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BENTLEY'S MISCELLANY.

OLIVER TWIST;

OR, THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS.

BY BOZ.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH.

WHEREIN OLIVER IS DELIVERED OVER TO MR. WILLIAM SIKES.

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WHEN Oliver awoke in the morning, he was a good deal surprised to find that a new pair of shoes with strong thick soles had been placed at his bedside, and that his old ones had been removed. At first he was pleased with the discovery, hoping it might be the forerunner of his release; but such thoughts were quickly dispelled on his sitting down to breakfast alone with the Jew, who told him, in a tone and manner which increased his alarm, that he was to be taken to the residence of Bill Sikes that night.

"To—to—stop there, sir?" asked Oliver anxiously.

"No, no, my dear, not to stop there," replied the Jew. "We shouldn't like to lose you. Don't be afraid, Oliver; you shall come back to us again. Ha! ha! ha! We won't be so cruel as to send you away, my dear. Oh no, no!"

The old man, who was stooping over the fire toasting a piece of bread, looked round as he bantered Oliver thus, and chuckled as if to show that he knew he would still be very glad to get away if he could.

"I suppose," said the Jew, fixing his eyes on Oliver, "you want to know what you're going to Bill's for—eh, my dear?"

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Oliver coloured involuntarily to find that the old thief had been reading his thoughts; but boldly said, Yes, he did want to know.

"Why, do you think?" inquired Fagin, parrying the question.

"Indeed I don't know, sir," replied Oliver.

"Bah!" said the Jew, turning away with a disappointed countenance from a close perusal of Oliver's face. "Wait till Bill tells you, then."

The Jew seemed much vexed by Oliver's not expressing any greater curiosity on the subject; but the truth is, that, although he felt very anxious, he was too much confused by the earnest

cunning of Fagin's looks, and his own speculations, to make any further inquiries just then. He had no other opportunity; for the Jew remained very surly and silent till night, when he prepared to go abroad.

"You may burn a candle," said the Jew, putting one upon the table; "and here's a book for you to read till they come to fetch you. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!" replied Oliver softly.

The Jew walked to the door, looking over his shoulder at the boy as he went, and, suddenly stopping, called him by his name.

Oliver looked up; the Jew, pointing to the candle, motioned to him to light it. He did so; and, as he placed the candlestick upon the table, saw that the Jew was gazing fixedly at him with lowering and contracted brows from the dark end of the room.

"Take heed, Oliver! take heed!" said the old man, shaking his right hand before him in a warning manner. "He's a rough man, and thinks nothing of blood when his own is up. Whatever falls out, say nothing; and do what he bids you. Mind!" Placing a strong emphasis on the last word, he suffered his features gradually to resolve themselves into a ghastly grin; and, nodding his head, left the room.

Oliver leant his head upon his hand when the old man disappeared, and pondered with a trembling heart on the words he had just heard. The more he thought of the Jew's admonition, the more he was at a loss to divine its real purpose and meaning. He could think of no bad object to be attained by sending him to Sikes which would not be equally well answered by his remaining with Fagin; and, after meditating for a long time, concluded that he had been selected to perform some ordinary menial offices for the housebreaker, until another boy, better suited for his purpose, could be engaged. He was too well accustomed to suffering, and had suffered too much where he was, to bewail the prospect of a change very severely. He remained lost in thought for some minutes, and then, with a heavy sigh, snuffed the candle, and, taking up the book which the Jew had left with him, began to read.

He turned over the leaves carelessly at first, but, lighting on a passage which attracted his attention, soon became intent upon the volume. It was a history of the lives and trials of great criminals, and the pages were soiled and thumbed with use. Here, he read of dreadful crimes that make the blood run cold; of secret murders that had been committed by the lonely wayside, and bodies hidden from the eye of man in deep pits and wells, which would not keep them down, deep as they were, but had yielded them up at last, after many years, and so maddened the murderers with the sight, that in their horror they had confessed their guilt, and yelled for the gibbet to end their agony. Here, too, he read of men who, lying in their beds at dead of

night, had been tempted and led on by their own bad thoughts to such dreadful bloodshed as it made the flesh creep and the limbs quail to think of. The terrible descriptions were so vivid and real, that the sallow pages seemed to turn red with gore, and the words upon them to be sounded in his ears as if they were whispered in hollow murmurs by the spirits of the dead.

In a paroxysm of fear the boy closed the book and thrust it from him. Then, falling upon his knees, he prayed Heaven to spare him from such deeds, and rather to will that he should die at once, than be reserved for crimes so fearful and appalling. By degrees he grew more calm, and besought, in a low and broken voice, that he might be rescued from his present dangers: and that if any aid were to be raised up for a poor outcast boy, who had never known the love of friends or kindred, it might come to him now, when, desolate and deserted, he stood alone in the midst of wickedness and guilt.

