

## OLIVER TWIST;

OR, THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS.

BY BOZ.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

BOOK THE SECOND.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

IN WHICH A MYSTERIOUS CHARACTER APPEARS UPON THE SCENE,  
AND MANY THINGS INSEPARABLE FROM THIS HISTORY  
ARE DONE AND PERFORMED.

THE old man had gained the street corner before he began to recover the effect of Toby Crackit's intelligence. He had relaxed nothing of his unusual speed, but was still pressing onward in the same wild and disordered manner, when the sudden dashing past of a carriage, and a boisterous cry from the foot-passengers who saw his danger, drove him back upon the pavement. Looking hastily round, as if uncertain whither he had been hurrying, he paused for a few moments, and turned away in quite an opposite direction to that in which he had before proceeded. Avoiding as much as possible all the main streets, and skulking only through the by-ways and alleys, he at length emerged on Snow Hill. Here he walked even faster than before; nor did he linger until he had again turned into a court, when, as if conscious that he was now in his proper element, he fell into his usual shuffling pace, and seemed to breathe more freely.

Near to the spot on which Snow Hill and Holborn Hill meet, there opens, upon the right hand as you come out of the city, a narrow and dismal alley leading to Saffron Hill. In its filthy shops are exposed for sale huge bunches of second-hand silk handkerchiefs of all sizes and patterns,—for here reside the traders who purchase them from pickpockets. Hundreds of these handkerchiefs hang dangling from pegs outside the windows, or flaunting from the door-posts; and the shelves within are piled with them. Confined as the limits of Field Lane are, it has its barber, its coffee-shop, its beer-shop, and its fried-fish warehouse. It is a commercial colony of itself, the emporium of petty larceny, visited at early morning and setting-in of dusk by silent merchants, who traffic in dark back-parlours, and go as strangely as they came. Here the clothesman, the shoe-vamper, and the rag-merchant display their goods as sign-boards to the petty thief; and stores of old iron and bones, and heaps of mildewy fragments of woollen-stuff and linen, rust and rot in the grimy cellars.

It was into this place that the Jew turned. He was well-known to the sallow denizens of the lane, for such of them as

were on the look-out to buy or sell, nodded familiarly as he passed along. He replied to their salutations in the same way, but bestowed no closer recognition until he reached the further end of the alley, when he stopped to address a salesman of small stature, who had squeezed as much of his person into a child's chair as the chair would hold, and was smoking a pipe at his warehouse-door.

"Why, the sight of you, Mister Fagin, would cure the hop-talmy!" said this respectable trader, in acknowledgment of the Jew's inquiry after his health.

"The neighbourhood was a little too hot, Lively!" said Fagin, elevating his eyebrows, and crossing his hands upon his shoulders.

"Well! I've heerd that complaint of it once or twice before," replied the trader, "but it soon cools down again; don't you find it so?"

Fagin nodded in the affirmative, and, pointing in the direction of Saffron Hill, inquired whether any one was up yonder to-night.

"At the Cripples?" inquired the man.

The Jew nodded.

"Let me see!" pursued the merchant, reflecting. "Yes; there's some half-dozen of 'em gone in, that I knows on. I don't think your friend's there."

"Sikes is not, I suppose?" inquired the Jew, with a disappointed countenance.

"*Non istwentus*, as the lawyers say," replied the little man, shaking his head, and looking amazingly sly. "Have you got anything in my line to-night?"

"Nothing to-night," said the Jew, turning away.

"Are you going up to the Cripples, Fagin?" cried the little man, calling after him. "Stop! I don't mind if I have a drain there with you!"

But as the Jew, looking back, waved his hand to intimate that he preferred being alone; and, moreover, as the little man could not very easily disengage himself from the chair, the sign of the Cripples was, for a time, bereft of the advantage of Mr. Lively's presence. By the time he had got upon his legs the Jew had disappeared; so Mr. Lively, after ineffectually standing on tip-toe, in the hope of catching sight of him, again forced himself into the little chair, and, exchanging a shake of the head with a lady in the opposite shop, in which doubt and mistrust were plainly mingled, resumed his pipe with a grave demeanour.

The Three Cripples, or rather the Cripples, which was the sign by which the establishment was familiarly known to its patrons, was the same public-house in which Mr. Sikes and his dog have already figured. Merely making a sign to a man in the bar, Fagin walked straight up stairs, and opening the door of a room, and softly insinuating himself into the chamber, looked

anxiously about, shading his eyes with his hand, as if in search of some particular person.

