OLIVER TWIST or THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS

by Charles Dickens

CHAPTER I

TREATS OF THE PLACE WHERE OLIVER TWIST WAS BORN AND OF THE

CIRCUMSTANCES ATTENDING HIS BIRTH

Among other public buildings in a certain town, which for many

reasons it will be prudent to refrain from mentioning, and to

which I will assign no fictitious name, there is one anciently

common to most towns, great or small: to wit, a workhouse; and

in this workhouse was born; on a day and date which I need not

trouble myself to repeat, inasmuch as it can be of no possible

consequence to the reader, in this stage of the business at all

events; the item of mortality whose name is prefixed to the head

of this chapter.

For a long time after it was ushered into this world of sorrow

and trouble, by the parish surgeon, it remained a matter of

considerable doubt whether the child would survive to bear any

name at all; in which case it is somewhat more than probable that

these memoirs would never have appeared; or, if they had, that

being comprised within a couple of pages, they would have

possessed the inestimable merit of being the most concise and

faithful specimen of biography, extant in the literature of any

age or country.

Although I am not disposed to maintain that the being born in a

workhouse, is in itself the most fortunate and enviable

circumstance that can possibly befall a human being, I do mean to

say that in this particular instance, it was the best thing for

Oliver Twist that could by possibility have occurred. The fact

is, that there was considerable difficulty in inducing Oliver to

take upon himself the office of respiration,--a troublesome

practice, but one which custom has rendered necessary to our easy

existence; and for some time he lay gasping on a little flock

mattress, rather unequally poised between this world and the

next: the balance being decidedly in favour of the latter. Now,

if, during this brief period, Oliver had been surrounded by

careful grandmothers, anxious aunts, experienced nurses, and

doctors of profound wisdom, he would most inevitably and

indubitably have been killed in no time. There being nobody by,

however, but a pauper old woman, who was rendered rather misty by

an unwonted allowance of beer; and a parish surgeon who did such

matters by contract; Oliver and Nature fought out the point

between them. The result was, that, after a few struggles,

Oliver breathed, sneezed, and proceeded to advertise to the

inmates of the workhouse the fact of a new burden having been

imposed upon the parish, by setting up as loud a cry as could

reasonably have been expected from a male infant who had not been

possessed of that very useful appendage, a voice, for a much

longer space of time than three minutes and a quarter.

As Oliver gave this first proof of the free and proper action of

his lungs, the patchwork coverlet which was carelessly flung over

the iron bedstead, rustled; the pale face of a young woman was

raised feebly from the pillow; and a faint voice imperfectly

articulated the words, 'Let me see the child, and die.'

The surgeon had been sitting with his face turned towards the

fire: giving the palms of his hands a warm and a rub

alternately. As the young woman spoke, he rose, and advancing to

the bed's head, said, with more kindness than might have been

expected of him:

'Oh, you must not talk about dying yet.'

'Lor bless her dear heart, no!' interposed the nurse, hastily

depositing in her pocket a green glass bottle, the contents of

which she had been tasting in a corner with evident satisfaction.

'Lor bless her dear heart, when she has lived as long as I have,

sir, and had thirteen children of her own, and all on 'em dead

except two, and them in the wurkus with me, she'll know better

than to take on in that way, bless her dear heart! Think what it

is to be a mother, there's a dear young lamb do.'

Apparently this consolatory perspective of a mother's prospects

failed in producing its due effect. The patient shook her head,

and stretched out her hand towards the child.

The surgeon deposited it in her arms. She imprinted her cold

white lips passionately on its forehead; passed her hands over

her face; gazed wildly round; shuddered; fell back--and died.

They chafed her breast, hands, and temples; but the blood had

stopped forever. They talked of hope and comfort. They had been

strangers too long.

'It's all over, Mrs. Thingummy!' said the surgeon at last.

'Ah, poor dear, so it is!' said the nurse, picking up the cork of

the green bottle, which had fallen out on the pillow, as she

stooped to take up the child. 'Poor dear!'

'You needn't mind sending up to me, if the child cries, nurse,'

said the surgeon, putting on his gloves with great deliberation.

'It's very likely it \_will\_ be troublesome. Give it a little gruel

if it is.' He put on his hat, and, pausing by the bed-side on

his way to the door, added, 'She was a good-looking girl, too;

where did she come from?'

'She was brought here last night,' replied the old woman, 'by the

overseer's order. She was found lying in the street. She had

walked some distance, for her shoes were worn to pieces; but

where she came from, or where she was going to, nobody knows.'

