

OLIVER TWIST;

OR, THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS.

BY BOZ.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH.

IN WHICH OLIVER IS TAKEN BETTER CARE OF, THAN HE EVER WAS BEFORE,
WITH SOME PARTICULARS CONCERNING A CERTAIN PICTURE.

THE coach rattled away down Mount Pleasant and up Exmouth-street,—over nearly the same ground as that which Oliver had traversed when he first entered London in company with the Dodger,—and, turning a different way when it reached the Angel at Islington, stopped at length before a neat house in a quiet shady street near Pentonville. Here a bed was prepared without loss of time, in which Mr. Brownlow saw his young charge carefully and comfortably deposited; and here he was tended with a kindness and solicitude which knew no bounds.

But for many days Oliver remained insensible to all the goodness of his new friends; the sun rose and sunk, and rose and sunk again, and many times after that, and still the boy lay stretched upon his uneasy bed, dwindling away beneath the dry and wasting heat of fever,—that heat which, like the subtle acid that gnaws into the very heart of hardest iron, burns only to corrode and to destroy. The worm does not his work more surely on the dead body, than does this slow, creeping fire upon the living frame.

Weak, and thin, and pallid, he awoke at last from what seemed to have been a long and troubled dream. Feebly raising himself in the bed, with his head resting on his trembling arm, he looked anxiously round.

“What room is this?—where have I been brought to?” said Oliver. “This is not the place I went to sleep in.”

He uttered these words in a feeble voice, being very faint and weak; but they were overheard at once, for the curtain at the bed's head was hastily drawn back, and a motherly old lady, very neatly and precisely dressed, rose as she undrew it, from an arm-chair close by, in which she had been sitting at needle-work.

“Hush, my dear,” said the old lady softly. “You must be very quiet, or you will be ill again, and you have been very bad,—as bad as bad could be, pretty nigh. Lie down again, there's a dear.” With these words the old lady very gently placed Oliver's head upon the pillow, and, smoothing back his hair from his forehead, looked so kindly and lovingly in his



George Cruikshank

Oliver recovering from the fever.

face, that he could not help placing his little withered hand upon her's and drawing it round his neck.

"Save us!" said the old lady, with tears in her eyes, "what a grateful little dear it is. Pretty creetur, what would his mother feel if she had sat by him as I have, and could see him now!"

"Perhaps she does see me," whispered Oliver, folding his hands together; "perhaps she has sat by me, ma'am. I almost feel as if she had."

"That was the fever, my dear," said the old lady mildly.

"I suppose it was," replied Oliver thoughtfully, "because Heaven is a long way off, and they are too happy there, to come down to the bedside of a poor boy. But if she knew I was ill, she must have pitied me even there, for she was very ill herself before she died. She can't know anything about me though," added Oliver after a moment's silence, "for if she had seen me beat, it would have made her sorrowful; and her face has always looked sweet and happy when I have dreamt of her."

The old lady made no reply to this, but wiping her eyes first, and her spectacles, which lay on the counterpane, afterwards, as if they were part and parcel of those features, brought some cool stuff for Oliver to drink, and then, patting him on the cheek, told him he must lie very quiet, or he would be ill again.

So Oliver kept very still, partly because he was anxious to obey the kind old lady in all things, and partly, to tell the truth, because he was completely exhausted with what he had already said. He soon fell into a gentle doze, from which he was awakened by the light of a candle, which, being brought near the bed, showed him a gentleman, with a very large and loud-ticking gold watch in his hand, who felt his pulse, and said he was a great deal better.

"You *are* a great deal better, are you not, my dear?" said the gentleman.

"Yes, thank you, sir," replied Oliver.

"Yes, I know you are," said the gentleman: "you 're hungry too, an't you?"

"No, sir," answered Oliver.

"Hem!" said the gentleman. "No, I know you 're not. He is not hungry, Mrs. Bedwin," said the gentleman, looking very wise.

