

OLIVER TWIST;

OR, THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS.

BY BOZ.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH.

COMPRISING FURTHER PARTICULARS OF OLIVER'S STAY AT MR. BROWNLOW'S, WITH THE REMARKABLE PREDICTION WHICH ONE MR. GRIMWIG UTTERED CONCERNING HIM, WHEN HE WENT OUT ON AN ERRAND.

OLIVER SOON recovered from the fainting-fit into which Mr. Brownlow's abrupt exclamation had thrown him; and the subject of the picture was carefully avoided, both by the old gentleman and Mrs. Bedwin, in the conversation that ensued, which indeed bore no reference to Oliver's history or prospects, but was confined to such topics as might amuse without exciting him. He was still too weak to get up to breakfast; but, when he came down into the housekeeper's room next day, his first act was to cast an eager glance at the wall, in the hope of again looking on the face of the beautiful lady. His expectations were disappointed, however, for the picture had been removed.

"Ah!" said the housekeeper, watching the direction of Oliver's eyes. "It is gone, you see."

"I see it is, ma'am," replied Oliver, with a sigh. "Why have they taken it away?"

"It has been taken down, child, because Mr. Brownlow said, that, as it seemed to worry you, perhaps it might prevent your getting well, you know," rejoined the old lady.

"Oh, no, indeed it didn't worry me, ma'am," said Oliver. "I liked to see it; I quite loved it."

"Well, well!" said the old lady, good-humouredly; "you get well as fast as ever you can, dear, and it shall be hung up again. There, I promise you that; now let us talk about something else."

This was all the information Oliver could obtain about the picture at that time, and as the old lady had been so kind to him in his illness, he endeavoured to think no more of the subject just then; so listened attentively to a great many stories she told him about an amiable and handsome daughter of hers, who was married to an amiable and handsome man, and lived in the country; and a son, who was clerk to a merchant in the West Indies, and who was also such a good young man, and wrote such dutiful letters home four times a year, that it brought the tears into her eyes to talk about them. When the old lady had expatiated a long time on the excellences of her children, and the merits of her kind good husband besides, who had been dead and gone, poor dear soul! just six-and-twenty years, it was time to have tea; and after tea she began to teach Oliver cribbage, which he learnt as quickly as she could teach, and at which game they played, with great interest and gravity, until it was

time for the invalid to have some warm wine and water, with a slice of dry toast, and to go cosily to bed.

They were happy days those of Oliver's recovery. Everything was so quiet, and neat, and orderly, everybody so kind and gentle, that after the noise and turbulence in the midst of which he had always lived, it seemed like heaven itself. He was no sooner strong enough to put his clothes on properly, than Mr. Brownlow caused a complete new suit, and a new cap, and a new pair of shoes, to be provided for him. As Oliver was told that he might do what he liked with the old clothes, he gave them to a servant who had been very kind to him, and asked her to sell them to a Jew, and keep the money for herself. This she very readily did; and, as Oliver looked out of the parlour window, and saw the Jew roll them up in his bag and walk away, he felt quite delighted to think that they were safely gone, and that there was now no possible danger of his ever being able to wear them again. They were sad rags, to tell the truth; and Oliver had never had a new suit before.

One evening, about a week after the affair of the picture, as Oliver was sitting talking to Mrs. Bedwin, there came a message down from Mr. Brownlow, that if Oliver Twist felt pretty well, he should like to see him in his study, and talk to him a little while.

"Bless us, and save us! wash your hands, and let me part your hair nicely for you, child," said Mrs. Bedwin. "Dear heart alive! if we had known he would have asked for you, we would have put you a clean collar on, and made you as smart as sixpence."

Oliver did as the old lady bade him, and, although she lamented grievously meanwhile that there was not even time to crimp the little frill that bordered his shirt-collar, he looked so delicate and handsome, despite that important personal advantage, that she went so far as to say, looking at him with great complacency from head to foot, that she really didn't think it would have been possible on the longest notice to have made much difference in him for the better.