The surgeon leaned over the body, and raised the left hand. 'The

old story,' he said, shaking his head: 'no wedding-ring, I see.

Ah! Good-night!'

The medical gentleman walked away to dinner; and the nurse,

having once more applied herself to the green bottle, sat down on

a low chair before the fire, and proceeded to dress the infant.

What an excellent example of the power of dress, young Oliver

Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his

only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a

beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to

have assigned him his proper station in society. But now that he

was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in

the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his

place at once--a parish child--the orphan of a workhouse--the

humble, half-starved drudge--to be cuffed and buffeted through

the world--despised by all, and pitied by none.

Oliver cried lustily. If he could have known that he was an

orphan, left to the tender mercies of church-wardens and

overseers, perhaps he would have cried the louder.

CHAPTER II

TREATS OF OLIVER TWIST'S GROWTH, EDUCATION, AND BOARD

For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a

systematic course of treachery and deception. He was brought up

by hand. The hungry and destitute situation of the infant orphan

was duly reported by the workhouse authorities to the parish

authorities. The parish authorities inquired with dignity of the

workhouse authorities, whether there was no female then domiciled

in 'the house' who was in a situation to impart to Oliver Twist,

the consolation and nourishment of which he stood in need. The

workhouse authorities replied with humility, that there was not.

Upon this, the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely

resolved, that Oliver should be 'farmed,' or, in other words,

that he should be dispatched to a branch-workhouse some three

miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders

against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without

the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under

the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received

the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny

per small head per week. Sevenpence-halfpenny's worth per week

is a good round diet for a child; a great deal may be got for

sevenpence-halfpenny, quite enough to overload its stomach, and

make it uncomfortable. The elderly female was a woman of wisdom

and experience; she knew what was good for children; and she had

a very accurate perception of what was good for herself. So, she

appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own

use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to even a

shorter allowance than was originally provided for them. Thereby

finding in the lowest depth a deeper still; and proving herself a

very great experimental philosopher.

Everybody knows the story of another experimental philosopher who

had a great theory about a horse being able to live without

eating, and who demonstrated it so well, that he had got his own

horse down to a straw a day, and would unquestionably have

rendered him a very spirited and rampacious animal on nothing at

all, if he had not died, four-and-twenty hours before he was to

have had his first comfortable bait of air. Unfortunately for,

the experimental philosophy of the female to whose protecting care

Oliver Twist was delivered over, a similar result usually

attended the operation of \_her\_ system; for at the very moment when

the child had contrived to exist upon the smallest possible

portion of the weakest possible food, it did perversely happen in

eight and a half cases out of ten, either that it sickened from

want and cold, or fell into the fire from neglect, or got

half-smothered by accident; in any one of which cases, the

miserable little being was usually summoned into another world,

and there gathered to the fathers it had never known in this.

Occasionally, when there was some more than usually interesting

inquest upon a parish child who had been overlooked in turning up

a bedstead, or inadvertently scalded to death when there happened

to be a washing--though the latter accident was very scarce,

anything approaching to a washing being of rare occurrence in the

farm--the jury would take it into their heads to ask troublesome

questions, or the parishioners would rebelliously affix their

signatures to a remonstrance. But these impertinences were

speedily checked by the evidence of the surgeon, and the

testimony of the beadle; the former of whom had always opened the

body and found nothing inside (which was very probable indeed),

and the latter of whom invariably swore whatever the parish

wanted; which was very self-devotional. Besides, the board made

periodical pilgrimages to the farm, and always sent the beadle

the day before, to say they were going. The children were neat

and clean to behold, when \_they\_ went; and what more would the

people have!

It cannot be expected that this system of farming would produce

any very extraordinary or luxuriant crop. Oliver Twist's ninth

birthday found him a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in

stature, and decidedly small in circumference. But nature or

inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's

breast. It had had plenty of room to expand, thanks to the spare

diet of the establishment; and perhaps to this circumstance may

be attributed his having any ninth birth-day at all. Be this as

it may, however, it was his ninth birthday; and he was keeping it

in the coal-cellar with a select party of two other young

gentleman, who, after participating with him in a sound

thrashing, had been locked up for atrociously presuming to be

hungry, when Mrs. Mann, the good lady of the house, was

unexpectedly startled by the apparition of Mr. Bumble, the

beadle, striving to undo the wicket of the garden-gate.

'Goodness gracious! Is that you, Mr. Bumble, sir?' said Mrs.

Mann, thrusting her head out of the window in well-affected

ecstasies of joy. '(Susan, take Oliver and them two brats

upstairs, and wash 'em directly.)--My heart alive! Mr. Bumble,

how glad I am to see you, sure-ly!'