He had concluded his prayer, but still remained with his head buried in his hands, when a rustling noise aroused him.

"What's that!" he cried, starting up, and catching sight of a figure standing by the door. "Who's there?"

"Me—only me," replied a tremulous voice.

Oliver raised the candle above his head, and looked towards the door. It was Nancy.

"Put down the light," said the girl, turning away her head: "it hurts my eyes."

Oliver saw that she was very pale, and gently inquired if she were ill. The girl threw herself into a chair, with her back towards him, and wrung her hands; but made no reply.

"God forgive me!" she cried after a while, "I never thought of all this."

"Has anything happened?" asked Oliver. "Can I help you? I will if I can; I will indeed."

She rocked herself to and fro, and then, wringing her hands violently, caught her throat, and, uttering a gurgling sound, struggled and gasped for breath.

"Nancy!" cried Oliver, greatly alarmed. "What is it?"

The girl burst into a fit of loud laughter, beating her hands upon her knees, and her feet upon the ground, meanwhile; and, suddenly stopping, drew her shawl close round her, and shivered with cold.

Oliver stirred the fire. Drawing her chair close to it, she sat there for a little time without speaking, but at length she raised her head and looked round.

"I don't know what comes over me sometimes," said the girl, affecting to busy herself in arranging her dress; "it's this damp, dirty room, I think. Now, Nolly, dear, are you ready?"

"Am I to go with you?" asked Oliver.

"Yes; I have come from Bill," replied the girl. "You are to go with me."

"What for?" said Oliver recoiling.

"What for!" echoed the girl, raising her eyes, and averting them again the moment they encountered the boy's face. "Oh! for no harm."

"I don't believe it," said Oliver, who had watched her closely.

"Have it your own way," rejoined the girl, affecting to laugh. "For no good, then."

Oliver could see that he had some power over the girl's better feelings, and for an instant thought of appealing to her compassion for his helpless state. But then the thought darted across his mind that it was barely eleven o'clock, and that many people were still in the streets, of whom surely some might be found to give credence to his tale. As the reflection occurred to him, he stepped forward, and said somewhat hastily that he was ready.

Neither his brief consideration nor its purport were lost upon his companion. She eyed him narrowly while he spoke, and cast upon him a look of intelligence which sufficiently showed that she guessed what had been passing in his thoughts.

"Hush!" said the girl, stooping over him, and pointing to the door as she looked cautiously round. "You can't help yourself. I have tried hard for you, but all to no purpose. You are hedged round and round; and, if ever you are to get loose from here, this is not the time."

Struck by the energy of her manner, Oliver looked up in her face with great surprise. She seemed to speak the truth; her countenance was white and agitated, and she trembled with very earnestness.

"I have saved you from being ill-used once, and I will again, and I do now," continued the girl aloud; "for those who would have fetched you, if I had not, would have been far more rough than me. I have promised for your being quiet and silent; if you are not, you will only do harm to yourself and me too, and perhaps be my death. See here! I have borne all this for you already, as true as God sees me show it."

She pointed hastily to some livid bruises upon her neck and arms, and continued with great rapidity.

"Remember this, and don't let me suffer more for you just now. If I could help you I would, but I have not the power: they don't mean to harm you; and whatever they make you do, is no fault of yours. Hush! every word from you is a blow for me: give me your hand—make haste, your hand!"

She caught the hand which Oliver instinctively placed in hers, and, blowing out the light, drew him after her up the stairs. The door was opened quickly by some one shrouded in the darkness, and as quickly closed when they had passed out. A hackney cabriolet was in waiting; and, with the same vehemence which she had exhibited in addressing Oliver, the

girl pulled him in with her, and drew the curtains close. The driver wanted no directions, but lashed his horse into full speed without the delay of an instant.

The girl still held Oliver fast by the hand, and continued to pour into his ear the warnings and assurances she had already imparted. All was so quick and hurried, that he had scarcely time to recollect where he was, or how he came there, when the carriage stopped at the same house to which the Jew's steps had been directed on the previous evening.

For one brief moment Oliver cast a hurried glance along the empty street, and a cry for help hung upon his lips. But the girl's voice was in his ear, beseeching him in such tones of agony to remember her, that he had not the heart to utter it; and while he hesitated, the opportunity was gone, for he was already in the house, and the door was shut.

"This way," said the girl, releasing her hold for the first time. "Bill!"

"Hallo!" replied Sikes, appearing at the head of the stairs with a candle. "Oh! that's the time of day. Come on!"