Thus encouraged, Oliver tapped at the study door, and, on Mr. Brownlow calling to him to come in, found himself in a little back room, quite full of books, with a window looking into some pleasant little gardens. There was a table drawn up before the window, at which Mr. Brownlow was seated reading. When he saw Oliver, he pushed the book away from him, and told him to come near the table and sit down. Oliver complied, marvelling where the people could be found to read such a great number of books as seemed to be written to make the world wiser,—which is still a marvel to more experienced people than Oliver Twist every day of their lives.

"There are a good many books, are there not, my boy?" said Mr. Brownlow, observing the curiosity with which Oliver surveyed the shelves that reached from the floor to the ceiling.

"A great number, sir," replied Oliver; "I never saw so many."

"You shall read them if you behave well," said the old gentleman kindly; "and you will like that, better than looking at the outsides,—that is, in some cases, because there *are* books of which the backs and covers are by far the best parts."

"I suppose they are those heavy ones, sir," said Oliver, pointing to some large quartos with a good deal of gilding about the binding.

"Not those," said the old gentleman, patting Oliver on the head, and smiling as he did so; "but other equally heavy ones, though of a much smaller size. How should you like to grow up a clever man, and write books, eh?"

"I think I would rather read them, sir," replied Oliver.

"What! wouldn't you like to be a book-writer?" said the old gentleman.

Oliver considered a little while, and at last said he should think it would be a much better thing to be a bookseller; upon which the old gentleman laughed heartily, and declared he had said a very good thing, which Oliver felt glad to have done, though he by no means knew what it was.

"Well, well," said the old gentleman, composing his features, "don't be afraid; we won't make an author of you, while there's an honest trade to be learnt, or brick-making to turn to."

"Thank you, sir," said Oliver; and at the earnest manner of his reply the old gentleman laughed again, and said something about a curious instinct, which Oliver, not understanding, paid no very great attention to.

"Now," said Mr. Brownlow, speaking if possible in a kinder, but at the same time in a much more serious manner than Oliver had ever heard him speak in yet, "I want you to pay great attention, my boy, to what I am going to say. I shall talk to you without any reserve, because I am sure you are as well able to understand me as many older persons would be."

"Oh, don't tell me you are going to send me away, sir, pray!" exclaimed Oliver, alarmed by the serious tone of the old gentleman's commencement; "don't turn me out of doors to wander in the streets again. Let me stay here and be a servant. Don't send me back to the wretched place I came from. Have mercy upon a poor boy, sir; do!"

"My dear child," said the old gentleman, moved by the warmth of Oliver's sudden appeal, "you need not be afraid of my deserting you, unless you give me cause."

"I never, never will, sir," interposed Oliver.

"I hope not," rejoined the old gentleman; "I do not think you ever will. I have been deceived before, in the objects whom I have endeavoured to benefit; but I feel strongly disposed to trust you; nevertheless, and more strongly interested in your behalf than I can well account for, even to myself. The persons on whom I have bestowed my dearest love lie deep in their graves; but, although the happiness and delight of my life lie

buried there too, I have not made a coffin of my heart, and sealed it up for ever on my best affections. Deep affliction has only made them stronger; it ought, I think, for it should refine our nature."

As the old gentleman said this in a low voice, more to himself than to his companion, and remained silent for a short time afterwards, Oliver sat quite still, almost afraid to breathe.

"Well, well," said the old gentleman at length in a more cheerful voice, "I only say this, because you have a young heart; and knowing that I have suffered great pain and sorrow, you will be more careful, perhaps, not to wound me again. You say you are an orphan, without a friend in the world; and all the inquiries I have been able to make confirm the statement. Let me hear your story; where you came from, who brought you up, and how you got into the company in which I found you. Speak the truth; and if I find you have committed no crime, you will never be friendless while I live."

Oliver's sobs quite checked his utterance for some minutes; and just when he was on the point of beginning to relate how he had been brought up at the farm, and carried to the work-house by Mr. Bumble, a peculiarly impatient little double-knock was heard at the street-door, and the servant, running up stairs, announced Mr. Grimwig.

"Is he coming up?" inquired Mr. Brownlow.

"Yes, sir," replied the servant. "He asked if there were any muffins in the house, and, when I told him yes, he said he had come to tea."

Mr. Brownlow smiled, and, turning to Oliver, said Mr. Grimwig was an old friend of his, and he must not mind his being a little rough in his manners, for he was a worthy creature at bottom, as he had reason to know.