Now, Mr. Bumble was a fat man, and a choleric; so, instead of

responding to this open-hearted salutation in a kindred spirit,

he gave the little wicket a tremendous shake, and then bestowed

upon it a kick which could have emanated from no leg but a

beadle's.

'Lor, only think,' said Mrs. Mann, running out,--for the three

boys had been removed by this time,--'only think of that! That I

should have forgotten that the gate was bolted on the inside, on

account of them dear children! Walk in sir; walk in, pray, Mr.

Bumble, do, sir.'

Although this invitation was accompanied with a curtsey that

might have softened the heart of a church-warden, it by no means

mollified the beadle.

'Do you think this respectful or proper conduct, Mrs. Mann,'

inquired Mr. Bumble, grasping his cane, 'to keep the parish

officers a waiting at your garden-gate, when they come here upon

porochial business with the porochial orphans? Are you aweer,

Mrs. Mann, that you are, as I may say, a porochial delegate, and

a stipendiary?'

'I'm sure Mr. Bumble, that I was only a telling one or two of the

dear children as is so fond of you, that it was you a coming,'

replied Mrs. Mann with great humility.

Mr. Bumble had a great idea of his oratorical powers and his

importance. He had displayed the one, and vindicated the other.

He relaxed.

'Well, well, Mrs. Mann,' he replied in a calmer tone; 'it may be

as you say; it may be. Lead the way in, Mrs. Mann, for I come on

business, and have something to say.'

Mrs. Mann ushered the beadle into a small parlour with a brick

floor; placed a seat for him; and officiously deposited his

cocked hat and cane on the table before him. Mr. Bumble wiped

from his forehead the perspiration which his walk had engendered,

glanced complacently at the cocked hat, and smiled. Yes, he

smiled. Beadles are but men: and Mr. Bumble smiled.

'Now don't you be offended at what I'm a going to say,' observed

Mrs. Mann, with captivating sweetness. 'You've had a long walk,

you know, or I wouldn't mention it. Now, will you take a little

drop of somethink, Mr. Bumble?'

'Not a drop. Nor a drop,' said Mr. Bumble, waving his right hand

in a dignified, but placid manner.

'I think you will,' said Mrs. Mann, who had noticed the tone of

the refusal, and the gesture that had accompanied it. 'Just a

leetle drop, with a little cold water, and a lump of sugar.'

Mr. Bumble coughed.

'Now, just a leetle drop,' said Mrs. Mann persuasively.

'What is it?' inquired the beadle.

'Why, it's what I'm obliged to keep a little of in the house, to

put into the blessed infants' Daffy, when they ain't well, Mr.

Bumble,' replied Mrs. Mann as she opened a corner cupboard, and

took down a bottle and glass. 'It's gin. I'll not deceive you,

Mr. B. It's gin.'

'Do you give the children Daffy, Mrs. Mann?' inquired Bumble,

following with his eyes the interesting process of mixing.

'Ah, bless 'em, that I do, dear as it is,' replied the nurse. 'I

couldn't see 'em suffer before my very eyes, you know sir.'

'No'; said Mr. Bumble approvingly; 'no, you could not. You are a

humane woman, Mrs. Mann.' (Here she set down the glass.) 'I

shall take a early opportunity of mentioning it to the board,

Mrs. Mann.' (He drew it towards him.) 'You feel as a mother,

Mrs. Mann.' (He stirred the gin-and-water.) 'I--I drink your

health with cheerfulness, Mrs. Mann'; and he swallowed half of

it.

'And now about business,' said the beadle, taking out a leathern

pocket-book. 'The child that was half-baptized Oliver Twist, is

nine year old to-day.'

'Bless him!' interposed Mrs. Mann, inflaming her left eye with

the corner of her apron.

'And notwithstanding a offered reward of ten pound, which was

afterwards increased to twenty pound. Notwithstanding the most

superlative, and, I may say, supernat'ral exertions on the part

of this parish,' said Bumble, 'we have never been able to

discover who is his father, or what was his mother's settlement,

name, or con--dition.'

Mrs. Mann raised her hands in astonishment; but added, after a

moment's reflection, 'How comes he to have any name at all,

then?'

The beadle drew himself up with great pride, and said, 'I

inwented it.'

'You, Mr. Bumble!'

'I, Mrs. Mann. We name our fondlings in alphabetical order. The

last was a S,--Swubble, I named him. This was a T,--Twist, I

named \_him\_. The next one comes will be Unwin, and the next

Vilkins. I have got names ready made to the end of the alphabet,

and all the way through it again, when we come to Z.'