The old lady made a respectful inclination of the head, which seemed to say that she thought the doctor was a very clever man. The doctor appeared very much of the same opinion himself.

"You feel sleepy, don't you, my dear?" said the doctor.

"No, sir," replied Oliver.

"No," said the doctor with a very shrewd and satisfied look.

"You 're not sleepy. Nor thirsty, are you?"

"Yes, sir, rather thirsty," answered Oliver.

“Just as I expected, Mrs. Bedwin,” said the doctor. “It’s very natural that he should be thirsty—perfectly natural. You may give him a little tea, ma’am, and some dry toast without any butter. Don’t keep him too warm, ma’am; but be careful that you don’t let him be too cold; will you have the goodness?”

The old lady dropped a curtsey; and the doctor, after tasting the cool stuff, and expressing a qualified approval thereof, hurried away: his boots creaking in a very important and wealthy manner as he went down stairs.

Oliver dozed off again soon after this, and when he awoke it was nearly twelve o’clock. The old lady tenderly bade him good-night shortly afterwards, and left him in charge of a fat old woman who had just come, bringing with her in a little bundle a small Prayer Book and a large nightcap. Putting the latter on her head, and the former on the table, the old woman, after telling Oliver that she had come to sit up with him, drew her chair close to the fire and went off into a series of short naps, chequered at frequent intervals with sundry tumblings forward and divers moans and chokings, which, however, had no worse effect than causing her to rub her nose very hard, and then fall asleep again.

And thus the night crept slowly on. Oliver lay awake for some time, counting the little circles of light which the reflection of the rushlight-shade threw upon the ceiling, or tracing with his languid eyes the intricate pattern of the paper on the wall. The darkness and deep stillness of the room were very solemn; and as they brought into the boy’s mind the thought that death had been hovering there for many days and nights, and might yet fill it with the gloom and dread of his awful presence, he turned his face upon the pillow and fervently prayed to Heaven.

Gradually he fell into that deep tranquil sleep which ease from recent suffering alone imparts; that calm and peaceful rest which it is pain to wake from. Who, if this were death, would be roused again to all the struggles and turmoils of life, —to all its cares for the present, its anxieties for the future, and, more than all, its weary recollections of the past!

It had been bright day for hours when Oliver opened his eyes; and when he did so, he felt cheerful and happy. The crisis of the disease was safely past, and he belonged to the world again.

In three days’ time he was able to sit in an easy-chair well propped up with pillows; and, as he was still too weak to walk, Mrs. Bedwin had him carried down stairs into the little house-keeper’s room, which belonged to her, where, having sat him up by the fireside, the good old lady sat herself down too, and, being in a state of considerable delight at seeing him so much better, forthwith began to cry most violently.

“Never mind me, my dear,” said the old lady; “I’m only

having a regular good cry. There, it's all over now, and I'm quite comfortable."

"You're very, very kind to me, ma'am," said Oliver.

"Well, never you mind that, my dear," said the old lady; "that's got nothing to do with your broth, and it's full time you had it, for the doctor says Mr. Brownlow may come in to see you this morning, and we must get up our best looks, because the better we look, the more he'll be pleased." And with this, the old lady applied herself to warming up in a little saucepan a basin full of broth strong enough to furnish an ample dinner, when reduced to the regulation strength, for three hundred and fifty paupers, at the very lowest computation.

"Are you fond of pictures, dear?" inquired the old lady, seeing that Oliver had fixed his eyes most intently on a portrait which hung against the wall just opposite his chair.

"I don't quite know, ma'am," said Oliver, without taking his eyes from the canvass; "I have seen so few that I hardly know. What a beautiful mild face that lady's is!"

"Ah," said the old lady, "painters always make ladies out prettier than they are, or they wouldn't get any custom, child. The man that invented the machine for taking likenesses might have known *that* would never succeed; it's a deal too honest,—a deal," said the old lady, laughing very heartily at her own acuteness.

"Is—is that a likeness, ma'am?" said Oliver.