"Shall I go down stairs, sir?" inquired Oliver.

"No," replied Mr. Brownlow; "I would rather you stopped here."

At this moment there walked into the room, supporting himself by a thick stick, a stout old gentleman, rather lame in one leg, who was dressed in a blue coat, striped waistcoat, nankeen breeches and gaiters, and a broad-brimmed white hat, with the sides turned up with green. A very small-plaited shirt-frill stuck out from his waistcoat, and a very long steel watch-chain, with nothing but a key at the end, dangled loosely below it. The ends of his white neckerchief were twisted into a ball about the size of an orange;—the variety of shapes into which his countenance was twisted defy description. He had a manner of screwing his head round on one side when he spoke, and looking out of the corners of his eyes at the same time, which irresistibly reminded the beholder of a parrot. In this attitude he fixed himself the moment he made his appearance; and, holding out a small piece of orange-peel at arm's length, exclaimed in a growling, discontented voice,

“Look here! do you see this? Isn't it a most wonderful and extraordinary thing that I can't call at a man's house but I find a piece of this cursed poor-surgeon's-friend on the staircase? I've been lamed with orange-peel once, and I know orange-peel will be my death at last. It will, sir; orange-peel will be my death, or I'll be content to eat my own head, sir!” This was the handsome offer with which Mr. Grimwig backed and confirmed nearly every assertion he made; and it was the more singular in his case, because, even admitting, for the sake of argument, the possibility of scientific improvements being ever brought to that pass which will enable a gentleman to eat his own head in the event of his being so disposed, Mr. Grimwig's head was such a particularly large one, that the most sanguine man alive could hardly entertain a hope of being able to get through it at a sitting, to put entirely out of the question a very thick coating of powder.

“I'll eat my head, sir,” repeated Mr. Grimwig, striking his stick upon the ground. “Hallo! what's that?” he added, looking at Oliver, and retreating a pace or two.

“This is young Oliver Twist, whom we were speaking about,” said Mr. Brownlow.

Oliver bowed.

“You don't mean to say that's the boy that had the fever, I hope?” said Mr. Grimwig, recoiling a little further. “Wait a minute, don't speak: stop—” continued Mr. Grimwig abruptly, losing all dread of the fever in his triumph at the discovery; “that's the boy that had the orange! If that's not the boy, sir, that had the orange, and threw this bit of peel upon the staircase, I'll eat my head and his too.”

“No, no, he has not had one,” said Mr. Brownlow, laughing. “Come, put down your hat, and speak to my young friend.”

“I feel strongly on this subject, sir,” said the irritable old gentleman, drawing off his gloves. “There's always more or less orange-peel on the pavement in our street, and I *know* it's put there by the surgeon's boy at the corner. A young woman stumbled over a bit last night, and fell against my garden-railings; directly she got up I saw her look towards his infernal lamp with the pantomime-light. ‘Don't go to him,’ I called out of the window, ‘he's an assassin,—a man-trap!’ So he is. If he is not—” Here the irascible old gentleman gave a great knock on the ground with his stick, which was always understood by his friends to imply the customary offer whenever it was not expressed in words. Then, still keeping his stick in his hand, he sat down, and, opening a double eye-glass which he wore attached to a broad black riband, took a view of Oliver, who, seeing that he was the object of inspection, coloured, and bowed again.

“That's the boy, is it?” said Mr. Grimwig, at length.

“That is the boy,” replied Mr. Brownlow, nodding good-humouredly to Oliver.

"How are you, boy?" said Mr. Grimwig.

"A great deal better, thank you, sir," replied Oliver.

Mr. Brownlow, seeming to apprehend that his singular friend was about to say something disagreeable, asked Oliver to step down stairs, and tell Mrs. Bedwin they were ready for tea, which, as he did not half like the visitor's manner, he was very happy to do.

"He is a nice-looking boy, is he not?" inquired Mr. Brownlow.

"I don't know," replied Grimwig, pettishly.

"Don't know?"

"No, I don't know. I never see any difference in boys. I only know two sorts of boys,—mealy boys, and beef-faced boys."

"And which is Oliver?"