'Why, you're quite a literary character, sir!' said Mrs. Mann.

'Well, well,' said the beadle, evidently gratified with the

compliment; 'perhaps I may be. Perhaps I may be, Mrs. Mann.' He

finished the gin-and-water, and added, 'Oliver being now too old

to remain here, the board have determined to have him back into

the house. I have come out myself to take him there. So let me

see him at once.'

'I'll fetch him directly,' said Mrs. Mann, leaving the room for

that purpose. Oliver, having had by this time as much of the

outer coat of dirt which encrusted his face and hands, removed,

as could be scrubbed off in one washing, was led into the room by

his benevolent protectress.

'Make a bow to the gentleman, Oliver,' said Mrs. Mann.

Oliver made a bow, which was divided between the beadle on the

chair, and the cocked hat on the table.

'Will you go along with me, Oliver?' said Mr. Bumble, in a

majestic voice.

Oliver was about to say that he would go along with anybody with

great readiness, when, glancing upward, he caught sight of Mrs.

Mann, who had got behind the beadle's chair, and was shaking her

fist at him with a furious countenance. He took the hint at

once, for the fist had been too often impressed upon his body not

to be deeply impressed upon his recollection.

'Will she go with me?' inquired poor Oliver.

'No, she can't,' replied Mr. Bumble. 'But she'll come and see

you sometimes.'

This was no very great consolation to the child. Young as he

was, however, he had sense enough to make a feint of feeling

great regret at going away. It was no very difficult matter for

the boy to call tears into his eyes. Hunger and recent ill-usage

are great assistants if you want to cry; and Oliver cried very

naturally indeed. Mrs. Mann gave him a thousand embraces, and

what Oliver wanted a great deal more, a piece of bread and

butter, less he should seem too hungry when he got to the

workhouse. With the slice of bread in his hand, and the little

brown-cloth parish cap on his head, Oliver was then led away by

Mr. Bumble from the wretched home where one kind word or look had

never lighted the gloom of his infant years. And yet he burst

into an agony of childish grief, as the cottage-gate closed after

him. Wretched as were the little companions in misery he was

leaving behind, they were the only friends he had ever known; and

a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world, sank into the

child's heart for the first time.

Mr. Bumble walked on with long strides; little Oliver, firmly

grasping his gold-laced cuff, trotted beside him, inquiring at

the end of every quarter of a mile whether they were 'nearly

there.' To these interrogations Mr. Bumble returned very brief

and snappish replies; for the temporary blandness which

gin-and-water awakens in some bosoms had by this time evaporated;

and he was once again a beadle.

Oliver had not been within the walls of the workhouse a quarter

of an hour, and had scarcely completed the demolition of a second

slice of bread, when Mr. Bumble, who had handed him over to the

care of an old woman, returned; and, telling him it was a board

night, informed him that the board had said he was to appear

before it forthwith.

Not having a very clearly defined notion of what a live board

was, Oliver was rather astounded by this intelligence, and was

not quite certain whether he ought to laugh or cry. He had no

time to think about the matter, however; for Mr. Bumble gave him

a tap on the head, with his cane, to wake him up: and another on

the back to make him lively: and bidding him to follow,

conducted him into a large white-washed room, where eight or ten

fat gentlemen were sitting round a table. At the top of the

table, seated in an arm-chair rather higher than the rest, was a

particularly fat gentleman with a very round, red face.

'Bow to the board,' said Bumble. Oliver brushed away two or

three tears that were lingering in his eyes; and seeing no board

but the table, fortunately bowed to that.

'What's your name, boy?' said the gentleman in the high chair.

Oliver was frightened at the sight of so many gentlemen, which

made him tremble: and the beadle gave him another tap behind,

which made him cry. These two causes made him answer in a very

low and hesitating voice; whereupon a gentleman in a white

waistcoat said he was a fool. Which was a capital way of raising

his spirits, and putting him quite at his ease.

'Boy,' said the gentleman in the high chair, 'listen to me. You

know you're an orphan, I suppose?'

'What's that, sir?' inquired poor Oliver.

'The boy \_is\_ a fool--I thought he was,' said the gentleman in the

white waistcoat.

'Hush!' said the gentleman who had spoken first. 'You know

you've got no father or mother, and that you were brought up by

the parish, don't you?'

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver, weeping bitterly.

'What are you crying for?' inquired the gentleman in the white

waistcoat. And to be sure it was very extraordinary. What \_could\_

the boy be crying for?