This was a very strong expression of approbation, and an uncommonly hearty welcome, from a person of Mr. Sikes's temperament; Nancy, appearing much gratified thereby, saluted him cordially.

"Bullseye's gone home with Tom," observed Sikes as he lighted them up. "He'd have been in the way."

"That's right," rejoined Nancy.

"So you've got the kid," said Sikes, when they had all reached the room: closing the door as he spoke.

"Yes, here he is," replied Nancy.

"Did he come quiet?" inquired Sikes.

"Like a lamb," rejoined Nancy.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Sikes, looking grimly at Oliver, "for the sake of his young carcass, as would otherways have suffered for it. Come here, young 'un, and let me read you a lectur', which is as well got over at once."

Thus addressing his new *protégé*, Mr. Sikes pulled off his cap and threw it into a corner; and then, taking him by the shoulder, sat himself down by the table, and stood Oliver in front of him.

"Now first, do you know wot this is?" inquired Sikes, taking up a pocket-pistol which lay on the table.

Oliver replied in the affirmative.

"Well then, look here," continued Sikes. "This is powder, that 'ere's a bullet, and this is a little bit of a old hat for waddin'."

Oliver murmured his comprehension of the different bodies referred to, and Mr. Sikes proceeded to load the pistol with great nicety and deliberation.

"Now it's loaded," said Mr. Sikes when he had finished.

"Yes, I see it is, sir," replied Oliver, trembling.

"Well," said the robber, grasping Oliver's wrist tightly, and putting the barrel so close to his temple that they touched, at which moment the boy could not repress a shriek; "if you speak a word when you're out o' doors with me, except when I speak to you, that loading will be in your head without notice—so, if you *do* make up your mind to speak without leave, say your prayers first."

Having bestowed a scowl upon the object of this warning, to increase its effect, Mr. Sikes continued.

"As near as I know, there isn't anybody as would be asking very partickler arter you, if you *was* disposed of; so I needn't take this devil-and-all of trouble to explain matters to you if it warn't for your own good. D'ye hear?"

"The short and the long of what you mean," said Nancy, speaking very emphatically, and slightly frowning at Oliver, as if to bespeak his serious attention to her words, "is, that if you're crossed by him in this job you have on hand, you'll prevent his ever telling tales afterwards, by shooting him through the head, and take your chance of swinging for it as you do for a great many other things in the way of business every month of your life."

"That's it!" observed Mr. Sikes approvingly; "women can always put things in fewest words, except when it's blowing-up, and then they lengthens it out. And now that he's thoroughly up to it, let's have some supper, and get a snooze afore starting."

In pursuance of this request, Nancy quickly laid the cloth, and, disappearing for a few minutes, presently returned with a pot of porter and a dish of sheeps' heads, which gave occasion to several pleasant witticisms on the part of Mr. Sikes, founded upon the singular coincidence of "jemmies" being a cant name common to them and an ingenious implement much used in his profession. Indeed, the worthy gentleman, stimulated perhaps by the immediate prospect of being in active service, was in great spirits and good-humour; in proof whereof it may be here remarked, that he humorously drank all the beer at a draught, and did not utter, on a rough calculation, more than fourscore oaths during the whole progress of the meal.

Supper being ended,—it may be easily conceived that Oliver had no great appetite for it,—Mr. Sikes disposed of a couple of glasses of spirits and water, and threw himself upon the bed, ordering Nancy, with many imprecations in case of failure, to call him at five precisely. Oliver stretched himself, in his clothes, by command of the same authority, on a mattress upon the floor; and the girl, mending the fire, sat before it, in readiness to rouse them at the appointed time.

For a long time Oliver lay awake, thinking it not impossible that Nancy might seek that opportunity of whispering some

further advice, but the girl sat brooding over the fire without moving, save now and then to trim the light: weary with watching and anxiety, he at length fell asleep.

When he awoke, the table was covered with tea-things, and Sikes was thrusting various articles into the pockets of his great-coat which hung over the back of a chair, while Nancy was busily engaged in preparing breakfast. It was not yet daylight, for the candle was still burning, and it was quite dark outside. A sharp rain, too, was beating against the window-panes, and the sky looked black and cloudy.

"Now, then!" growled Sikes, as Oliver started up; "half-past five! Look sharp, or you'll get no breakfast, for it's late as it is."

Oliver was not long in making his toilet; and, having taken some breakfast, replied to a surly inquiry from Sikes, by saying that he was quite ready.

Nancy, scarcely looking at the boy, threw him a handkerchief to tie round his throat, and Sikes gave him a large rough cape to button over his shoulders. Thus attired, he gave his hand to the robber, who, merely pausing to show him, with a menacing gesture, that he had the pistol in a side-pocket of his great-coat, clasped it firmly in his, and, exchanging a farewell with Nancy, led him away.