"Mealy. I know a friend who's got a beef-faced boy; a fine boy they call him, with a round head, and red cheeks, and glaring eyes; a horrid boy, with a body and limbs that appear to be swelling out of the seams of his blue clothes—with the voice of a pilot, and the appetite of a wolf. I know him, the wretch!"

"Come," said Mr. Brownlow, "these are not the characteristics of young Oliver Twist; so he needn't excite your wrath."

"They are not," replied Grimwig. "He may have worse."

Here Mr. Brownlow coughed impatiently, which appeared to afford Mr. Grimwig the most exquisite delight.

"He may have worse, I say," repeated Mr. Grimwig. "Where does he come from? Who is he? What is he? He has had a fever—what of that? Fevers are not peculiar to good people, are they? Bad people have fevers sometimes, haven't they, eh? I knew a man that was hung in Jamaica for murdering his master; he had had a fever six times; he wasn't recommended to mercy on that account. Pooh! nonsense!"

Now, the fact was, that, in the inmost recesses of his own heart, Mr. Grimwig was strongly disposed to admit that Oliver's appearance and manner were unusually prepossessing, but he had a strong appetite for contradiction, sharpened on this occasion by the finding of the orange-peel; and inwardly determining that no man should dictate to him whether a boy was well-looking or not, he had resolved from the first to oppose his friend. When Mr. Brownlow admitted that on no one point of inquiry could he yet return any satisfactory answer, and that he had postponed any investigation into Oliver's previous history until he thought the boy was strong enough to bear it, Mr. Grimwig chuckled maliciously, and demanded, with a sneer, whether the housekeeper was in the habit of counting the plate at night; because, if she didn't find a table-spoon or two missing some sunshiny morning, why, he would be content to —, et cetera.

All this Mr. Brownlow, although himself somewhat of an impetuous gentleman, knowing his friend's peculiarities, bore with great good humour; and as Mr. Grimwig, at tea, was gracious-

ly pleased to express his entire approval of the muffins, matters went on very smoothly, and Oliver, who made one of the party, began to feel more at his ease than he had yet done in the fierce old gentleman's presence.

"And when are you going to hear a full, true, and particular account of the life and adventures of Oliver Twist?" asked Grimwig of Mr. Brownlow, at the conclusion of the meal: looking sideways at Oliver as he resumed the subject.

"To-morrow morning," replied Mr. Brownlow. "I would rather he was alone with me at the time. Come up to me to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, my dear."

"Yes, sir," replied Oliver. He answered with some hesitation, because he was confused by Mr. Grimwig's looking so hard at him.

"I'll tell you what," whispered that gentleman to Mr. Brownlow; "he won't come up to you to-morrow morning. I saw him hesitate. He is deceiving you, my dear friend."

"I'll swear he is not," replied Mr. Brownlow, warmly.

"If he is not," said Mr. Grimwig, "I'll ——" and down went the stick.

"I'll answer for that boy's truth with my life," said Mr. Brownlow, knocking the table.

"And I for his falsehood with my head," rejoined Mr. Grimwig, knocking the table also.

"We shall see," said Mr. Brownlow, checking his rising passion.

"We will," replied Mr. Grimwig, with a provoking smile; "we will."

As fate would have it, Mrs. Bedwin chanced to bring in at this moment a small parcel of books which Mr. Brownlow had that morning purchased of the identical bookstall-keeper who has already figured in this history; which having laid on the table, she prepared to leave the room.

"Stop the boy, Mrs. Bedwin," said Mr. Brownlow; "there is something to go back."

"He has gone, sir," replied Mrs. Bedwin.

"Call after him," said Mr. Brownlow; it's particular. He's a poor man, and they are not paid for. There are some books to be taken back, too."

The street-door was opened. Oliver ran one way, and the girl another, and Mrs. Bedwin stood on the step and screamed for the boy; but there was no boy in sight, and both Oliver and the girl returned in a breathless state to report that there were no tidings of him.

"Dear me, I am very sorry for that," exclaimed Mr. Brownlow;

"I particularly wished those books to be returned to-night."

"Send Oliver with them," said Mr. Grimwig, with an ironical smile; "he will be sure to deliver them safely, you know."