'I hope you say your prayers every night,' said another gentleman

in a gruff voice; 'and pray for the people who feed you, and take

care of you--like a Christian.'

'Yes, sir,' stammered the boy. The gentleman who spoke last was

unconsciously right. It would have been very like a Christian,

and a marvellously good Christian too, if Oliver had prayed for

the people who fed and took care of \_him\_. But he hadn't, because

nobody had taught him.

'Well! You have come here to be educated, and taught a useful

trade,' said the red-faced gentleman in the high chair.

'So you'll begin to pick oakum to-morrow morning at six o'clock,'

added the surly one in the white waistcoat.

For the combination of both these blessings in the one simple

process of picking oakum, Oliver bowed low by the direction of

the beadle, and was then hurried away to a large ward; where, on

a rough, hard bed, he sobbed himself to sleep. What a novel

illustration of the tender laws of England! They let the paupers

go to sleep!

Poor Oliver! He little thought, as he lay sleeping in happy

unconsciousness of all around him, that the board had that very

day arrived at a decision which would exercise the most material

influence over all his future fortunes. But they had. And this

was it:

The members of this board were very sage, deep, philosophical

men; and when they came to turn their attention to the workhouse,

they found out at once, what ordinary folks would never have

discovered--the poor people liked it! It was a regular place of

public entertainment for the poorer classes; a tavern where there

was nothing to pay; a public breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper

all the year round; a brick and mortar elysium, where it was all

play and no work. 'Oho!' said the board, looking very knowing;

'we are the fellows to set this to rights; we'll stop it all, in

no time.' So, they established the rule, that all poor people

should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not

they), of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by

a quick one out of it. With this view, they contracted with the

water-works to lay on an unlimited supply of water; and with a

corn-factor to supply periodically small quantities of oatmeal;

and issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a

week, and half a roll of Sundays. They made a great many other

wise and humane regulations, having reference to the ladies,

which it is not necessary to repeat; kindly undertook to divorce

poor married people, in consequence of the great expense of a

suit in Doctors' Commons; and, instead of compelling a man to

support his family, as they had theretofore done, took his family

away from him, and made him a bachelor! There is no saying how

many applicants for relief, under these last two heads, might

have started up in all classes of society, if it had not been

coupled with the workhouse; but the board were long-headed men,

and had provided for this difficulty. The relief was inseparable

from the workhouse and the gruel; and that frightened people.

For the first six months after Oliver Twist was removed, the

system was in full operation. It was rather expensive at first,

in consequence of the increase in the undertaker's bill, and the

necessity of taking in the clothes of all the paupers, which

fluttered loosely on their wasted, shrunken forms, after a week

or two's gruel. But the number of workhouse inmates got thin as

well as the paupers; and the board were in ecstasies.

The room in which the boys were fed, was a large stone hall, with

a copper at one end: out of which the master, dressed in an

apron for the purpose, and assisted by one or two women, ladled

the gruel at mealtimes. Of this festive composition each boy had

one porringer, and no more--except on occasions of great public

rejoicing, when he had two ounces and a quarter of bread besides.

The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with

their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed

this operation (which never took very long, the spoons being

nearly as large as the bowls), they would sit staring at the

copper, with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the

very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves,

meanwhile, in sucking their fingers most assiduously, with the

view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have

been cast thereon. Boys have generally excellent appetites.

Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow

starvation for three months: at last they got so voracious and

wild with hunger, that one boy, who was tall for his age, and

hadn't been used to that sort of thing (for his father had kept a

small cook-shop), hinted darkly to his companions, that unless he

had another basin of gruel per diem, he was afraid he might some

night happen to eat the boy who slept next him, who happened to

be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a wild, hungry eye; and

they implicitly believed him. A council was held; lots were cast

who should walk up to the master after supper that evening, and

ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist.

The evening arrived; the boys took their places. The master, in

his cook's uniform, stationed himself at the copper; his pauper

assistants ranged themselves behind him; the gruel was served

out; and a long grace was said over the short commons. The gruel

disappeared; the boys whispered each other, and winked at Oliver;

while his next neighbors nudged him. Child as he was, he was

desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from

the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand,

said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity:

'Please, sir, I want some more.'

The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He

gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some

seconds, and then clung for support to the copper. The

assistants were paralysed with wonder; the boys with fear.

'What!' said the master at length, in a faint voice.

'Please, sir,' replied Oliver, 'I want some more.'

The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle; pinioned

him in his arm; and shrieked aloud for the beadle.