"Yes," said the old lady, looking up for a moment from the broth; "that's a portrait."

"Whose, ma'am?" asked Oliver eagerly.

"Why, really, my dear, I don't know," answered the old lady in a good-humoured manner. "It's not a likeness of anybody that you or I know, I expect. It seems to strike your fancy, dear."

"It is so very pretty: so very beautiful," replied Oliver.

"Why, sure you're not afraid of it?" said the old lady, observing in great surprise the look of awe with which the child regarded the painting.

"Oh no, no," returned Oliver quickly; "but the eyes look so sorrowful, and where I sit they seem fixed upon me. It makes my heart beat," added Oliver in a low voice, "as if it was alive, and wanted to speak to me, but couldn't."

"Lord save us!" exclaimed the old lady, starting; "don't talk in that way, child. You're weak and nervous after your illness. Let me wheel your chair round to the other side, and then you won't see it. There," said the old lady, suiting the action to the word; "you don't see it now, at all events."

Oliver *did* see it in his mind's eye as distinctly as if he had not altered his position, but he thought it better not to worry the kind old lady; so he smiled gently when she looked at him, and Mrs. Bedwin, satisfied that he felt more comfortable, salted

and broke bits of toasted bread into the broth with all the bustle befitting so solemn a preparation. Oliver got through it with extraordinary expedition, and had scarcely swallowed the last spoonful when there came a soft tap at the door. "Come in," said the old lady; and in walked Mr. Brownlow.

Now, the old gentleman came in as brisk as need be; but he had no sooner raised his spectacles on his forehead, and thrust his hands behind the skirts of his dressing-gown to take a good long look at Oliver, than his countenance underwent a very great variety of odd contortions. Oliver looked very worn and shadowy from sickness, and made an ineffectual attempt to stand up, out of respect to his benefactor, which terminated in his sinking back into the chair again; and the fact is, if the truth must be told, that Mr. Brownlow's heart being large enough for any six ordinary old gentlemen of humane disposition, forced a supply of tears into his eyes by some hydraulic process which we are not sufficiently philosophical to be in a condition to explain.

"Poor boy, poor boy!" said Mr. Brownlow clearing his throat. "I'm rather hoarse this morning, Mrs. Bedwin; I'm afraid I have caught cold."

"I hope not, sir," said Mrs. Bedwin. "Everything you have had has been well aired, sir."

"I don't know, Bedwin,—I don't know," said Mr. Brownlow; "I rather think I had a damp napkin at dinner-time yesterday; but never mind that. How do you feel, my dear?"

"Very happy, sir," replied Oliver, "and very grateful indeed, sir, for your goodness to me."

"Good boy," said Mr. Brownlow stoutly. "Have you given him any nourishment, Bedwin?—any slops, eh?"

"He has just had a basin of beautiful strong broth, sir," replied Mrs. Bedwin, drawing herself up slightly, and laying a strong emphasis on the last word, to intimate that between slops, and broth well compounded, there existed no affinity or connexion whatsoever.

"Ugh!" said Mr. Brownlow, with a slight shudder; "a couple of glasses of port wine would have done him a great deal more good,—wouldn't they, Tom White,—eh?"

"My name is Oliver, sir," replied the little invalid with a look of great astonishment.

"Oliver!" said Mr. Brownlow; "Oliver what? Oliver White,—eh?"

"No, sir, Twist,—Oliver Twist."

"Queer name," said the old gentleman. "What made you tell the magistrate your name was White?"

"I never told him so, sir," returned Oliver in amazement.

This sounded so like a falsehood, that the old gentleman looked somewhat sternly in Oliver's face. It was impossible to doubt him; there was truth in every one of its thin and sharpened lineaments.

"Some mistake," said Mr. Brownlow. But, although his motive for looking steadily at Oliver no longer existed, the old idea of the resemblance between his features and some familiar face came upon him so strongly that he could not withdraw his gaze.

"I hope you are not angry with me, sir," said Oliver, raising his eyes beseechingly.