"Yes; do let me take them, if you please, sir," said Oliver;

"I'll run all the way, sir."

The old gentleman was just going to say that Oliver should not go out on any account, when a most malicious cough from Mr. Grimwig determined him that he should, and by his prompt discharge of the commission prove to him the injustice of his suspicions, on this head at least, at once.

"You *shall* go, my dear," said the old gentleman. "The books are on a chair by my table. Fetch them down."

Oliver, delighted to be of use, brought down the books under his arm in a great bustle, and waited, cap in hand, to hear what message he was to take.

"You are to say," said Mr. Brownlow, glancing steadily at Grimwig,—“you are to say that you have brought those books back, and that you have come to pay the four pound ten I owe him. This is a five-pound note, so you will have to bring me back ten shillings change.”

"I won't be ten minutes, sir," replied Oliver, eagerly; and, having buttoned up the bank-note in his jacket pocket, and placed the books carefully under his arm, he made a respectful bow, and left the room. Mrs. Bedwin followed him to the street-door, giving him many directions about the nearest way, and the name of the bookseller, and the name of the street, all of which Oliver said he clearly understood; and, having super-added many injunctions to be sure and not take cold, the careful old lady at length permitted him to depart.

"Bless his sweet face!" said the old lady, looking after him. "I can't bear, somehow, to let him go out of my sight."

At this moment Oliver looked gaily round, and nodded before he turned the corner. The old lady smilingly returned his salutation, and, closing the door, went back to her own room.

"Let me see; he'll be back in twenty minutes, at the longest," said Mr. Brownlow, pulling out his watch, and placing it on the table. "It will be dark by that time."

"Oh! you really expect him to come back, do you?" inquired Mr. Grimwig.

"Don't you?" asked Mr. Brownlow, smiling.

The spirit of contradiction was strong in Mr. Grimwig's breast at the moment, and it was rendered stronger by his friend's confident smile.

"No," he said, smiting the table with his fist, "I do not. The boy has got a new suit of clothes on his back, a set of valuable books under his arm, and a five-pound note in his pocket; he'll join his old friends the thieves, and laugh at you. If ever that boy returns to this house, sir, I'll eat my head."

With these words he drew his chair closer to the table, and there the two friends sat in silent expectation, with the watch between them. It is worthy of remark, as illustrating the importance we attach to our own judgments, and the pride with which we put forth our most rash and hasty conclusions, that, although Mr. Grimwig was not a bad-hearted man, and would have been unfeignedly sorry to see his respected friend duped

and deceived, he really did most earnestly and strongly hope at that moment that Oliver Twist might not come back. Of such contradictions is human nature made up!

It grew so dark that the figures on the dial were scarcely discernible; but there the two old gentlemen continued to sit in silence, with the watch between them.

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH.

SHEWING HOW VERY FOND OF OLIVER TWIST, THE MERRY OLD JEW AND MISS NANCY WERE.

If it did not come strictly within the scope and bearing of my long-considered intentions and plans regarding this prose epic (for such I mean it to be,) to leave the two old gentlemen sitting with the watch between them long after it grew too dark to see it, and both doubting Oliver's return, the one in triumph, and the other in sorrow, I might take occasion to entertain the reader with many wise reflections on the obvious impolicy of ever attempting to do good to our fellow-creatures where there is no hope of earthly reward; or rather on the strict policy of betraying some slight degree of charity or sympathy in one particularly unpromising case, and then abandoning such weaknesses for ever. I am aware that, in advising even this slight dereliction from the paths of prudence and worldliness, I lay myself open to the censure of many excellent and respectable persons, who have long walked therein; but I venture to contend, nevertheless, that the advantages of the proceeding are manifold and lasting. As thus: if the object selected should happen most unexpectedly to turn out well, and to thrive and amend upon the assistance you have afforded him, he will, in pure gratitude and fulness of heart, laud your goodness to the skies; your character will be thus established, and you will pass through the world as a most estimable person, who does a vast deal of good in secret, not one-twentieth part of which will ever see the light. If, on the contrary, his bad character become notorious, and his profligacy a by-word, you place yourself in the excellent position of having attempted to bestow relief most disinterestedly; of having become misanthropical in consequence of the treachery of its object; and of having made a rash and solemn vow, (which no one regrets more than yourself,) never to help or relieve any man, woman, or child again, lest you should be similarly deceived. I know a great number of persons in both situations at this moment, and I can safely assert that they are the most generally respected and esteemed of any in the whole circle of my acquaintance.