The board were sitting in solemn conclave, when Mr. Bumble rushed

into the room in great excitement, and addressing the gentleman

in the high chair, said,

'Mr. Limbkins, I beg your pardon, sir! Oliver Twist has asked

for more!'

There was a general start. Horror was depicted on every

countenance.

'For \_more\_!' said Mr. Limbkins. 'Compose yourself, Bumble, and

answer me distinctly. Do I understand that he asked for more,

after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary?'

'He did, sir,' replied Bumble.

'That boy will be hung,' said the gentleman in the white

waistcoat. 'I know that boy will be hung.'

Nobody controverted the prophetic gentleman's opinion. An

animated discussion took place. Oliver was ordered into instant

confinement; and a bill was next morning pasted on the outside of

the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would

take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish. In other words,

five pounds and Oliver Twist were offered to any man or woman who

wanted an apprentice to any trade, business, or calling.

'I never was more convinced of anything in my life,' said the

gentleman in the white waistcoat, as he knocked at the gate and

read the bill next morning: 'I never was more convinced of

anything in my life, than I am that that boy will come to be

hung.'

As I purpose to show in the sequel whether the white waistcoated

gentleman was right or not, I should perhaps mar the interest of

this narrative (supposing it to possess any at all), if I

ventured to hint just yet, whether the life of Oliver Twist had

this violent termination or no.

CHAPTER III

RELATES HOW OLIVER TWIST WAS VERY NEAR GETTING A PLACE WHICH

WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN A SINECURE

For a week after the commission of the impious and profane

offence of asking for more, Oliver remained a close prisoner in

the dark and solitary room to which he had been consigned by the

wisdom and mercy of the board. It appears, at first sight not

unreasonable to suppose, that, if he had entertained a becoming

feeling of respect for the prediction of the gentleman in the

white waistcoat, he would have established that sage individual's

prophetic character, once and for ever, by tying one end of his

pocket-handkerchief to a hook in the wall, and attaching himself

to the other. To the performance of this feat, however, there

was one obstacle: namely, that pocket-handkerchiefs being

decided articles of luxury, had been, for all future times and

ages, removed from the noses of paupers by the express order of

the board, in council assembled: solemnly given and pronounced

under their hands and seals. There was a still greater obstacle

in Oliver's youth and childishness. He only cried bitterly all

day; and, when the long, dismal night came on, spread his little

hands before his eyes to shut out the darkness, and crouching in

the corner, tried to sleep: ever and anon waking with a start

and tremble, and drawing himself closer and closer to the wall,

as if to feel even its cold hard surface were a protection in the

gloom and loneliness which surrounded him.

Let it not be supposed by the enemies of 'the system,' that,

during the period of his solitary incarceration, Oliver was

denied the benefit of exercise, the pleasure of society, or the

advantages of religious consolation. As for exercise, it was

nice cold weather, and he was allowed to perform his ablutions

every morning under the pump, in a stone yard, in the presence of

Mr. Bumble, who prevented his catching cold, and caused a

tingling sensation to pervade his frame, by repeated applications

of the cane. As for society, he was carried every other day into

the hall where the boys dined, and there sociably flogged as a

public warning and example. And so for from being denied the

advantages of religious consolation, he was kicked into the same

apartment every evening at prayer-time, and there permitted to

listen to, and console his mind with, a general supplication of

the boys, containing a special clause, therein inserted by

authority of the board, in which they entreated to be made good,

virtuous, contented, and obedient, and to be guarded from the

sins and vices of Oliver Twist: whom the supplication distinctly

set forth to be under the exclusive patronage and protection of

the powers of wickedness, and an article direct from the

manufactory of the very Devil himself.

It chanced one morning, while Oliver's affairs were in this

auspicious and comfortable state, that Mr. Gamfield,

chimney-sweep, went his way down the High Street, deeply

cogitating in his mind his ways and means of paying certain

arrears of rent, for which his landlord had become rather

pressing. Mr. Gamfield's most sanguine estimate of his finances

could not raise them within full five pounds of the desired

amount; and, in a species of arthimetical desperation, he was

alternately cudgelling his brains and his donkey, when passing

the workhouse, his eyes encountered the bill on the gate.

'Wo--o!' said Mr. Gamfield to the donkey.

The donkey was in a state of profound abstraction: wondering,

probably, whether he was destined to be regaled with a

cabbage-stalk or two when he had disposed of the two sacks of

soot with which the little cart was laden; so, without noticing

the word of command, he jogged onward.