The room was illuminated by two gas-lights, the glare of which was prevented, by the barred shutters and closely-drawn curtains of faded red, from being visible outside. The ceiling was blackened, to prevent its colour being injured by the flaring of the lamps; and the place was so full of dense tobacco-smoke, that at first it was scarcely possible to discern anything further. By degrees, however, as some of it cleared away through the open door, an assemblage of heads, as confused as the noises that greeted the ear, might be made out; and, as the eye grew more accustomed to the scene, the spectator gradually became aware of the presence of a numerous company, male and female, crowded round a long table, at the upper end of which sat a chairman with a hammer of office in his hand, while a professional gentleman, with a bluish nose, and his face tied up for the benefit of a tooth-ache, presided at a jingling piano in a remote corner.

As Fagin stepped softly in, the professional gentleman, running over the keys by way of prelude, occasioned a general cry of order for a song; which having subsided, a young lady proceeded to entertain the company with a ballad in four verses, between each of which the accompanist played the melody all through as loud as he could. When this was over, the chairman gave a sentiment; after which, the professional gentlemen on the chairman's right and left volunteered a duet, and sang it with great applause.

It was curious to observe some faces which stood out prominently from among the group. There was the chairman himself, the landlord of the house: a coarse, rough, heavy-built fellow, who, while the songs were proceeding, rolled his eyes hither and thither, and, seeming to give himself up to joviality, had an eye for everything that was done, and an ear for everything that was said,—and sharp ones, too. Near him were the singers, receiving with professional indifference the compliments of the company, and applying themselves in turn to a dozen proffered glasses of spirits and water tendered by their more boisterous admirers, whose countenances, expressive of almost every vice in almost every grade, irresistibly attracted the attention by their very repulsiveness. Cunning, ferocity, and drunkenness in all its stages were there in their strongest aspects; and women—some with the last lingering tinge of their early freshness almost fading as you looked, and others with every mark and stamp of their sex utterly beaten out, and presenting but one loathsome blank of profligacy and crime; some mere girls, others but young women, and none past the prime of life,—formed the darkest and saddest portion of this dreary picture.

Fagin, troubled by no grave emotions, looked eagerly from face to face while these proceedings were in progress, but appa-

rently without meeting that of which he was in search. Succeeding at length in catching the eye of the man who occupied the chair, he beckoned to him slightly, and left the room as quietly as he had entered it.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Fagin?" softly inquired the man as he followed him out to the landing. "Won't you join us? They'll be delighted, every one of 'em."

The Jew shook his head impatiently, and said in a whisper, "Is *he* here?"

"No," replied the man.

"And no news of Barney?" inquired Fagin.

"None," replied the landlord of the Cripples, for it was he. "He won't stir till it's all safe. Depend on it that they're on the scent down there, and that if he moved he'd blow upon the thing at once. He's all right enough, Barney is; else I should have heard of him. I'll pound it that Barney's managing properly. Let him alone for that."

"Will *he* be here to-night?" asked the Jew, laying the same emphasis on the pronoun as before.

"Monks do you mean?" inquired the landlord, hesitating.

"Hush!" said the Jew. "Yes."

"Certain," replied the man, drawing a gold watch from his fob; "I expected him here before now. If you'll wait ten minutes, he'll be——"

"No, no," said the Jew hastily, as though, however desirous he might be to see the person in question, he was nevertheless relieved by his absence. "Tell him I came here to see him, and that he must come to me to-night; no, say to-morrow. As he is not here, to-morrow will be time enough."

"Good!" said the man. "Nothing more?"

"Not a word now," said the Jew, descending the stairs.

"I say," said the other, looking over the rails, and speaking in a hoarse whisper; "what a time this would be for a sell! I've got Phil Barker here, so drunk, that a boy might take him."

"Aha! But it's not Phil Barker's time," said the Jew, looking up. "Phil has something more to do before we can afford to part with him; so go back to the company, my dear, and tell them to lead merry lives—*while they last*. Ha! ha! ha!"

The landlord reciprocated the old man's laugh, and returned to his guests. The Jew was no sooner alone than his countenance resumed its former expression of anxiety and thought. After a brief reflection, he called a hack-cabriolet, and bade the man drive towards Bethnal Green. He dismissed him within some quarter of a mile of Mr. Sikes's residence, and performed the short remainder of the distance on foot.

"Now," muttered the Jew as he knocked at the door, "if there is any deep play here, I shall have it out of you, my girl, cunning as you are."

She was in her room, the woman said; so Fagin crept softly up-stairs, and entered it without any previous ceremony. The girl was alone, lying with her head upon the table, and her hair straggling over it. "She has been drinking," thought the Jew coolly, "or perhaps she is only miserable."

