, and its comprehensive love of all the King's subjects, held to be no satisfactory proof in the absence of all other evidence, that the sleeper or sleepers have committed burglary accompanied with violence, and have therefore rendered themselves liable to the punishment of death,—Messrs. Blathers and Duff came back again as wise as they went.

In short, after some more examination, and a great deal more conversation, a neighbouring magistrate was readily induced to take the joint bail of Mrs. Maylie and Mr. Losberne for Oliver's appearance if he should ever be called upon; and Blathers and Duff, being rewarded with a couple of guineas, returned to town with divided opinions on the subject of their expedition: the latter gentleman, on a mature consideration of all the circumstances, inclining to the belief that the burglarious attempt had originated with the Family Pet, and the former being equally disposed to concede the full merit of it to the great Mr. Conkey Chickweed.

Meanwhile Oliver gradually throve and prospered under the united care of Mrs. Maylie, Rose, and the kind-hearted Mr. Losberne. If fervent prayers gushing from hearts overcharged with gratitude be heard in heaven,—and if they be not, what prayers are?—the blessings which the orphan child called down upon them, sunk into their souls, diffusing peace and happiness.

## CHAPTER THE NINTH.

OF THE HAPPY LIFE OLIVER BEGAN TO LEAD WITH HIS KIND FRIENDS.

OLIVER's ailments were neither slight nor few. In addition to the pain and delay attendant upon a broken limb, his exposure to the wet and cold had brought on fever and ague, which hung about him for many weeks, and reduced him sadly. But at length he began by slow degrees to get better, and to be able to say sometimes, in a few tearful words, how deeply he felt the goodness of the two sweet ladies, and how ardently he hoped that when he grew strong and well again he could do something to show his gratitude; only something which would let them see the love and duty with which his breast was full; something, however slight, which would prove to them that their gentle kindness had not been cast away, but that the poor boy, whom their charity had rescued from misery or death, was eager and anxious to serve them with all his heart and soul.

"Poor fellow!" said Rose, when Oliver had been one day feebly endeavouring to utter the words of thankfulness that rose to his pale lips. "You shall have many opportunities of serving us, if you will. We are going into the country, and my aunt intends that you shall accompany us. The quiet place, the pure air, and all the pleasures and beauties of spring,

will restore you in a few days, and we will employ you in a hundred ways when you can bear the trouble."

"The trouble!" cried Oliver. "Oh! dear lady, if I could but work for you,—if I could only give you pleasure by watering your flowers, or watching your birds, or running up and down the whole day long to make you happy, what would I give to do it!"

"You shall give nothing at all," said Miss Maylie smiling; "for, as I told you before, we shall employ you in a hundred ways; and if you only take half the trouble to please us that you promise now, you will make me very happy indeed."

"Happy, ma'am!" cried Oliver: "oh, how kind of you to say so!"

"You will make me happier than I can tell you," replied the young lady. "To think that my dear good aunt should have been the means of rescuing any one from such sad misery as you have described to us, would be an unspeakable pleasure to me; but to know that the object of her goodness and compassion was sincerely grateful and attached in consequence, would delight me more than you can well imagine. Do you understand me?" she inquired, watching Oliver's thoughtful face.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, yes!" replied Oliver eagerly; "but I was thinking that I am ungrateful now."

"To whom?" inquired the young lady.

"To the kind gentleman and the dear old nurse who took so much care of me before," rejoined Oliver. "If they knew how happy I am, they would be pleased, I am sure."

"I am sure they would," rejoined Oliver's benefactress; "and Mr. Losberne has already been kind enough to promise that when you are well enough to bear the journey he will carry you to see them."

"Has he, ma'am!" cried Oliver, his face brightening with pleasure. "I don't know what I shall do for joy when I see their kind faces once again!"

In a short time Oliver was sufficiently recovered to undergo the fatigue of this expedition; and one morning he and Mr. Losberne set out accordingly in a little carriage which belonged to Mrs. Maylie. When they came to Chertsey Bridge, Oliver turned very pale, and uttered a loud exclamation.

"What's the matter with the boy!" cried the doctor, as usual all in a bustle. "Do you see anything—hear anything—feel anything—eh?"

"That, sir," cried Oliver, pointing out of the carriage window. "That house!"

"Yes; well, what of it? Stop, coachman. Pull up here," cried the doctor. "What of the house, my man—eh?"

"The thieves—the house they took me to," whispered Oliver.