Mr. Gamfield growled a fierce imprecation on the donkey

generally, but more particularly on his eyes; and, running after

him, bestowed a blow on his head, which would inevitably have

beaten in any skull but a donkey's. Then, catching hold of the

bridle, he gave his jaw a sharp wrench, by way of gentle reminder

that he was not his own master; and by these means turned him

round. He then gave him another blow on the head, just to stun

him till he came back again. Having completed these

arrangements, he walked up to the gate, to read the bill.

The gentleman with the white waistcoat was standing at the gate

with his hands behind him, after having delivered himself of some

profound sentiments in the board-room. Having witnessed the

little dispute between Mr. Gamfield and the donkey, he smiled

joyously when that person came up to read the bill, for he saw at

once that Mr. Gamfield was exactly the sort of master Oliver

Twist wanted. Mr. Gamfield smiled, too, as he perused the

document; for five pounds was just the sum he had been wishing

for; and, as to the boy with which it was encumbered, Mr.

Gamfield, knowing what the dietary of the workhouse was, well

knew he would be a nice small pattern, just the very thing for

register stoves. So, he spelt the bill through again, from

beginning to end; and then, touching his fur cap in token of

humility, accosted the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

'This here boy, sir, wot the parish wants to 'prentis,' said Mr.

Gamfield.

'Ay, my man,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat, with a

condescending smile. 'What of him?'

'If the parish vould like him to learn a right pleasant trade, in

a good 'spectable chimbley-sweepin' bisness,' said Mr. Gamfield,

'I wants a 'prentis, and I am ready to take him.'

'Walk in,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. Mr.

Gamfield having lingered behind, to give the donkey another blow

on the head, and another wrench of the jaw, as a caution not to

run away in his absence, followed the gentleman with the white

waistcoat into the room where Oliver had first seen him.

'It's a nasty trade,' said Mr. Limbkins, when Gamfield had again

stated his wish.

'Young boys have been smothered in chimneys before now,' said

another gentleman.

'That's acause they damped the straw afore they lit it in the

chimbley to make 'em come down again,' said Gamfield; 'that's all

smoke, and no blaze; vereas smoke ain't o' no use at all in

making a boy come down, for it only sinds him to sleep, and

that's wot he likes. Boys is wery obstinit, and wery lazy,

Gen'l'men, and there's nothink like a good hot blaze to make 'em

come down vith a run. It's humane too, gen'l'men, acause, even

if they've stuck in the chimbley, roasting their feet makes 'em

struggle to hextricate theirselves.'

The gentleman in the white waistcoat appeared very much amused by

this explanation; but his mirth was speedily checked by a look

from Mr. Limbkins. The board then proceeded to converse among

themselves for a few minutes, but in so low a tone, that the

words 'saving of expenditure,' 'looked well in the accounts,'

'have a printed report published,' were alone audible. These

only chanced to be heard, indeed, or account of their being very

frequently repeated with great emphasis.

At length the whispering ceased; and the members of the board,

having resumed their seats and their solemnity, Mr. Limbkins

said:

'We have considered your proposition, and we don't approve of

it.'

'Not at all,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

'Decidedly not,' added the other members.

As Mr. Gamfield did happen to labour under the slight imputation

of having bruised three or four boys to death already, it

occurred to him that the board had, perhaps, in some

unaccountable freak, taken it into their heads that this

extraneous circumstance ought to influence their proceedings. It

was very unlike their general mode of doing business, if they

had; but still, as he had no particular wish to revive the

rumour, he twisted his cap in his hands, and walked slowly from

the table.

'So you won't let me have him, gen'l'men?' said Mr. Gamfield,

pausing near the door.

'No,' replied Mr. Limbkins; 'at least, as it's a nasty business,

we think you ought to take something less than the premium we

offered.'

Mr. Gamfield's countenance brightened, as, with a quick step, he

returned to the table, and said,

'What'll you give, gen'l'men? Come! Don't be too hard on a poor

man. What'll you give?'

'I should say, three pound ten was plenty,' said Mr. Limbkins.

'Ten shillings too much,' said the gentleman in the white

waistcoat.

'Come!' said Gamfield; 'say four pound, gen'l'men. Say four

pound, and you've got rid of him for good and all. There!'

'Three pound ten,' repeated Mr. Limbkins, firmly.

'Come! I'll split the diff'erence, gen'l'men,' urged Gamfield.

'Three pound fifteen.'

'Not a farthing more,' was the firm reply of Mr. Limbkins.

'You're desperate hard upon me, gen'l'men,' said Gamfield,

wavering.

'Pooh! pooh! nonsense!' said the gentleman in the white

waistcoat. 'He'd be cheap with nothing at all, as a premium.