"No, no," replied the old gentleman.—"Gracious God, what's this! Bedwin, look, look there!"

As he spoke, he pointed hastily to the picture above Oliver's head, and then to the boy's face. There was its living copy,—the eyes, the head, the mouth; every feature was the same. The expression was for the instant so precisely alike, that the minutest line seemed copied with an accuracy which was perfectly unearthly.

Oliver knew not the cause of this sudden exclamation, for he was not strong enough to bear the start it gave him, and he fainted away.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

REVERTS TO THE MERRY OLD GENTLEMAN AND HIS YOUTHFUL FRIENDS, THROUGH WHOM A NEW ACQUAINTANCE IS INTRODUCED TO THE INTELLIGENT READER, AND CONNECTED WITH WHOM VARIOUS PLEASANT MATTERS ARE RELATED APPERTAINING TO THIS HISTORY.

WHEN the Dodger and his accomplished friend Master Bates joined in the hue and cry which was raised at Oliver's heels, in consequence of their executing an illegal conveyance of Mr. Brownlow's personal property, as hath been already described with great perspicuity in a foregoing chapter, they were actuated, as we therein took occasion to observe, by a very laudable and becoming regard for themselves: and forasmuch as the freedom of the subject and the liberty of the individual are among the first and proudest boasts of a true-hearted Englishman, so I need hardly beg the reader to observe that this action must tend to exalt them in the opinion of all public and patriotic men, in almost as great a degree as this strong proof of their anxiety for their own preservation and safety goes to corroborate and confirm the little code of laws which certain profound and sound-judging philosophers have laid down as the mainsprings of all Madam Nature's deeds and actions; the said philosophers very wisely reducing the good lady's proceedings to matters of maxim and theory, and, by a very neat and pretty compliment to her exalted wisdom and understanding, putting entirely out of sight any considerations of heart, or generous impulse and feeling, as matters totally beneath a female who is acknowledged by universal admission to be so far beyond the numerous little foibles and weaknesses of her sex.

If I wanted any further proof of the strictly philosophical

nature of the conduct of these young gentlemen in their very delicate predicament, I should at once find it in the fact (also recorded in a foregoing part of this narrative) of their quitting the pursuit when the general attention was fixed upon Oliver, and making immediately for their home by the shortest possible cut; for although I do not mean to assert that it is the practice of renowned and learned sages at all to shorten the road to any great conclusion, their course indeed being rather to lengthen the distance by various circumlocutions and discursive staggerings, like those in which drunken men under the pressure of a too mighty flow of ideas are prone to indulge, still I do mean to say, and do say distinctly, that it is the invariable practice of all mighty philosophers, in carrying out their theories, to evince great wisdom and foresight in providing against every possible contingency which can be supposed at all likely to affect themselves. Thus, to do a great right, you may do a little wrong, and you may take any means which the end to be attained will justify; the amount of the right or the amount of the wrong, or indeed the distinction between the two, being left entirely to the philosopher concerned: to be settled and determined by his clear, comprehensive, and impartial view of his own particular case.

It was not until the two boys had scoured with great rapidity through a most intricate maze of narrow streets and courts, that they ventured to halt by common consent beneath a low and dark archway. Having remained silent here, just long enough to recover breath to speak, Master Bates uttered an exclamation of amusement and delight, and, bursting into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, flung himself upon a door-step, and rolled thereon in a transport of mirth.

"What 's the matter?" inquired the Dodger.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Charley Bates.

"Hold your noise," remonstrated the Dodger, looking cautiously round. "Do you want to be grabbed, stupid?"

"I can't help it," said Charley, "I can't help it. To see him splitting away at that pace, and cutting round the corners, and knocking up against the posts, and starting on again as if he was made of iron as well as them, and me with the wipe in my pocket, singing out arter him—oh, my eye!" The vivid imagination of Master Bates presented the scene before him in too strong colours. As he arrived at this apostrophe, he again rolled upon the door-step and laughed louder than before.