The old man turned to close the door as he made this reflection, and the noise thus occasioned roused the girl. She eyed his crafty face narrowly as she inquired whether there was any news, and listened to his recital of Toby Crackit's story. When it was concluded, she sunk into her former attitude, but spoke not a word. She pushed the candle impatiently away, and once or twice, as she feverishly changed her position, shuffled her feet upon the ground; but this was all.

During this silence, the Jew looked restlessly about the room, as if to assure himself that there were no appearances of Sikes having covertly returned. Apparently satisfied with his inspection, he coughed twice or thrice, and made as many efforts to open a conversation; but the girl heeded him no more than if he had been made of stone. At length he made another attempt, and, rubbing his hands together, said, in his most conciliatory tone,

"And where should you think Bill was now, my dear; eh?"

The girl moaned out some scarcely intelligible reply, that she could not tell; and seemed, from the half-smothered noise that escaped her, to be crying.

"And the boy, too," said the Jew, straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of her face. "Poor leetle child!—left in a ditch, Nance; only think!"

"The child," said the girl, suddenly looking up, "is better where he is, than among us: and, if no harm comes to Bill from it, I hope he lies dead in the ditch, and that his young bones may rot there."

"What!" cried the Jew in amazement.

"Ay, I do," returned the girl, meeting his gaze. "I shall be glad to have him away from my eyes, and to know that the worst is over. I can't bear to have him about me: the sight of him turns me against myself and all of you."

"Pooh!" said the Jew scornfully. "You're drunk, girl."

"Am I?" cried the girl bitterly. "It's no fault of yours if I am not; you'd never have me anything else if you had your will, except now!—the humour doesn't suit you, doesn't it?"

"No!" rejoined the Jew furiously. "It does not!"

"Change it, then!" responded the girl with a laugh.

"Change it!" exclaimed the Jew, exasperated beyond all bounds by his companion's unexpected obstinacy and the vexation of the night, "I will change it! Listen to me, you drab! listen to me, who with six words can strangle Sikes as surely as if I had his bull's throat between my fingers now. If he comes back, and leaves that boy behind him,—if he gets off free, and,

dead or alive, fails to restore him to me, murder him yourself if you would have him escape Jack Ketch, and do it the moment he sets foot in this room, or, mind me, it will be too late!"

"What is all this?" cried the girl involuntarily.

"What is it!" pursued Fagin, mad with rage. "This! When the boy's worth hundreds of pounds to me, am I to lose what chance threw me in the way of getting safely, through the whims of a drunken gang that I could whistle away the lives of,—and me bound, too, to a born devil that only wants the will, and has got the power to, to——"

Panting for breath, the old man stammered for a word, and in that one instant checked the torrent of his wrath, and changed his whole demeanour. A moment before, his clenched hands had grasped the air, his eyes had dilated, and his face grown livid with passion; but now he shrunk into a chair, and, cowering together, trembled with the apprehension of having himself disclosed some hidden villany. After a short silence he ventured to look round at his companion, and appeared somewhat reassured on beholding her in the same listless attitude from which he had first roused her.

"Nancy dear!" croaked the Jew in his usual voice. "Did you mind me, dear?"

"Don't worry me now, Fagin!" replied the girl, raising her head languidly. "If Bill has not done it this time, he will another: he has done many a good job for you, and will do many more when he can; and when he can't, he won't, and so no more about that."

"Regarding this boy, my dear?" said the Jew, rubbing the palms of his hands nervously together.

"The boy must take his chance with the rest," interrupted Nancy hastily; "and I say again, I hope he is dead, and out of harm's way, and out of yours,—that is, if Bill comes to no harm; and, if Toby got clear off, he's pretty sure to, for he's worth two of him any time."

"And about what I was saying, my dear?" observed the Jew, keeping his glistening eye steadily upon her.

"You must say it all over again if it's anything you want me to do," rejoined Nancy; "and if it is, you had better wait till to-morrow. You put me up for a minute, but now I'm stupid again."

Fagin put several other questions, all with the same drift of ascertaining whether the girl had profited by his unguarded hints; but she answered them so readily, and was withal so utterly unmoved by his searching looks, that his original impression of her being more than a trifle in liquor was fully confirmed. Miss Nancy, indeed, was not exempt from a failing which was very common among the Jew's female pupils, and in which in their tenderer years they were rather encouraged than checked. Her disordered appearance, and a wholesome perfume of Ge-

neva which pervaded the apartment, afforded strong confirmatory evidence of the justice of the Jew's supposition; and when, after indulging in the temporary display of violence above described, she subsided, first into dullness, and afterwards into a compound of feelings, under the influence of which she shed tears one minute, and in the next gave utterance to various exclamations of "Never say die!" and divers calculations as to what might be the amount of the odds so long as a lady or gentleman were happy, Mr. Fagin, who had had considerable experience of such matters in his time, saw with great satisfaction that she was very far gone indeed.