But, as Mr. Brownlow was not one of these; as he obstinately persevered in doing good for its own sake, and the gratification of heart it yielded him; as no failure dispirited him, and no ingratitude in individual cases tempted him to wreak his vengeance on the whole human race, I shall not enter into any such digression in this place: and, if this be not a sufficient reason for

this determination, I have a better, and, indeed, a wholly unanswerable one, already stated; which is, that it forms no part of my original intention so to do.

In the obscure parlour of a low public-house, situate in the filthiest part of Little Saffron-Hill,—a dark and gloomy den, where a flaring gas-light burnt all day in the winter-time, and where no ray of sun ever shone in the summer,—there sat, brooding over a little pewter measure and a small glass, strongly impregnated with the smell of liquor, a man in a velveteen coat, drab shorts, half-boots, and stockings, whom, even by that dim light, no experienced agent of police would have hesitated for one instant to recognise as Mr. William Sikes. At his feet sat a white-coated, red-eyed dog, who occupied himself alternately in winking at his master with both eyes at the same time, and in licking a large, fresh cut on one side of his mouth, which appeared to be the result of some recent conflict.

“Keep quiet, you warmint! keep quiet!” said Mr. Sikes, suddenly breaking silence. Whether his meditations were so intense as to be disturbed by the dog’s winking, or whether his feelings were so wrought upon by his reflections that they required all the relief derivable from kicking an unoffending animal to allay them, is matter for argument and consideration. Whatever was the cause, the effect was a kick and a curse bestowed upon the dog simultaneously.

Dogs are not generally apt to revenge injuries inflicted upon them by their masters; but Mr. Sikes’s dog, having faults of temper in common with his owner, and labouring perhaps, at this moment, under a powerful sense of injury, made no more ado but at once fixed his teeth in one of the half-boots, and, having given it a good hearty shake, retired, growling, under a form: thereby just escaping the pewter measure which Mr. Sikes levelled at his head.

“You would, would you?” said Sikes, seizing the poker in one hand, and deliberately opening with the other a large clasp-knife, which he drew from his pocket. “Come here, you born devil! Come here! D’ye hear?”

The dog no doubt heard, because Mr. Sikes spoke in the very harshest key of a very harsh voice; but, appearing to entertain some unaccountable objection to having his throat cut, he remained where he was, and growled more fiercely than before, at the same time grasping the end of the poker between his teeth, and biting at it like a wild beast.

This resistance only infuriated Mr. Sikes the more; so, dropping upon his knees, he began to assail the animal most furiously. The dog jumped from right to left, and from left to right, snapping, growling, and barking; the man thrust and swore, and struck and blasphemed; and the struggle was reaching a most critical point for one or other, when, the door suddenly opening, the dog darted out, leaving Bill Sikes with the poker and the clasp-knife in his hands.

There must always be two parties to a quarrel, says the old adage; and Mr. Sikes, being disappointed of the dog's presence, at once transferred the quarrel to the new-comer.

"What the devil do you come in between me and my dog for?" said Sikes with a fierce gesture.

"I didn't know, my dear, I didn't know," replied Fagin humbly—for the Jew was the new-comer.

"Didn't know, you white-livered thief!" growled Sikes. "Couldn't you hear the noise?"

"Not a sound of it, as I'm a living man, Bill," replied the Jew.

"Oh no, you hear nothing, you don't," retorted Sikes with a fierce sneer, "sneaking in and out, so as nobody hears how you come or go. I wish you had been the dog, Fagin, half a minute ago."

"Why?" inquired the Jew with a forced smile.

"'Cause the government, as cares for the lives of such men as you, as haven't half the pluck of curs, lets a man kill his dog how he likes," replied Sikes, shutting the knife up with a very expressive look; "that's why."

The Jew rubbed his hands, and, sitting down at the table, affected to laugh at the pleasantry of his friend,—obviously very ill at his ease, however.