"What 'll Fagin say?" inquired the Dodger, taking advantage of the next interval of breathlessness on the part of his friend to propound the question.

"What!" repeated Charley Bates.

"Ah, what?" said the Dodger.

"Why, what should he say?" inquired Charley, stopping rather suddenly in his merriment, for the Dodger's manner was impressive; "what should he say?"

Mr. Dawkins whistled for a couple of minutes, and then, taking off his hat, scratched his head and nodded thrice.

"What do you mean?" said Charley.

"Toor rul lol loo, gammon and spinnage, the frog he wouldn't, and high cockolorum," said the Dodger with a slight sneer on his intellectual countenance.

This was explanatory, but not satisfactory. Mr. Bates felt it so, and again said, "What do you mean?"

The Dodger made no reply, but putting his hat on again, and gathering the skirts of his long-tailed coat under his arms, thrust his tongue into his cheek, slapped the bridge of his nose some half-dozen times in a familiar but expressive manner, and then, turning on his heel, slunk down the court. Mr. Bates followed, with a thoughtful countenance.

The noise of footsteps on the creaking stairs a few minutes after the occurrence of this conversation roused the merry old gentleman as he sat over the fire with a saveloy and a small loaf in his left hand, a pocket-knife in his right, and a pewter pot on the trivet. There was a rascally smile on his white face as he turned round, and, looking sharply out from under his thick red eyebrows, bent his ear towards the door and listened intently.

"Why, how's this?" muttered the Jew, changing countenance; "only two of 'em! Where's the third? They can't have got into trouble. Hark!"

The footsteps approached nearer; they reached the landing, the door was slowly opened, and the Dodger and Charley Bates entered and closed it behind them.

"Where's Oliver, you young hounds?" said the furious Jew, rising with a menacing look: "where's the boy?"

The young thieves eyed their preceptor as if they were alarmed at his violence, and looked uneasily at each other, but made no reply.

"What's become of the boy?" said the Jew, seizing the Dodger tightly by the collar, and threatening him with horrid imprecations. "Speak out, or I'll throttle you!"

Mr. Fagin looked so very much in earnest, that Charley Bates, who deemed it prudent in all cases to be on the safe side, and conceived it by no means improbable that it might be his turn to be throttled second, dropped upon his knees, and raised a loud, well-sustained, and continuous roar, something between an insane bull and a speaking-trumpet.

"Will you speak?" thundered the Jew, shaking the Dodger so much that his keeping in the big coat at all seemed perfectly miraculous.

"Why, the traps have got him, and that's all about it," said the Dodger sullenly. "Come, let go o' me, will yer!" and, swinging himself at one jerk clean out of the big coat, which he left in the Jew's hands, the Dodger snatched up the toasting-

fork and made a pass at the merry old gentleman's waistcoat, which, if it had taken effect, would have let a little more merriment out than could have been easily replaced in a month or two.

The Jew stepped back in this emergency with more agility than could have been anticipated in a man of his apparent decrepitude, and, seizing up the pot, prepared to hurl it at his assailant's head. But Charley Bates at this moment calling his attention by a perfectly terrific howl, he suddenly altered its destination, and flung it full at that young gentleman.

"Why, what the blazes is in the wind now!" growled a deep voice. "Who pitched that 'ere at me? It's well it's the beer and not the pot as hit me, or I'd have settled somebody. I might have know'd as nobody but an infernal rich, plundering, thundering old Jew could afford to throw away any drink but water, and not that, unless he done the River company every quarter. Wot's it all about, Fagin. D—me if my neckerkercher an't lined with beer. Come in, you sneaking warmint; wot are you stopping outside for, as if you was ashamed of your master. Come in!"