Oliver turned round for an instant when they reached the door, in the hope of meeting a look from the girl; but she had resumed her old seat in front of the fire, and sat perfectly motionless before it.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE EXPEDITION.

It was a cheerless morning when they got into the street, blowing and raining hard, and the clouds looking dull and stormy. The night had been very wet, for large pools of water had collected in the road, and the kennels were overflowing. There was a faint glimmering of the coming day in the sky, but it rather aggravated than relieved the gloom of the scene, the sombre light only serving to pale that which the street-lamps afforded, without shedding any warmer or brighter tints upon the wet housetops and dreary streets. There appeared to be nobody stirring in that quarter of the town, for the windows of the houses were all closely shut, and the streets through which they passed noiseless and empty.

By the time they had turned into the Bethnal Green road the day had fairly begun to break. Many of the lamps were already extinguished, a few country waggons were slowly toiling on towards London, and now and then a stage-coach, covered with mud, rattled briskly by, the driver bestowing, as he passed, an admonitory lash upon the heavy waggoner, who, by keeping on the wrong side of the road, had endangered his arriving at

the office a quarter of a minute after his time. The public-houses, with gas-lights burning inside, were already open. By degrees other shops began to be unclosed, and a few scattered people were met with. Then came straggling groups of labourers going to their work; then men and women with fish-baskets on their heads, donkey-carts laden with vegetables, chaise-carts filled with live-stock or whole carcasses of meat, milkwomen with pails, and an unbroken concourse of people trudging out with various supplies to the eastern suburbs of the town. As they approached the City, the noise and traffic gradually increased; and, when they threaded the streets between Shoreditch and Smithfield, it had swelled into a roar of sound and bustle. It was as light as it was likely to be till night set in again, and the busy morning of half the London population had begun.

Turning down Sun-street and Crown-street, and crossing Finsbury-square, Mr. Sikes struck, by way of Chiswell-street, into Barbican, thence into Long-lane, and so into Smithfield, from which latter place arose a tumult of discordant sounds that filled Oliver Twist with surprise and amazement.

It was market-morning. The ground was covered nearly ankle-deep with filth and mire; and a thick steam perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle, and mingling with the fog, which seemed to rest upon the chimney-tops, hung heavily above. All the pens in the centre of the large area, and as many temporary ones as could be crowded into the vacant space, were filled with sheep; and, tied up to posts by the gutter side, were long lines of beasts and oxen three or four deep. Countrymen, butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers, and vagabonds of every low grade, were mingled together in a dense mass: the whistling of drovers, the barking of dogs, the bellowing and plunging of beasts, the bleating of sheep, and grunting and squeaking of pigs; the cries of hawkers, the shouts, oaths, and quarrelling on all sides, the ringing of bells and roar of voices that issued from every public-house; the crowding, pushing, driving, beating, whooping, and yelling; the hideous and discordant din that resounded from every corner of the market; and the unwashed, unshaven, squalid, and dirty figures constantly running to and fro, and bursting in and out of the throng, rendered it a stunning and bewildering scene which quite confounded the senses.

Mr. Sikes, dragging Oliver after him, elbowed his way through the thickest of the crowd, and bestowed very little attention upon the numerous sights and sounds which so astonished the boy. He nodded twice or thrice to a passing friend; and, resisting as many invitations to take a morning dram, pressed steadily onward until they were clear of the turmoil, and had made their way through Hosier-lane into Holborn.

"Now, young 'un!" said Sikes surlily, looking up at the

clock of St. Andrew's church, "hard upon seven! you must step out. Come, don't lag behind already, Lazy-legs!"

Mr. Sikes accompanied this speech with a fierce jerk at his little companion's wrist; and Oliver, quickening his pace into a kind of trot, between a fast walk and a run, kept up with the rapid strides of the housebreaker as well as he could.

They kept on their course at this rate until they had passed Hyde-Park corner, and were on their way to Kensington, when Sikes relaxed his pace until an empty cart, which was at some little distance behind, came up: when, seeing "Hounslow" written upon it, he asked the driver, with as much civility as he could assume, if he would give them a lift as far as Isleworth."

"Jump up," said the man. "Is that your boy?"

"Yes; he's my boy," replied Sikes, looking hard at Oliver, and putting his hand abstractedly into the pocket where the pistol was.

"Your father walks rather too quick for you; don't he, my man?" inquired the driver, seeing that Oliver was out of breath.

"Not a bit of it," replied Sikes, interposing. "He's used to it. Here, take hold of my hand, Ned. In with you!"