Having eased his mind by this discovery, and accomplished his two-fold object of imparting to the girl what he had that night heard, and ascertaining with his own eyes that Sikes had not returned, Mr. Fagin again turned his face homeward, leaving his young friend asleep with her head upon the table.

It was within an hour of midnight, and the weather being dark and piercing cold, he had no great temptation to loiter. The sharp wind that scoured the streets seemed to have cleared them of passengers as of dust and mud, for few people were abroad, and they were to all appearance hastening fast home. It blew from the right quarter for the Jew, however; and straight before it he went, trembling and shivering as every fresh gust drove him rudely on his way.

He had reached the corner of his own street, and was already fumbling in his pocket for the door-key, when a dark figure emerged from a projecting entrance which lay in deep shadow, and, crossing the road, glided up to him unperceived.

"Fagin!" whispered a voice close to his ear.

"Ah!" said the Jew, turning quickly round. "Is that——"

"Yes!" interrupted the stranger harshly. "I have been lingering here these two hours. Where the devil have you been?"

"On your business, my dear," replied the Jew, glancing uneasily at his companion, and slackening his pace as he spoke.

"On your business all night."

"Oh, of course!" said the stranger, with a sneer. "Well; and what's come of it?"

"Nothing good," said the Jew.

"Nothing bad, I hope!" said the stranger, stopping short, and turning a startled look upon his companion.

The Jew shook his head, and was about to reply, when the stranger, interrupting him, motioned to the house, before which they had by this time arrived, and remarked that he had better say what he had got to say, under cover, for his blood was chilled with standing about so long, and the wind blew through him.

Fagin looked as if he could have willingly excused himself from taking home a visitor at that unseasonable hour, and mut-

tered something about having no fire; but, his companion repeating his request in a peremptory manner, he unlocked the door, and requested him to close it softly, while he got a light.

"It's as dark as the grave," said the man, groping forward a few steps. "Make haste; I hate this!"

"Shut the door," whispered Fagin from the end of the passage. As he spoke, it closed with a loud noise.

"That wasn't my doing," said the other man, feeling his way. "The wind blew it to, or it shut of its own accord; one or the other. Look sharp with the light, or I shall knock my brains out against something in this confounded hole."

Fagin stealthily descended the kitchen stairs, and, after a short absence, returned with a lighted candle, and the intelligence that Toby Crackit was asleep in the back-room below, and the boys in the front one. Beckoning the other man to follow him, he led the way up stairs.

"We can say the few words we've got to say, in here, my dear," said the Jew, throwing open a door on the first floor; "and as there are holes in the shutters, and we never show lights to our neighbours, we'll set the candle on the stairs. There!"

With these words, the Jew, stooping down, placed the candle on an upper flight of stairs exactly opposite the room door, and led the way into the apartment, which was destitute of all movables save a broken arm-chair, and an old couch or sofa, without covering, which stood behind the door. Upon this piece of furniture the stranger flung himself with the air of a weary man; and, the Jew drawing up the arm-chair opposite, they sat face to face. It was not quite dark, for the door was partially open, and the candle outside threw a feeble reflection on the opposite wall.

They conversed for some time in whispers; and, although nothing of the conversation was distinguishable beyond a few disjointed words here and there, a listener might easily have perceived that Fagin appeared to be defending himself against some remarks of the stranger, and that the latter was in a state of considerable irritation. They might have been talking thus for a quarter of an hour or more, when Monks—by which name the Jew had designated the strange man several times in the course of their colloquy—said, raising his voice a little,

"I tell you again it was badly planned. Why not have kept him here among the rest, and made a sneaking, snivelling pickpocket of him at once?"

"Only hear him!" exclaimed the Jew, shrugging his shoulders.

"Why; do you mean to say you couldn't have done it if you had chosen?" demanded Monks sternly. "Haven't you done it with other boys scores of times? If you had had patience for a twelvemonth at most, couldn't you have got him convicted and sent safely out of the kingdom, perhaps for life?"



“Whose turn would that have served, my dear?” inquired the Jew humbly.

“Mine,” replied Monks.

“But not mine,” said the Jew submissively. “When there are two parties to a bargain, it is only reasonable that the interest of both should be consulted; is it, my good friend?”

“What then?” demanded Monks sulkily.