The man who growled out these words was a stoutly-built fellow of about five-and-forty, in a black velveteen coat, very soiled drab breeches, lace-up half-boots, and grey cotton stockings, which enclosed a very bulky pair of legs, with large swelling calves,—the kind of legs which in such costume always look in an unfinished and incomplete state without a set of fetters to garnish them. He had a brown hat on his head, and a dirty belcher handkerchief round his neck, with the long frayed ends of which, he smeared the beer from his face as he spoke; disclosing when he had done so, a broad heavy countenance with a beard of three days' growth, and two scowling eyes, one of which displayed various parti-coloured symptoms of having been recently damaged by a blow.

"Come in, d'y'e hear?" growled this engaging-looking ruffian. A white shaggy dog, with his face scratched and torn in twenty different places, skulked into the room.

"Why didn't you come in afore?" said the man. "You're getting too proud to own me afore company, are you. Lie down!"

This command was accompanied with a kick which sent the animal to the other end of the room. He appeared well used to it, however; for he coiled himself up in a corner very quietly without uttering a sound, and, winking his very ill-looking eyes about twenty times in a minute, appeared to occupy himself in taking a survey of the apartment.

"What are you up to? Ill-treating the boys, you covetous, avaricious, in-sa-ti-a-ble old fence?" said the man, seating himself deliberately. "I wonder they don't murder you; I would if I was them. If I'd been your 'prentice I'd have done it long

ago; and—no, I couldn't have sold you arterwards, though; for you're fit for nothing but keeping as a curiosity of ugliness in a glass bottle, and I suppose they don't blow them large enough."

"Hush! hush! Mr. Sikes," said the Jew, trembling; "don't speak so loud."

"None of your mistering," replied the ruffian; "you always mean mischief when you come that. You know my name: out with it. I shan't disgrace it when the time comes."

"Well, well, then, Bill Sikes," said the Jew with abject humility. "You seem out of humour, Bill."

"Perhaps I am," replied Sikes. "I should think *you* were rather out of sorts too, unless you mean as little harm when you throw pewter pots about, as you do when you blab and——"

"Are you mad?" said the Jew, catching the man by the sleeve, and pointing towards the boys.

Mr. Sikes contented himself with tying an imaginary knot under his left ear, and jerking his head over on the right shoulder; a piece of dumb show which the Jew appeared to understand perfectly. He then in cant terms, with which his whole conversation was plentifully besprinkled, but which would be quite unintelligible if they were recorded here, demanded a glass of liquor.

"And mind you don't poison it," said Mr. Sikes, laying his hat upon the table.

This was said in jest; but if the speaker could have seen the evil leer with which the Jew bit his pale lip as he turned round to the cupboard, he might have thought the caution not wholly unnecessary, or the wish, at all events, to improve upon the distiller's ingenuity not very far from the old gentleman's merry heart.

After swallowing two or three glassfuls of spirits, Mr. Sikes condescended to take some notice of the young gentlemen; which gracious act led to a conversation in which the cause and manner of Oliver's capture were circumstantially detailed, with such alterations and improvements on the truth as to the Dodger appeared most advisable under the circumstances.

"I'm afraid," said the Jew, "that he may say something which will get us into trouble."

"That's very likely," returned Sikes with a malicious grin.

"You're blowed upon, Fagin."

"And I'm afraid, you see," added the Jew, speaking as if he had not noticed the interruption, and regarding the other closely as he did so,— "I'm afraid that, if the game was up with us, it might be up with a good many more; and that it would come out rather worse for you than it would for me, my dear."

The man started, and turned fiercely round upon the Jew; but the old gentleman's shoulders were shrugged up to his ears, and his eyes were vacantly staring on the opposite wall.

There was a long pause. Every member of the respectable

coterie appeared plunged in his own reflections, not excepting the dog, who by a certain malicious licking of his lips seemed to be meditating an attack upon the legs of the first gentleman or lady he might encounter in the street when he went out.

"Somebody must find out what's been done at the office," said Mr. Sikes in a much lower tone than he had taken since he came in.

The Jew nodded assent.

"If he hasn't peached, and is committed, there's no fear till he comes out again," said Mr. Sikes, "and then he must be taken care on. You must get hold of him, somehow."