Thus addressing Oliver, he helped him into the cart; and the driver, pointing to a heap of sacks, told him to lie down there, and rest himself.

As they passed the different milestones, Oliver wondered more and more where his companion meant to take him. Kensington, Hammersmith, Chiswick, Kew Bridge, Brentford, were all passed; and yet they kept on as steadily as if they had only begun their journey. At length they came to a public-house called the Coach and Horses, a little way beyond which, another road appeared to turn off. And here the cart stopped.

Sikes dismounted with great precipitation, holding Oliver by the hand all the while; and, lifting him down directly, bestowed a furious look upon him, and rapped the side-pocket with his fist in a very significant manner.

"Good-b'ye, boy!" said the man.

"He's sulky," replied Sikes, giving him a shake; "he's sulky,—a young dog! Don't mind him."

"Not I!" rejoined the other, getting into his cart. "It's a fine day, after all." And he drove away.

Sikes waited till he had fairly gone, and then, telling Oliver he might look about him if he wanted, once again led him forward on his journey.

They turned round to the left a short way past the public-house, and then, taking a right-hand road, walked on for a long time, passing many large gardens and gentlemen's houses on both sides of the way, and at length crossing a little bridge which led them into Twickenham; from which town they still walked on without stopping for anything but some beer, until they reached another town, in which, against the wall of a

house, Oliver saw written up in pretty large letters "Hampton." Turning round by a public-house which bore the sign of the Red Lion, they kept on by the river side for a short distance, and then Sikes, striking off into a narrow street, walked straight to an old public-house with a defaced sign-board, and ordered some dinner by the kitchen fire.

The kitchen was an old low-roofed room, with a great beam across the middle of the ceiling, and benches with high backs to them by the fire, on which were seated several rough men in smock-frocks, drinking and smoking. They took no notice of Oliver, and very little of Sikes; and, as Sikes took very little notice of them, he and his young comrade sat in a corner by themselves, without being much troubled by the company.

They had some cold meat for dinner, and sat here so long after it, while Mr. Sikes indulged himself with three or four pipes, that Oliver began to feel quite certain they were not going any further. Being much tired with the walk and getting up so early, he dozed a little at first; and then, quite overpowered by fatigue and the fumes of the tobacco, fell fast asleep.

It was quite dark when he was awakened by a push from Sikes. Rousing himself sufficiently to sit up and look about him, he found that worthy in close fellowship and communication with a labouring man, over a pint of ale.

"So, you're going on to Lower Halliford, are you?" inquired Sikes.

"Yes, I am," replied the man, who seemed a little the worse—or better, as the case might be—for drinking; "and not slow about it either. My horse hasn't got a load behind him going back, as he had coming up in the mornin', and he won't be long a-doing of it. Here's luck to him! Ecod, he's a good 'un!"

"Could you give my boy and me a lift as far as there?" demanded Sikes, pushing the ale towards his new friend.

"If you're going directly, I can," replied the man, looking out of the pot. "Are you going to Halliford?"

"Going on to Shepperton," replied Sikes.

"I'm your man as far as I go," replied the other. "Is all paid, Becky?"

"Yes, the other gentleman's paid," replied the girl.

"I say!" said the man with tipsy gravity; "that won't do, you know."

"Why not?" rejoined Sikes. "You're a-going to accommodate us, and wot's to prevent my standing treat for a pint or so, in return?"

The stranger reflected upon this argument with a very profound face, and, having done so, seized Sikes by the hand, and declared he was a real good fellow. To which Mr. Sikes replied he was joking; as, if he had been sober, there would have been strong reason to suppose he was.

After the exchange of a few more compliments, they bade the company good-night, and went out: the girl gathering up the pots and glasses as they did so, and lounging out to the door, with her hands full, to see the party start.

The horse, whose health had been drunk in his absence, was standing outside, ready harnessed to the cart. Oliver and Sikes got in without any further ceremony, and the man, to whom he belonged having lingered a minute or two "to bear him up," and to defy the hostler and the world to produce his equal, mounted also. Then the hostler was told to give the horse his head, and, his head being given him, he made a very unpleasant use of it, tossing it into the air with great disdain, and running into the parlour windows over the way; after performing which feats, and supporting himself for a short time on his hind-legs, he started off at great speed, and rattled out of the town right gallantly.

The night was very dark; and a damp mist rose from the river and the marshy ground about, and spread itself over the dreary fields. It was piercing cold, too; all was gloomy and black. Not a word was spoken, for the driver had grown sleepy, and Sikes was in no mood to lead him into conversation. Oliver sat huddled together in a corner of the cart bewildered with alarm and apprehension, and figuring strange objects in the gaunt trees, whose branches waved grimly to and fro, as if in some fantastic joy at the desolation of the scene.