"Grin away," said Sikes, replacing the poker, and surveying him with savage contempt; "grin away. You'll never have the laugh at me, though, unless it's behind a nightcap. I've got the upper hand over you, Fagin; and, d— me, I'll keep it. There. If I go, you go; so take care of me."

"Well, well, my dear," said the Jew, "I know all that; we—we—have a mutual interest, Bill,—a mutual interest."

"Humph!" said Sikes, as if he thought the interest lay rather more on the Jew's side than on his. "Well, what have you got to say to me?"

"It's all passed safe through the melting-pot," replied Fagin, "and this is your share. It's rather more than it ought to be, my dear; but as I know you'll do me a good turn another time, and—"

"Stow that gammon," interposed the robber impatiently. "Where is it? Hand over!"

"Yes, yes, Bill; give me time, give me time," replied the Jew soothingly. "Here it is—all safe." As he spoke, he drew forth an old cotton handkerchief from his breast, and, untying a large knot in one corner, produced a small brown-paper packet, which Sikes snatching from him, hastily opened, and proceeded to count the sovereigns it contained.

"This is all, is it?" inquired Sikes.

"All," replied the Jew.

"You haven't opened the parcel and swallowed one or two as you come along, have you?" inquired Sikes suspiciously.

“Don't put on a injured look at the question; you've done it many a time. Jerk the tinkler.”

These words, in plain English, conveyed an injunction to ring the bell. It was answered by another Jew, younger than Fagin, but nearly as vile and repulsive in appearance.

Bill Sikes merely pointed to the empty measure, and the Jew, perfectly understanding the hint, retired to fill it, previously exchanging a remarkable look with Fagin, who raised his eyes for an instant as if in expectation of it, and shook his head in reply so slightly that the action would have been almost imperceptible to a third person. It was lost upon Sikes, who was stooping at the moment to tie the boot-lace which the dog had torn. Possibly if he had observed the brief interchange of signals, he might have thought that it boded no good to him.

“Is anybody here, Barney?” inquired Fagin, speaking—now that Sikes was looking on—without raising his eyes from the ground.

“Dot a shoul,” replied Barney, whose words, whether they came from the heart or not, made their way through the nose.

“Nobody?” inquired Fagin in a tone of surprise, which perhaps might mean that Barney was at liberty to tell the truth.

“Dobody but Biss Dadsy,” replied Barney.

“Miss Nancy!” exclaimed Sikes. “Where? Strike me blind, if I don't honor that 'ere girl for her native talents.”

“She's bid havid a plate of boiled beef id the bar,” replied Barney.

“Send her here,” said Sikes, pouring out a glass of liquor; “send her here.”

Barney looked timidly at Fagin, as if for permission; the Jew remaining silent, and not lifting his eyes from the ground, he retired, and presently returned ushering in Miss Nancy, who was decorated with the bonnet, apron, basket, and street-door key complete.

“You are on the scent, are you, Nancy?” inquired Sikes, proffering the glass.

“Yes, I am, Bill,” replied the young lady, disposing of its contents; “and tired enough of it I am, too. The young brat's been ill and confined to the crib; and——”

“Ah, Nancy, dear!” said Fagin, looking up.

Now, whether a peculiar contraction of the Jew's red eyebrows, and a half-closing of his deeply-set eyes, warned Miss Nancy that she was disposed to be too communicative, is not a matter of much importance. The fact is all we need care for here; and the fact is, that she suddenly checked herself, and, with several gracious smiles upon Mr. Sikes, turned the conversation to other matters. In about ten minutes' time, Mr. Fagin was seized with a fit of coughing, upon which Miss Nancy pulled her shawl over her shoulders, and declared it was time to go. Mr. Sikes, finding that he was walking a short part of her way himself, expressed his intention of accompanying her: and

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George Cruikshank

Oliver claimed by his affectionate friends.

they went away together, followed at a little distance by the dog, who slunk out of a back-yard as soon as his master was out of sight.

The Jew thrust his head out of the room door when Sikes had left it, looked after him as he walked up the dark passage, shook his clenched fist, muttered a deep curse, and then with a horrible grin reseated himself at the table, where he was soon deeply absorbed in the interesting pages of the *Hue and Cry*.