Again the Jew nodded.

The prudence of this line of action, indeed, was obvious; but unfortunately there was one very strong objection to its being adopted; and this was, that the Dodger, and Charley Bates, and Fagin, and Mr. William Sikes, happened one and all to entertain a most violent and deeply-rooted antipathy to going near a police-office on any ground or pretext whatever.

How long they might have sat and looked at each other in a state of uncertainty not the most pleasant of its kind, it is difficult to say. It is not necessary to make any guesses on the subject, however; for the sudden entrance of the two young ladies whom Oliver had seen on a former occasion caused the conversation to flow afresh.

"The very thing!" said the Jew. "Bet will go; won't you, my dear?"

"Wheres?" inquired the young lady.

"Only just up to the office, my dear," said the Jew coaxingly.

It is due to the young lady to say that she did not positively affirm that she would not, but that she merely expressed an emphatic and earnest desire to be "jiggered" if she would; a polite and delicate evasion of the request, which shows the young lady to have been possessed of that natural good-breeding that cannot bear to inflict upon a fellow-creature the pain of a direct and pointed refusal.

The Jew's countenance fell, and he turned to the other young lady, who was gaily, not to say gorgeously attired, in a red gown, green boots, and yellow curl-papers.

"Nancy, my dear," said the Jew in a soothing manner, "what do *you* say?"

"That it won't do; so it's no use a trying it on, Fagin," replied Nancy.

"What do you mean by that?" said Mr. Sikes, looking up in a surly manner.

"What I say, Bill," replied the lady collectedly.

"Why, you're just the very person for it," reasoned Mr. Sikes: "nobody about here, knows anything of you."

"And as I don't want 'em to, neither," replied Miss Nancy

in the same composed manner, "it's rayther more no than yes with me, Bill."

"She'll go, Fagin," said Sikes.

"No, she won't, Fagin," bawled Nancy.

"Yes she will, Fagin," said Sikes.

And Mr. Sikes was right. By dint of alternatè threats, promises, and bribes, the engaging female in question was ultimately prevailed upon to undertake the commission. She was not indeed withheld by the same considerations as her agreeable friend, for, having very recently removed into the neighbourhood of Field-lane from the remote but genteel suburb of Ratcliffe, she was not under the same apprehension of being recognised by any of her numerous acquaintance.

Accordingly, with a clean white apron tied over the red gown, and the yellow curl-papers tucked up under a straw bonnet,—both articles of dress being provided from the Jew's inexhaustible stock,—Miss Nancy prepared to issue forth on her errand.

"Stop a minute, my dear," said the Jew, producing a little covered basket. "Carry that in one hand; it looks more respectable, my dear."

"Give her a door-key to carry in her t'other one, Fagin," said Sikes; "it looks real and genivine like."

"Yes, yes, my dear, so it does," said the Jew, hanging a large street-door key on the fore-finger of the young lady's right hand. "There; very good,—very good indeed, my dear," said the Jew, rubbing his hands.

"Oh, my brother! my poor, dear, sweet, innocent little brother!" exclaimed Miss Nancy, bursting into tears, and wringing the little basket and the street-door key in an agony of distress. "What has become of him!—where have they taken him to! Oh, do have pity, and tell me what's been done with the dear boy, gentlemen; do, gentlemen, if you please, gentlemen."

Having uttered these words in a most lamentable and heart-broken tone, to the immeasurable delight of her hearers, Miss Nancy paused, winked to the company, nodded smilingly round, and disappeared.

"Ah! she's a clever girl, my dears," said the Jew, turning to his young friends, and shaking his head gravely, as if in mute admonition to them to follow the bright example they had just beheld.

"She's a honor to her sex," said Mr. Sikes, filling his glass, and smiting the table with his enormous fist. "Here's her health, and wishing they was all like her!"