"The devil it is!" cried the doctor. "Halloa, there! let me out!" But before the coachman could dismount from his box

he had tumbled out of the coach by some means or other, and, running down to the deserted tenement, began kicking at the door like a madman.

"Halloo!" said a little ugly hump-backed man, opening the door so suddenly that the doctor, from the very impetus of his last kick, nearly fell forward into the passage. "What's the matter here?"

"Matter!" exclaimed the other, collaring him without a moment's reflection. "A good deal. Robbery is the matter."

"There'll be murder too," replied the hump-backed man coolly, "if you don't take your hands off. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you," said the doctor, giving his captive a hearty shake. "Where's—confound the fellow, what's his rascally name—Sikes—that's it. Where's Sikes, you thief?"

The hump-backed man stared as if in excess of amazement and indignation; and, twisting himself dexterously from the doctor's grasp, growled forth a volley of horrid oaths, and retired into the house. Before he could shut the door, however, the doctor had passed into the parlour without a word of parley. He looked anxiously round: not an article of furniture, not a vestige of anything, animate or inanimate, not even the position of the cupboards, answered Oliver's description!

"Now," said the hump-backed man, who had watched him keenly, "what do you mean by coming into my house in this violent way? Do you want to rob me, or to murder me?—which is it?"

"Did you ever know a man come out to do either in a chariot and pair, you ridiculous old vampire?" said the irritable doctor.

"What do you want then?" demanded the hunchback fiercely.

"Will you take yourself off before I do you a mischief? curse you!"

"As soon as I think proper," said Mr. Losberne, looking into the other parlour, which, like the first, bore no resemblance whatever to Oliver's account of it. "I shall find you out some day, my friend."

"Will you?" sneered the ill-favoured cripple. "If you ever want me, I'm here. I haven't lived here mad, and all alone, for five-and-twenty years, to be scared by you. You shall pay for this; you shall pay for this." And so saying, the misshapen little demon set up a hideous yell, and danced upon the ground as if frantic with rage.

"Stupid enough, this," muttered the doctor to himself: "the boy must have made a mistake. There; put that in your pocket, and shut yourself up again." With these words he flung the hunchback a piece of money, and returned to the carriage.

The man followed to the chariot door, uttering the wildest imprecations and curses all the way; but as Mr. Losberne turned to speak to the driver, he looked into the carriage, and

eyed Oliver for an instant with a glance so sharp and fierce, and at the same time so furious and vindictive, that, waking or sleeping, he could not forget it for months afterwards. He continued to utter the most fearful imprecations until the driver had resumed his seat, and when they were once more on their way, they could see him some distance behind, beating his feet upon the ground, and tearing his hair in transports of frenzied rage.

"I am an ass!" said the doctor after a long silence. "Did you know that before, Oliver?"

"No, sir."

"Then don't forget it another time."

"An ass," said the doctor again after a further silence of some minutes. "Even if it had been the right place, and the right fellows had been there, what could I have done single-handed? And if I had had assistance, I see no good that I should have done except leading to my own exposure, and an unavoidable statement of the manner in which I have hushed up this business. That would have served me right, though. I am always involving myself in some scrape or other by acting upon these impulses, and it might have done me good."

Now the fact was, that the excellent doctor had never acted upon anything else but impulse all through his life; and it was no bad compliment to the nature of the impulses which governed him, that so far from being involved in any peculiar troubles or misfortunes, he had the warmest respect and esteem of all who knew him. If the truth must be told, he was a little out of temper for a minute or two at being disappointed in procuring corroborative evidence of Oliver's story on the very first occasion on which he had a chance of obtaining any. He soon came round again, however, and finding that Oliver's replies to his questions were still as straight-forward and consistent, and still delivered with as much apparent sincerity and truth, as they had ever been, he made up his mind to attach full credence to them from that time forth.

As Oliver knew the name of the street in which Mr. Brownlow resided, they were enabled to drive straight thither. When the coach turned into it, his heart beat so violently that he could scarcely draw his breath.

"Now, my boy, which house is it?" inquired Mr. Losberne.

"That, that!" replied Oliver, pointing eagerly out of the window. "The white house. Oh! make haste! Pray make haste! I feel as if I should die: it makes me tremble so."

"Come, come!" said the good doctor, patting him on the shoulder. "You will see them directly, and they will be overjoyed to find you safe and well."