As they passed Sunbury church, the clock struck seven. There was a light in the ferry-house window opposite, which streamed across the road, and threw into more sombre shadow a dark yew-tree with graves beneath it. There was a dull sound of falling water not far off, and the leaves of the old tree stirred gently in the night wind. It seemed like solemn quiet music for the repose of the dead.

Sunbury was passed through, and they came again into the lonely road. Two or three miles more, and the cart stopped. Sikes alighted, and, taking Oliver by the hand, they once again walked on.

They turned into no house at Shepperton, as the weary boy had expected, but still kept walking on in mud and darkness through gloomy lanes and over cold open wastes, until they came within sight of the lights of a town at no great distance. On looking intently forward, Oliver saw that the water was just below them, and that they were coming to the foot of a bridge.

Sikes kept straight on till they were close upon the bridge, and then turned suddenly down a bank upon the left. "The water!" thought Oliver, turning sick with fear. "He has brought me to this lonely place to murder me!"

He was about to throw himself on the ground, and make one struggle for his young life, when he saw that they stood before a solitary house all ruinous and decayed. There was a window

on each side of the dilapidated entrance, and one story above ; but no light was visible. It was dark, dismantled, and to all appearance uninhabited.

Sikes, with Oliver's hand still in his, softly approached the low porch, and raised the latch. The door yielded to his pressure, and they passed in together.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND.

THE BURGLARY.

"HALLO!" cried a loud, hoarse voice, directly they had set foot in the passage.

"Don't make such a row," said Sikes, bolting the door. "Show a glim, Toby."

"Aha! my pal," cried the same voice; "a glim, Barney, a glim! Show the gentleman in, Barney; and wake up first, if convenient."

The speaker appeared to throw a boot-jack, or some such article, at the person he addressed, to rouse him from his slumbers; for the noise of a wooden body falling violently was heard, and then an indistinct muttering as of a man between asleep and awake.

"Do you hear?" cried the same voice. "There's Bill Sikes in the passage, with nobody to do the civil to him; and you sleeping there, as if you took laudanum with your meals, and nothing stronger. Are you any fresher now, or do you want the iron candlestick to wake you thoroughly?"

A pair of slipshod feet shuffled hastily across the bare floor of the room as this interrogatory was put; and there issued from a door on the right hand, first a feeble candle, and next, the form of the same individual who has been heretofore described as labouring under the infirmity of speaking through his nose, and officiating as waiter at the public-house on Saffron Hill.

"Bister Sikes!" exclaimed Barney, with real or counterfeit joy; "cub id, sir; cub id."

"Here! you get on first," said Sikes, putting Oliver in front of him. "Quicker! or I shall tread upon your heels."

Muttering a curse upon his tardiness, Sikes pushed Oliver before him, and they entered a low dark room with a smoky fire, two or three broken chairs, a table, and a very old couch, on which, with his legs much higher than his head, a man was reposing at full length, smoking a long clay pipe. He was dressed in a smartly-cut snuff-coloured coat with large brass buttons, an orange neckerchief, a coarse, staring, shawl-pattern waistcoat, and drab breeches. Mr. Crackit (for he it was) had no very great quantity of hair, either upon his head or face; but what he had was of a reddish dye, and tortured into long, corkscrew curls, through which he occasionally thrust some very dirty fingers ornamented with large common rings. He was a trifle above the middle size, and apparently rather weak in the legs; but this circumstance by no means detracted from his own admiration of his top-boots, which he contemplated in their elevated situation with lively satisfaction.

"Bill, my boy!" said this figure, turning his head towards the door,

"I'm glad to see you; I was almost afraid you'd given it up, in which case I should have made a personal ventur'. Hallo!"

Uttering this exclamation in a tone of great surprise as his eyes rested on Oliver, Mr. Toby Crackit brought himself into a sitting posture, and demanded who that was.

"The boy—only the boy!" replied Sikes, drawing a chair towards the fire.

"Wud of Bister Fagid's lads," exclaimed Barney, with a grin.

"Fagin's, eh!" exclaimed Toby, looking at Oliver. "Wot an inwalable boy that'll make for the old ladies' pockets in chapels. His mug is a fortun' to him."

"There—there's enough of that!" interposed Sikes impatiently; and, stooping over his recumbent friend, he whispered a few words in his ear, at which Mr. Crackit laughed immensely, and honoured Oliver with a long stare of astonishment.

"Now," said Sikes, as he resumed his seat, "if you'll give us something to eat and drink while we're waiting, you'll put some heart in us,—or in me, at all events. Sit down by the fire, younker, and rest yourself; for you'll have to go out with us again to-night, though not very far off."