Meanwhile Oliver Twist, little dreaming that he was within so very short a distance of the merry old gentleman, was on his way to the bookstall. When he got into Clerkenwell he accidentally turned down a by-street which was not exactly in his way; but not discovering his mistake till he had got halfway down it, and knowing it must lead in the right direction, he did not think it worth while to turn back, and so marched on as quickly as he could, with the books under his arm.

He was walking along, thinking how happy and contented he ought to feel, and how much he would give for only one look at poor little Dick, who, starved and beaten, might be lying dead at that very moment, when he was startled by a young woman screaming out very loud, "Oh, my dear brother!" and he had hardly looked up to see what the matter was, when he was stopped by having a pair of arms thrown tight round his neck.

"Don't!" cried Oliver struggling. "Let go of me. Who is it? What are you stopping me for?"

The only reply to this, was a great number of loud lamentations from the young woman who had embraced him, and who had got a little basket and a street-door key in her hand.

"Oh my gracious!" said the young woman, "I've found him! Oh, Oliver! Oliver! Oh, you naughty boy, to make me suffer such distress on your account! Come home, dear, come. Oh, I've found him. Thank gracious goodness heavins, I've found him!" With these incoherent exclamations the young woman burst into another fit of crying, and got so dreadfully hysterical, that a couple of women who came up at the moment asked a butcher's boy, with a shiny head of hair anointed with suet, who was also looking on, whether he didn't think he had better run for the doctor. To which the butcher's boy, who appeared of a lounging, not to say indolent disposition, replied that he thought not.

"Oh, no, no, never mind," said the young woman, grasping Oliver's hand; "I'm better now. Come home directly, you cruel boy, come."

"What's the matter, ma'am?" inquired one of the women.

"Oh, ma'am," replied the young woman, "he ran away near a month ago from his parents, who are hard-working and respectable people, and joined a set of thieves and bad characters, and almost broke his mother's heart."

"Young wretch!" said one woman.

"Go home, do, you little brute," said the other.

"I'm not," replied Oliver, greatly alarmed. "I don't know her. I haven't got any sister, or father and mother either. I'm an orphan; I live at Pentonville."

"Oh, only hear him, how he braves it out!" cried the young woman.

"Why, it's Nancy!" exclaimed Oliver, who now saw her face for the first time, and started back in irrepressible astonishment.

"You see he knows me," cried Nancy, appealing to the bystanders. "He can't help himself. Make him come home, there's good people, or he'll kill his dear mother and father, and break my heart!"

"What the devil's this?" said a man, bursting out of a beer-shop, with a white dog at his heels; "young Oliver! Come home to your poor mother, you young dog! come home directly."

"I don't belong to them. I don't know them. Help! help!" cried Oliver, struggling in the man's powerful grasp.

"Help!" repeated the man. "Yes; I'll help you, you young rascal! What books are these? You've been a stealing 'em, have you? Give 'em here!" With these words the man tore the volumes from his grasp, and struck him violently on the head.

"That's right!" cried a looker-on, from a garret window.

"That's the only way of bringing him to his senses!"

"To be sure," cried a sleepy-faced carpenter, casting an approving look at the garret-window.

"It'll do him good!" said the two women.

"And he shall have it, too!" rejoined the man, administering another blow, and seizing Oliver by the collar. "Come on, you young villain! Here, Bull's-eye, mind him, boy! mind him!"

Weak with recent illness, stupified by the blows and the suddenness of the attack, terrified by the fierce growling of the dog and the brutality of the man, and overpowered by the conviction of the bystanders that he was really the hardened little wretch he was described to be, what could one poor child do? Darkness had set in; it was a low neighbourhood; no help was near; resistance was useless. In another moment he was dragged into a labyrinth of dark, narrow courts, and forced along them at a pace which rendered the few cries he dared to give utterance to, wholly unintelligible. It was of little moment, indeed, whether they were intelligible or not, for there was nobody to care for them had they been ever so plain.

* * * * *

The gas-lamps were lighted; Mrs. Bedwin was waiting anxiously at the open door; the servant had run up the street twenty times, to see if there were any traces of Oliver; and still the two old gentlemen sat perseveringly in the dark parlour, with the watch between them.