“I saw it was not easy to train him to the business,” replied the Jew; “he was not like other boys in the same circumstances.”

“Curse him, no!” muttered the man, “or he would have been a thief long ago.”

“I had no hold upon him to make him worse,” pursued the Jew, anxiously watching the countenance of his companion; “his hand was not in; I had nothing to frighten him with; which we always must have in the beginning, or we labour in vain. What could I do? Send him out with the Dodger and Charley? We had enough of that at first, my dear; I trembled for us all.”

“That was not my doing,” observed Monks.

“No, no, my dear!” renewed the Jew, “and I don’t quarrel with it now; because, if it had never happened, you might never have clapped eyes upon the boy to notice him, and so led to the discovery that it was him you were looking for. Well; I got him back for you by means of the girl, and then *she* begins to favour him.”

“Throttle the girl!” said Monks impatiently.

“Why, we can’t afford to do that just now, my dear,” replied the Jew, smiling; “and, besides, that sort of thing is not in our way, or one of these days I might be glad to have it done. I know what these girls are, Monks, well; as soon as the boy begins to harden, she’ll care no more for him than for a block of wood. You want him made a thief: if he is alive, I can make him one from this time; and if—if—” said the Jew, drawing nearer to the other,—“it’s not likely, mind,—but if the worst comes to the worst, and he is dead—”

“It’s no fault of mine if he is!” interposed the other man with a look of terror, and clasping the Jew’s arm with trembling hands. “Mind that, Fagin! I had no hand in it. Anything but his death, I told you from the first. I won’t shed blood; it’s always found out, and haunts a man besides! If they shot him dead, I was not the cause; do you hear me? Fire this infernal den!—what’s that?”

“What!” cried the Jew, grasping the coward round the body with both arms as he sprung to his feet. “Where?”

“Yonder!” replied the man, glaring at the opposite wall.

“The shadow—I saw the shadow of a woman in a cloak and bonnet pass along the wainscot like a breath!”

The Jew released his hold, and they rushed tumultuously

from the room. The candle, wasted by the draught, was standing where it had been placed, and showed them the empty staircases, and their own white faces. They listened intently, but a profound silence reigned throughout the house.

"It's your fancy," said the Jew, taking up the light, and turning to his companion.

"I'll swear I saw it!" replied Monks, trembling violently. "It was bending forward when I saw it first, and when I spoke it darted away."

The Jew glanced contemptuously at the pale face of his associate, and, telling him he could follow if he pleased, ascended the stairs. They looked into all the rooms; they were cold, bare, and empty. They descended to the passage, and thence into the cellars below. The green damp hung upon the low walls, and the tracks of the snail and slug glistened in the light, but all was still as death.

"What do you think now, my dear?" said the Jew, when they had regained the passage. "Besides ourselves, there's not a creature in the house except Toby and the boys, and they're safe enough. See here!"

As a proof of the fact, the Jew drew forth two keys from his pocket; and explained that when he first went down stairs he had locked them in, to prevent any intrusion on the conference.

This accumulated testimony effectually staggered Mr. Monks. His protestations had gradually become less and less vehement as they proceeded in their search without making any discovery; and now he gave vent to several very grim laughs, and confessed it could only have been his excited imagination. He declined any renewal of the conversation however for that night, suddenly remembering that it was past one o'clock; and so the amiable couple parted.

#### CHAPTER THE FIFTH

ATONES FOR THE UNPOLITENESS OF A FORMER CHAPTER, WHICH DESERTED  
A LADY MOST UN CEREMONIOUSLY.

As it would be by no means seemly in a humble author to keep so mighty a personage as a beadle waiting with his back to a fire, and the skirts of his coat gathered up under his arms, until such time as it might suit his pleasure to relieve him; and as it would still less become his station or his gallantry to involve in the same neglect a lady on whom that beadle had looked with an eye of tenderness and affection, and in whose ear he had whispered sweet words, which, coming from such a quarter, might well thrill the bosom of maid or matron of whatsoever degree; the faithful historian whose pen traces these words, trusting that he knows his place, and entertains a becoming reverence for those upon earth to whom high and im-

portant authority is delegated, hastens to pay them that respect which their position demands, and to treat them with all that duteous ceremony which their exalted rank and (by consequence) great virtues imperatively claim at his hands. Towards this end, indeed, he had purposed to introduce in this place a dissertation touching the divine right of beadle, and elucidative of the position that a beadle can do no wrong, which could not fail to have been both pleasurable and profitable to the right-minded reader, but which he is unfortunately compelled by want of time and space to postpone to some more convenient and fitting opportunity; on the arrival of which, he will be prepared to show that a beadle properly constituted—that is to say, a parochial beadle attached to the parochial workhouse, and attending in his official capacity the parochial church,—is, in right and virtue of his office, possessed of all the excellencies and best qualities of humanity; and that to none of those excellencies can mere companies' beadles, or court-of-law beadles, or even chapel-of-ease beadles (save the last in a very lowly and inferior degree), lay the remotest sustainable claim.