Oliver looked at Sikes in mute and timid wonder, and, drawing a stool to the fire, sat with his aching head upon his hands, scarcely knowing where he was, or what was passing around him.

"Here," said Toby, as the young Jew placed some fragments of food and a bottle upon the table, "Success to the crack!" He rose to honour the toast, and, carefully depositing his empty pipe in a corner, advanced to the table, filled a glass with spirits, and drank off its contents. Mr. Sikes did the same.

"A drain for the boy," said Toby, half filling a wine-glass. "Down with it, innocence!"

"Indeed," said Oliver, looking piteously up into the man's face; "indeed I——"

"Down with it!" echoed Toby. "Do you think I don't know what's good for you? Tell him to drink it, Bill."

"He had better," said Sikes, clapping his hand upon his pocket. "Burn my body! if he isn't more trouble than a whole family of Dodgers. Drink it, you perverse imp; drink it!"

Frightened by the menacing gestures of the two men, Oliver hastily swallowed the contents of the glass, and immediately fell into a violent fit of coughing, which delighted Toby Crackit and Barney, and even drew a smile from the surly Mr. Sikes.

This done, and Sikes having satisfied his appetite, (Oliver could eat nothing but a small crust of bread which they made him swallow,) the two men laid themselves down on chairs for a short nap. Oliver retained his stool by the fire; and Barney, wrapped in a blanket, stretched himself on the floor, close outside the fender.

They slept, or appeared to sleep, for some time; nobody stirring but Barney, who rose once or twice to throw coals upon the fire. Oliver fell into a heavy doze, imagining himself straying alone through the gloomy lanes, or wandering about the dark churchyard, or retracing some one or other of the scenes of the past day, when he was roused by Toby Crackit's jumping up and declaring it was half-past one.

In an instant the other two were on their legs, and all were actively engaged in busy preparation. Sikes and his companion enveloped their necks and chins in large dark shawls, and drew on their great-coats; while Barney, opening a cupboard, brought forth several articles, which he hastily crammed into the pockets.

"Barkers for me, Barney?" said Toby Crackit.

"Here they are," replied Barney, producing a pair of pistols.

"You loaded them yourself?"

"All right!" replied Toby, stowing them away. "The persuaders?"

"I've got 'em," replied Sikes.

"Crape, keys, centre-bit, darkies—nothing forgotten?" inquired Toby, fastening a small crowbar to a loop inside the skirt of his coat.

"All right!" rejoined his companion. "Bring them bits of timber, Barney: that's the time of day."

With these words he took a thick stick from Barney's hands, who, having delivered another to Toby, busied himself in fastening on Oliver's cape.

"Now then!" said Sikes, holding out his hand.

Oliver, who was completely stupefied by the unwonted exercise, and the air, and the drink that had been forced upon him, put his hand mechanically into that which Sikes extended for the purpose.

"Take his other hand, Toby," said Sikes. "Look out, Barney!"

The man went to the door, and returned to announce that all was quiet. The two robbers issued forth with Oliver between them; and Barney, having made all fast, rolled himself up as before, and was soon asleep again.

It was now intensely dark. The fog was much heavier than it had been in the early part of the night, and the atmosphere was so damp that, although no rain fell, Oliver's hair and eyebrows within a few minutes after leaving the house had become stiff with the half-frozen moisture that was floating about. They crossed the bridge, and kept on towards the lights which he had seen before. They were at no great distance off; and, as they walked pretty briskly, they soon arrived at Chertsey.

"Slap through the town," whispered Sikes: "there'll be nobody in the way to-night to see us."

Toby acquiesced; and they hurried through the main street of the little town, which at that late hour was wholly deserted. A dim light shone at intervals from some bed-room window, and the hoarse barking of dogs occasionally broke the silence of the night; but there was nobody abroad, and they had cleared the town as the church bell struck two.

Quickening their pace, they turned up a road upon the left hand; after walking about a quarter of a mile, they stopped before a detached house surrounded by a wall, to the top of which Toby Crackit, scarcely pausing to take breath, climbed in a twinkling.

"The boy next," said Toby. "Hoist him up: I'll catch hold of him."

Before Oliver had time to look round, Sikes had caught him under the arms, and in three or four seconds he and Toby were lying on the grass on the other side. Sikes followed directly, and they stole cautiously towards the house.

And now, for the first time, Oliver, well-nigh mad with grief and terror, saw that housebreaking and robbery, if not murder, were the objects of the expedition. He clasped his hands together, and involuntarily uttered a subdued exclamation of horror. A mist came before his eyes, the cold sweat stood upon his ashy face, his limbs failed him, and he sunk upon his knees.