"Oh! I hope so!" cried Oliver. "They were so good to me; so very, very good to me, sir."

The coach rolled on. It stopped. No; that was the wrong house. The next door. It went on a few paces, and stopped

again. Oliver looked up at the windows with tears of happy expectation coursing down his face.

Alas! the white house was empty, and there was a bill in the window—"To Let."

"Knock at the next door," cried Mr. Losberne, taking Oliver's arm in his. "What has become of Mr. Brownlow, who used to live in the adjoining house, do you know?"

The servant did not know; but would go and enquire. She presently returned, and said that Mr. Brownlow had sold off his goods, and gone to the West Indies six weeks before. Oliver clasped his hands, and sank feebly backwards.

"Has his housekeeper gone too?" inquired Mr. Losberne, after a moment's pause.

"Yes, sir;" replied the servant. "The old gentleman, the housekeeper, and a gentleman, a friend of Mr. Brownlow's, all went together."

"Then turn towards home again," said Mr. Losberne to the driver, "and don't stop to bait the horse till you get out of this confounded London!"

"The book-stall keeper, sir?" said Oliver. "I know the way there. See him, pray sir! Do see him!"

"My poor boy, this is disappointment enough for one day," said the doctor. "Quite enough for both of us. If we go to the book-stall keeper's we shall certainly find that he is dead, or has set his house on fire, or run away. No; home again straight!" And, in obedience to the doctor's first impulse, home they went.

This bitter disappointment caused Oliver much sorrow and grief even in the midst of his happiness; for he had pleased himself many times during his illness with thinking of all that Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin would say to him, and what delight it would be to tell them how many long days and nights he had passed in reflecting upon what they had done for him, and bewailing their cruel separation. The hope of eventually clearing himself with them, too, and explaining how he had been forced away, had buoyed him up and sustained him under many of his recent trials; and now the idea that they should have gone so far, and carried with them the belief that he was an impostor and robber,—a belief which might remain uncontradicted to his dying day,—was almost more than he could bear.

The circumstance occasioned no alteration, however, in the behaviour of his benefactors. After another fortnight, when the fine warm weather had fairly begun, and every tree and flower was putting forth its young leaves and rich blossoms, they made preparations for quitting the house at Chertsey for some months. Sending the plate which had so excited the Jew's cupidity to the banker's, and leaving Giles and another servant in care of the house, they departed for a cottage some distance in the country, and took Oliver with them.

Who can describe the pleasure and delight, the peace of mind and soft tranquillity, which the sickly boy felt in the balmy air, and among the green hills and rich woods of an inland village! Who can tell how scenes of peace and quietude sink into the minds of pain-worn dwellers in close and noisy places, and carry their own freshness deep into their jaded hearts? Men who have lived in crowded pent-up streets, through whole lives of toil, and never wished for change; men to whom custom has indeed been second nature, and who have come almost to love each brick and stone that formed the narrow boundaries of their daily walks—even they with the hand of death upon them, have been known to yearn at last for one short glimpse of Nature's face, and carried far from the scenes of their old pains and pleasures, have seemed to pass at once into a new state of being, and crawling forth from day to day to some green sunny spot, have had such memories awakened up within them by the mere sight of sky, and hill, and plain, and glistening water, that a foretaste of Heaven itself has soothed their quick decline, and they have sunk into their tombs as peacefully as the sun, whose setting they watched from their lonely chamber window but a few hours before, faded from their dim and feeble sight! The memories which peaceful country scenes call up, are not of this world, or of its thoughts or hopes. Their gentle influence may teach us to weave fresh garlands for the graves of those we loved, may purify our thoughts, and bear down before it old enmity and hatred; but, beneath all this there lingers in the least reflective mind a vague and half-formed consciousness of having held such feelings long before in some remote and distant time, which calls up solemn thoughts of distant times to come, and bends down pride and worldliness beneath it.

It was a lovely spot to which they repaired, and Oliver, whose days had been spent among squalid crowds, and in the midst of noise and brawling, seemed to enter upon a new existence there. The rose and honey-suckle clung to the cottage walls, the ivy crept round the trunks of the trees, and the garden-flowers perfumed the air with delicious odours. Hard by, was a little churchyard: not crowded with tall, unsightly gravestones, but full of humble mounds covered with fresh turf and moss, beneath which the old people of the village lay at rest. Oliver often wandered here, and, thinking of the wretched grave in which his mother lay, would sometimes sit him down and sob unseen; but, as he raised his eyes to the deep sky overhead, he would cease to think of her as lying in the ground, and weep for her sadly, but without pain.