Mr. Bumble had re-counted the tea-spoons, re-weighed the sugar-tongs, made a closer inspection of the milk-pot, and ascertained to a nicety the exact condition of the furniture down to the very horse-hair seats of the chairs, and had repeated each process full half-a-dozen times, before he began to think that it was time for Mrs. Corney to return. Thinking begets thinking; and, as there were no sounds of Mrs. Corney's approach, it occurred to Mr. Bumble that it would be an innocent and virtuous way of spending the time, if he were further to allay his curiosity by a cursory glance at the interior of Mrs. Corney's chest of drawers.

Having listened at the key-hole to assure himself that nobody was approaching the chamber, Mr. Bumble, beginning at the bottom, proceeded to make himself acquainted with the contents of the three long drawers; which, being filled with various garments of good fashion and texture, carefully preserved between two layers of old newspaper speckled with dried lavender, seemed to yield him exceeding satisfaction. Arriving in course of time at the right-hand corner drawer (in which was the key), and beholding therein a small padlocked box, which, being shaken, gave forth a pleasant sound as of the chinking of coin, Mr. Bumble returned with a stately walk to the fire-place, and, resuming his old attitude, said, with a grave and determined air, "I'll do it!" He followed up this remarkable declaration by shaking his head in a waggish manner for ten minutes, as though he were remonstrating with himself for being such a pleasant dog; and then took a view of his legs in profile with much seeming pleasure and interest.

He was still placidly engaged in this latter survey when Mrs. Corney, hurrying into the room, threw herself in a breathless

state on a chair by the fire-side, and covering her eyes with one hand, placed the other over her heart, and gasped for breath.

"Mrs. Corney," said Mr. Bumble, stooping over the matron, "what is this, ma'am? has anything happened, ma'am? Pray answer me; I'm on—on—" Mr. Bumble in his alarm could not immediately think of the word "tenterhooks," so he said "broken bottles."

"Oh, Mr. Bumble!" cried the lady, "I have been so dreadfully put out!"

"Put out, ma'am!" exclaimed Mr. Bumble; "who has dared to—? I know!" said Mr. Bumble, checking himself with native majesty, "this is them wicious paupers!"

"It's dreadful to think of!" said the lady, shuddering.

"Then *don't* think of it, ma'am," rejoined Mr. Bumble.

"I can't help it," whimpered the lady.

"Then take something, ma'am," said Mr. Bumble soothingly. "A little of the wine?"

"Not for the world!" replied Mrs. Corney. "I couldn't—oh! The top shelf in the right-hand corner—oh!" Uttering these words, the good lady pointed distractedly to the cupboard, and underwent a convulsion from internal spasms. Mr. Bumble rushed to the closet, and, snatching a pint green-glass bottle from the shelf thus incoherently indicated, filled a tea-cup with its contents, and held it to the lady's lips.

"I'm better now," said Mrs. Corney, falling back after drinking half of it.

Mr. Bumble raised his eyes piously to the ceiling in thankfulness, and, bringing them down again to the brim of the cup, lifted it to his nose.

"Peppermint," explained Mrs. Corney in a faint voice, smiling gently on the beadle as she spoke. "Try it; there's a little—a little something else in it."

Mr. Bumble tasted the medicine with a doubtful look; smacked his lips, took another taste, and put the cup down empty.

"It's very comforting," said Mrs. Corney.

"Very much so indeed, ma'am," said the beadle. As he spoke, he drew a chair beside the matron, and tenderly inquired what had happened to distress her.

"Nothing," replied Mrs. Corney. "I am a foolish, excitable, weak creetur."

"Not weak, ma'am," retorted Mr. Bumble, drawing his chair a little closer. "Are you a weak creetur, Mrs. Corney?"

"We are all weak creeturs," said Mrs. Corney, laying down a general principle.

"So we are," said the beadle.

Nothing was said on either side for a minute or two afterwards; and by the expiration of that time Mr. Bumble had illustrated the position by removing his left arm from the back of

Mrs. Corney's chair, where it had previously rested, to Mrs. Corney's apron-string, round which it gradually became entwined.

"We are all weak creeturs," said Mr. Bumble.

Mrs. Corney sighed.

"Don't sigh, Mrs. Corney," said Mr. Bumble.