"Get up!" murmured Sikes, trembling with rage, and drawing the pistol from his pocket; "get up, or I'll strew your brains upon the grass!"

"Oh! for God's sake let me go!" cried Oliver; "let me run away and die in the fields. I will never come near London—never, never! Oh! pray have mercy upon me, and do not make me steal: for the love of all the bright angels that rest in heaven, have mercy upon me!"

The man to whom this appeal was made swore a dreadful oath, and had cocked the pistol, when Toby, striking it from his grasp, placed his hand upon the boy's mouth and dragged him to the house.

"Hush!" cried the man; "it won't answer here. Say another word, and I'll do your business myself with a crack on the head that makes no noise, and is quite as certain and more genteel. Here, Bill, wrench the shutter open. He's game enough now, I'll engage. I've seen older hands of his age took the same way for a minute or two on a cold night."

Sikes, invoking terrific imprecations upon Fagin's head for sending Oliver on such an errand, plied the crowbar vigorously, but with little noise; and, after some delay and some assistance from Toby, the shutter to which he had referred swung open on its hinges.

It was a little lattice window, about five feet and a half above the ground, at the back of the house, belonging to a scullery or small brewing-place at the end of the passage: the aperture was so small that the inmates had probably not thought it worth while to defend it more securely; but it was large enough to admit a boy of Oliver's size nevertheless. A very brief exercise of Mr. Sikes's art sufficed to overcome the fastening of the lattice, and it soon stood wide open also.

"Now listen, you young limb!" whispered Sikes, drawing a dark lantern from his pocket, and throwing the glare full on Oliver's face; "I'm a-going to put you through there. Take this light, go softly up the steps straight afore you, and along the little hall to the street-door. Unfasten it, and let us in."

"There's a bolt at the top you won't be able to reach," interposed Toby. "Stand upon one of the hall chairs; there are three there, Bill, with a jolly large blue unicorn and a gold pitchfork on 'em, which is the old lady's arms."

"Keep quiet, can't you?" replied Sikes with a savage look. "The room door is open, is it?"

"Wide," replied Toby, after peeping in to satisfy himself. "The game of that is that they always leave it open with a catch, so that the dog, who's got a bed in here, may walk up and down the passage when he feels wakeful. Ha! ha! Barney 'ticed him away to-night, so neat."

Although Mr. Crackit spoke in a scarcely audible whisper, and laughed without noise, Sikes imperiously commanded him to be silent, and to get to work. Toby complied by first producing his lantern,

and placing it on the ground; and then planting himself firmly with his head against the wall beneath the window, and his hands upon his knees, so as to make a step of his back. This was no sooner done than Sikes, mounting upon him, put Oliver gently through the window, with his feet first; and, without leaving hold of his collar, planted him safely on the floor inside.

"Take this lantern," said Sikes, looking into the room. "You see the stairs afore you?"

Oliver, more dead than alive, gasped out, "Yes;" and Sikes, pointing to the street-door with the pistol barrel, briefly advised him to take notice that he was within shot all the way, and that if he faltered he would fall dead that instant.

"It's done in a minute," said Sikes in the same low whisper. "Directly I leave go of you, do your work. Hark!"

"What's that?" whispered the other man.

They listened intently.

"Nothing," said Sikes, releasing his hold of Oliver. "Now!"

In the short time he had had to collect his senses, the boy had firmly resolved that, whether he died in the attempt or not, he would make one effort to dart up stairs from the hall and alarm the family. Filled with this idea, he advanced at once, but stealthily.

"Come back!" suddenly cried Sikes aloud. "Back! back!"

Scared by the sudden breaking of the dead stillness of the place, and a loud cry which followed it, Oliver let his lantern fall, and knew not whether to advance or fly. The cry was repeated—a light appeared—a vision of two terrified half-dressed men at the top of the stairs swam before his eyes—a flash—a loud noise—a smoke—a crash somewhere, but where he knew not,—and he staggered back.

Sikes had disappeared for an instant; but he was up again, and had him by the collar before the smoke had cleared away. He fired his own pistol after the men, who were already retreating, and dragged the boy up.

"Clasp your arm tighter," said Sikes as he drew him through the window. "Give me a shawl here. They've hit him. Quick! Damnation, how the boy bleeds!"

Then came the loud ringing of a bell, mingled with the noise of fire-arms and the shouts of men, and the sensation of being carried over uneven ground at a rapid pace. And then the noises grew confused in the distance, and a cold deadly feeling crept over the boy's heart, and he saw or heard no more.

THE END OF THE FIRST BOOK.



George Cruikshank

The Burglary.

London, Richard Bentley, Jan 1, 1838.