While these and many other encomiums were being passed on the accomplished Miss Nancy, that young lady made the best of her way to the police-office; whither, notwithstanding a little natural timidity consequent upon walking through the streets alone and unprotected, she arrived in perfect safety shortly afterwards.

Entering by the back way, she tapped softly with the key at one of the cell-doors and listened. There was no sound within, so she coughed and listened again. Still there was no reply, so she spoke.

“Nolly, dear?” murmured Nancy in a gentle voice;—“Nolly?”

There was nobody inside but a miserable shoeless criminal, who had been taken up for playing the flute, and who—the offence against society having been clearly proved—had been very properly committed by Mr. Fang to the House of Correction for one month, with the appropriate and amusing remark that since he had got so much breath to spare, it would be much more wholesomely expended on the treadmill than in a musical instrument. He made no answer, being occupied in mentally bewailing the loss of the flute, which had been confiscated for the use of the county; so Miss Nancy passed on to the next cell, and knocked there.

“Well,” cried a faint and feeble voice.

“Is there a little boy here?” inquired Miss Nancy with a preliminary sob.

“No,” replied the voice; “God forbid!”

This was a vagrant of sixty-five, who was going to prison for *not* playing the flute, or, in other words, for begging in the streets, and doing nothing for his livelihood. In the next cell was another man, who was going to the same prison for hawking tin saucepans without a licence, thereby doing something for his living in defiance of the Stamp-office.

But as neither of these criminals answered to the name of Oliver, or knew anything about him, Miss Nancy made straight up to the bluff officer in the striped waistcoat, and with the most piteous wailings and lamentations, rendered more piteous by a prompt and efficient use of the street-door key and the little basket, demanded her own dear brother.

“I haven’t got him, my dear,” said the old man.

“Where is he?” screamed Miss Nancy in a distracted manner.

“Why, the gentleman’s got him,” replied the officer.

“What gentleman? Oh, gracious heavins! what gentleman?” exclaimed Miss Nancy.

In reply to this incoherent questioning, the old man informed the deeply affected sister that Oliver had been taken ill in the office, and discharged in consequence of a witness having proved the robbery to have been committed by another boy not in custody; and that the prosecutor had carried him away in an insensible condition to his own residence, of and concerning which all the informant knew was, that it was somewhere at Pentonville, he having heard that word mentioned in the directions to the coachman.

In a dreadful state of doubt and uncertainty the agonised young woman staggered to the gate, and then,—exchanging her

faltering gait for a good swift steady run, returned by the most devious and complicated route she could think of, to the domicile of the Jew.

Mr. Bill Sikes no sooner heard the account of the expedition delivered, than he very hastily called up the white dog, and, putting on his hat, expeditiously departed, without devoting any time to the formality of wishing the company good-morning.

"We must know where he is, my dears; he must be found," said the Jew, greatly excited. "Charley, do nothing but skulk about, till you bring home some news of him. Nancy, my dear, I must have him found: I trust to you, my dear,—to you and the Artful for every thing. Stay, stay," added the Jew, unlocking a drawer with a shaking hand; "there's money, my dears. I shall shut up this shop to-night: you'll know where to find me. Don't stop here a minute,—not an instant, my dears!"

With these words he pushed them from the room, and carefully double-locking and barring the door behind them, drew from its place of concealment the box which he had unintentionally disclosed to Oliver, and hastily proceeded to dispose the watches and jewellery beneath his clothing.

A rap at the door startled him in this occupation. "Who's there?" he cried in a shrill tone of alarm.

"Me!" replied the voice of the Dodger through the keyhole.

"What now?" cried the Jew impatiently.

"Is he to be kidnapped to the other ken, Nancy says?" inquired the Dodger cautiously.

"Yes," replied the Jew, "wherever she lays hands on him. Find him, find him out, that's all; and I shall know what to do next, never fear."

The boy murmured a reply of intelligence, and hurried down stairs after his companions.

"He has not peached so far," said the Jew as he pursued his occupation. "If he means to blab us among his new friends, we may stop his windpipe yet."