"I can't help it," said Mrs. Corney; and she sighed again.

"This is a very comfortable room, ma'am," said Mr. Bumble, looking round. "Another room and this, ma'am, would be a complete thing."

"It would be too much for one," murmured the lady.

"But not for two, ma'am," rejoined Mr. Bumble in soft accents. "Eh, Mrs. Corney?"

Mrs. Corney drooped her head when the beadle said this, and the beadle drooped his to get a view of Mrs. Corney's face. Mrs. Corney with great propriety turned her head away, and released her hand to get at her pocket-handkerchief, but insensibly replaced it in that of Mr. Bumble.

"The board allow you coals, don't they, Mrs. Corney?" affectionately inquired the beadle, pressing her hand.

"And candles," replied Mrs. Corney, slightly returning the pressure.

"Coals, candles, and house-rent free," said Mr. Bumble.

"Oh, Mrs. Corney, what a angel you are!"

The lady was not proof against this burst of feeling. She sunk into Mr. Bumble's arms; and that gentleman, in his agitation, imprinted a passionate kiss upon her chaste nose.

"Such porochial perfection!" exclaimed Mr. Bumble rapturously. "You know that Mr. Slout is worse to-night, my fascinator?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Corney bashfully.

"He can't live a week, the doctor says," pursued Mr. Bumble.

"He is the master of this establishment; his death will cause a vacancy; that vacancy must be filled up. Oh, Mrs. Corney, what a prospect this opens! What a opportunity for a joining of hearts and housekeeping!"

Mrs. Corney sobbed.

"The little word?" said Mr. Bumble, bending over the bashful beauty. "The one little, little, little word, my blessed Corney?"

"Ye—ye—yes!" sighed out the matron.

"One more," pursued the beadle; "compose your darling feelings for only one more. When is it to come off?"

Mrs. Corney twice essayed to speak, and twice failed. At length, summoning up courage, she threw her arms round Mr. Bumble's neck, and said it might be as soon as ever he pleased, and that he was "a irresistible duck."

Matters being thus amicably and satisfactorily arranged, the contract was solemnly ratified in another tea-cup-full of the peppermint mixture, which was rendered the more necessary

by the flutter and agitation of the lady's spirits. While it was being disposed of, she acquainted Mr. Bumble with the old woman's decease.

"Very good," said that gentleman, sipping his peppermint. "I'll call at Sowerberry's as I go home, and tell him to send to-morrow morning. Was it that as frightened you, love?"

"It wasn't anything particular, dear," said the lady evasively.

"It must have been something, love," urged Mr. Bumble. "Won't you tell your own B.?"

"Not now," rejoined the lady; "one of these days,—after we're married, dear."

"After we're married!" exclaimed Mr. Bumble. "It wasn't any impudence from any of them male paupers as——"

"No, no, love!" interposed the lady hastily.

"If I thought it was," continued Mr. Bumble, — "if I thought any one of 'em had dared to lift his vulgar eyes to that lovely countenance——"

"They wouldn't have dared to do it, love," responded the lady.

"They had better not!" said Mr. Bumble, clenching his fist. "Let me see any man, porochial or extra-porochial, as would presume to do it, and I can tell him that he wouldn't do it a second time!"

Unembellished by any violence of gesticulation, this might have sounded as no very high compliment to the lady's charms; but, as Mr. Bumble accompanied the threat with many warlike gestures, she was much touched with this proof of his devotion, and protested with great admiration that he was indeed a dove.

The dove then turned up his coat-collar, and put on his cocked-hat, and, having exchanged a long and affectionate embrace with his future partner, once again braved the cold wind of the night; merely pausing for a few minutes in the male paupers' ward to abuse them a little, with the view of satisfying himself that he could fill the office of workhouse-master with needful acerbity. Assured of his qualifications, Mr. Bumble left the building with a light heart, and bright visions of his future promotion, which served to occupy his mind until he reached the shop of the undertaker.

Now, Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry having gone out to tea and supper, and Noah Claypole not being at any time disposed to take upon himself a greater amount of physical exertion than is necessary to a convenient performance of the two functions of eating and drinking, the shop was not closed, although it was past the usual hour of shutting-up. Mr. Bumble tapped with his cane on the counter several times; but, attracting no attention, and beholding a light shining through the glass-window of the little parlour at the back of the shop, he made bold to peep in and see what was going forward; and, when he saw what was going forward, he was not a little surprised.