It was a happy time. The days were peaceful and serene, and the nights brought with them no fear or care, no languishing in a wretched prison, or associating with wretched men: nothing but pleasant and happy thoughts. Every morning he went to a white-headed old gentleman, who lived near the little



church, who taught him to read better and to write, and spoke so kindly, and took such pains, that Oliver could never try enough to please him. Then he would walk with Mrs. Maylie and Rose, and hear them talk of books, or perhaps sit near them in some shady place, and listen whilst the young lady read, which he could have done till it grew too dark to see the letters. Then he had his own lesson for the next day to prepare, and at this he would work hard in a little room which looked into the garden, till evening came slowly on, when the ladies would walk out again, and he with them: listening with such pleasure to all they said, and so happy if they wanted a flower that he could climb to reach, or had forgotten anything he could run to fetch, that he could never be quick enough about it. When it became quite dark, and they returned home, the young lady would sit down to the piano, and play some melancholy air, or sing in a low and gentle voice some old song which it pleased her aunt to hear. There would be no candles at such times as these, and Oliver would sit by one of the windows, listening to the sweet music, while tears of tranquil joy stole down his face.

And, when Sunday came, how differently the day was spent from any manner in which he had ever spent it yet! and how happily, too, like all the other days in that most happy time! There was the little church in the morning, with the green leaves fluttering at the windows, the birds singing without, and the sweet-smelling air stealing in at the low porch, and filling the homely building with its fragrance. The poor people were so neat and clean, and knelt so reverently in prayer, that it seemed a pleasure, not a tedious duty, their assembling there together; and, though the singing might be rude, it was real, and sounded more musical (to Oliver's ears at least) than any he had ever heard in church before. Then there were the walks as usual, and many calls at the clean houses of the labouring men; and at night Oliver read a chapter or two from the Bible, which he had been studying all the week, and in the performance of which duty he felt more proud and pleased than if he had been the clergyman himself.

In the morning Oliver would be a-foot by six o'clock, roaming the fields and surveying the hedges far and wide, for nosegays of wild flowers, with which he would return laden home, and which it took great care and consideration to arrange to the best advantage for the embellishment of the breakfast-table. There was fresh groundsel, too, for Miss Maylie's birds, with which Oliver,—who had been studying the subject under the able tuition of the village clerk,—would decorate the cages in the most approved taste. When the birds were made all spruce and smart for the day, there was usually some little commission of charity to execute in the village, or failing that, there was always something to do in the garden, or about the plants, to which Oliver—who had studied this science also under the same

master, who was a gardener by trade,—applied himself with hearty good-will till Miss Rose made her appearance, when there were a thousand commendations to be bestowed upon all he had done, for which one of those light-hearted beautiful smiles was an ample recompense.

So three months glided away; three months which, in the life of the most blessed and favoured of mortals, would have been unmixed happiness; but which, in Oliver's troubled and clouded dawn, were felicity indeed. With the purest and most amiable generosity on one side, and the truest, and warmest, and most soul-felt gratitude on the other, it is no wonder that, by the end of that short time, Oliver Twist had become completely domesticated with the old lady and her niece, and that the fervent attachment of his young and sensitive heart was repaid by their pride in, and attachment to, himself.

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THE WREATH.

FROM UHLAND.

THERE went a maid, and plucked the flowers,  
That grew upon a sunny lea;  
A ladye from the greenwood came,  
Most beautiful to see.

She met the maiden with a smile,  
She twined a wreath into her hair,  
"It blooms not yet, but it will bloom,  
Oh! wear it ever there!"

And as the maiden grew, and roamed  
Beneath the moon so pale and wan,  
And tears fell from her, sad and sweet,  
The wreath to bud began.

And when a joyous bride she lay  
Upon her faithful leman's breast,  
Then smiling blossoms burst the folds  
Of their encircling vest.

Soon, cradled gently in her lap,  
The mother held a blooming child;  
Then many a golden fruit from out  
The leafy chaplet smiled.

And when, alack! her love had sunk  
Into the dark and dusky grave,  
In her dishevelled hair a sere  
Dry leaf was seen to wave.

Soon she too there beside him lay,  
But still her dear-loved wreath she wore;  
And it—oh! wondrous sight to see,—  
Both fruit and blossom bore.

E. N.