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*Mr. Claypole as he appeared when his master was out.*



The cloth was laid for supper, and the table was strewed with bread and butter, plates and glasses, a porter-pot, and a wine-bottle. At the upper end of the table Mr. Noah Claypole lolled negligently in an easy-chair with his legs thrown over one of the arms, an open clasp-knife in one hand, and a mass of buttered bread in the other; close beside him stood Charlotte, opening oysters from a barrel, which Mr. Claypole condescended to swallow with remarkable avidity. A more than ordinary redness in the region of the young gentleman's nose, and a kind of fixed wink in his right eye, denoted that he was in a slight degree intoxicated; and these symptoms were confirmed by the intense relish with which he took his oysters, for which nothing but a strong appreciation of their cooling properties in cases of internal fever could have sufficiently accounted.

"Here 's a delicious fat one, Noah dear!" said Charlotte; "try him, do; only this one."

"What a delicious thing is a oyster!" remarked Mr. Claypole after he had swallowed it. "What a pity it is a number of 'em should ever make you feel uncomfortable, isn't it, Charlotte?"

"It 's quite a cruelty," said Charlotte.

"So it is," acquiesced Mr. Claypole. "Ain't yer fond of oysters?"

"Not overmuch," replied Charlotte. "I like to see you eat 'em, Noah dear, better than eating them myself."

"Lor!" said Noah reflectively; "how queer!"

"Have another?" said Charlotte. "Here 's one with such a beautiful, delicate beard!"

"I can't manage any more," said Noah. "I'm very sorry. Come here, Charlotte, and I'll kiss yer."

"What!" said Mr. Bumble, bursting into the room. "Say that again, sir."

Charlotte uttered a scream, and hid her face in her apron; while Mr. Claypole, without making any further change in his position than suffering his legs to reach the ground, gazed at the beadle in drunken terror.

"Say it again, you vile, owdacious fellow!" said Mr. Bumble. "How dare you mention such a thing, sir? and how dare you encourage him, you insolent minx? Kiss her!" exclaimed Mr. Bumble in strong indignation. "Faugh!"

"I didn't mean to do it!" said Noah, blubbering. "She 's always a-kissing of me, whether I like it or not."

"Oh, Noah!" cried Charlotte reproachfully.

"Yer are, yer know yer are!" retorted Noah. "She 's always a-doing of it, Mr. Bumble, sir; she chucks me under the chin, please sir, and makes all manner of love!"

"Silence!" cried Mr. Bumble sternly. "Take yourself down stairs, ma'am! Noah, you shut up the shop, and say

another word till your master comes home at your peril; and, when he does come home, tell him that Mr. Bumble said he was to send a old woman's shell after breakfast to-morrow morning. Do you hear, sir? Kissing!" cried Mr. Bumble, holding up his hands. "The sin and wickedness of the lower orders in this parochial district is frightful; if parliament don't take their abominable courses under consideration, this country's ruined, and the character of the peasantry gone for ever!" With these words the beadle strode, with a lofty and gloomy air, from the undertaker's premises.

And now that we have accompanied him so far on his road home, and have made all necessary preparations for the old woman's funeral, let us set on foot a few inquiries after young Oliver Twist, and ascertain whether he be still lying in the ditch where Toby Crackit left him.

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### THE POPPY.

FROM UHLAND.

SEE where, soft cradled by the western winds,  
 'Mong its bright mates, the blooming poppy gleams!  
 The slumb'rous flower, whose garland fitly binds  
 The drowsy temples of the God of Dreams:  
 Now vermeil-tinctured, as it had been dipped  
 Amid the glow of day's departing red;  
 Now wan and pallid, as it had been tipped  
 With colours from the sickly moonbeams shed.

They told me, with the voice of warning care,  
 Whoe'er beneath the poppy sank to sleep  
 Was borne away to a dim region, where  
 Was nought save dreams—dull, passionless, and deep:—  
 Nor did the spell with waking hours depart;  
 Its chains still hung upon the soul, and all  
 That had been nearest, dearest to the heart,  
 Seemed shrouded in a visionary pall.

In my life's morn, unheeding of the hours,  
 Once lay I, musing many an idle tale,  
 Nestling unseen amid fair clustering flowers,  
 Far down within a solitary vale.  
 Oh! 'twas a time with joy and sweetness rife!  
 And, while I scarcely of the change did deem,  
 A picture seemed the moving world of life,  
 All real things were only as a dream.

E'er since that hour, within my bosom furled,  
 Has lain the golden vision then I knew:—  
 My picture—it has been my living world,  
 My dream alone been firmly based and true.  
 The shapes, that rise and float around me now,  
 Bright as the stars—the eternal stars—are they!  
 Oh, poppy! flower of poesy! do thou  
 Among my locks entwine and bloom for aye!

E. N.