Take him, you silly fellow! He's just the boy for you. He wants

the stick, now and then: it'll do him good; and his board

needn't come very expensive, for he hasn't been overfed since he

was born. Ha! ha! ha!'

Mr. Gamfield gave an arch look at the faces round the table, and,

observing a smile on all of them, gradually broke into a smile

himself. The bargain was made. Mr. Bumble, was at once

instructed that Oliver Twist and his indentures were to be

conveyed before the magistrate, for signature and approval, that

very afternoon.

In pursuance of this determination, little Oliver, to his

excessive astonishment, was released from bondage, and ordered to

put himself into a clean shirt. He had hardly achieved this very

unusual gymnastic performance, when Mr. Bumble brought him, with

his own hands, a basin of gruel, and the holiday allowance of two

ounces and a quarter of bread. At this tremendous sight, Oliver

began to cry very piteously: thinking, not unnaturally, that the

board must have determined to kill him for some useful purpose,

or they never would have begun to fatten him up in that way.

'Don't make your eyes red, Oliver, but eat your food and be

thankful,' said Mr. Bumble, in a tone of impressive pomposity.

'You're a going to be made a 'prentice of, Oliver.'

'A prentice, sir!' said the child, trembling.

'Yes, Oliver,' said Mr. Bumble. 'The kind and blessed gentleman

which is so many parents to you, Oliver, when you have none of

your own: are a going to 'prentice' you: and to set you up in

life, and make a man of you: although the expense to the parish

is three pound ten!--three pound ten, Oliver!--seventy

shillins--one hundred and forty sixpences!--and all for a naughty

orphan which nobody can't love.'

As Mr. Bumble paused to take breath, after delivering this

address in an awful voice, the tears rolled down the poor child's

face, and he sobbed bitterly.

'Come,' said Mr. Bumble, somewhat less pompously, for it was

gratifying to his feelings to observe the effect his eloquence

had produced; 'Come, Oliver! Wipe your eyes with the cuffs of

your jacket, and don't cry into your gruel; that's a very foolish

action, Oliver.' It certainly was, for there was quite enough

water in it already.

On their way to the magistrate, Mr. Bumble instructed Oliver that

all he would have to do, would be to look very happy, and say,

when the gentleman asked him if he wanted to be apprenticed, that

he should like it very much indeed; both of which injunctions

Oliver promised to obey: the rather as Mr. Bumble threw in a

gentle hint, that if he failed in either particular, there was no

telling what would be done to him. When they arrived at the

office, he was shut up in a little room by himself, and

admonished by Mr. Bumble to stay there, until he came back to

fetch him.

There the boy remained, with a palpitating heart, for half an

hour. At the expiration of which time Mr. Bumble thrust in his

head, unadorned with the cocked hat, and said aloud:

'Now, Oliver, my dear, come to the gentleman.' As Mr. Bumble

said this, he put on a grim and threatening look, and added, in a

low voice, 'Mind what I told you, you young rascal!'

Oliver stared innocently in Mr. Bumble's face at this somewhat

contradictory style of address; but that gentleman prevented his

offering any remark thereupon, by leading him at once into an

adjoining room: the door of which was open. It was a large room,

with a great window. Behind a desk, sat two old gentleman with

powdered heads: one of whom was reading the newspaper; while the

other was perusing, with the aid of a pair of tortoise-shell

spectacles, a small piece of parchment which lay before him. Mr.

Limbkins was standing in front of the desk on one side; and Mr.

Gamfield, with a partially washed face, on the other; while two

or three bluff-looking men, in top-boots, were lounging about.

The old gentleman with the spectacles gradually dozed off, over

the little bit of parchment; and there was a short pause, after

Oliver had been stationed by Mr. Bumble in front of the desk.

'This is the boy, your worship,' said Mr. Bumble.

The old gentleman who was reading the newspaper raised his head

for a moment, and pulled the other old gentleman by the sleeve;

whereupon, the last-mentioned old gentleman woke up.

'Oh, is this the boy?' said the old gentleman.

'This is him, sir,' replied Mr. Bumble. 'Bow to the magistrate,

my dear.'

Oliver roused himself, and made his best obeisance. He had been

wondering, with his eyes fixed on the magistrates' powder,

whether all boards were born with that white stuff on their

heads, and were boards from thenceforth on that account.

'Well,' said the old gentleman, 'I suppose he's fond of

chimney-sweeping?'

'He doats on it, your worship,' replied Bumble; giving Oliver a

sly pinch, to intimate that he had better not say he didn't.

'And he \_will\_ be a sweep, will he?' inquired the old gentleman.

'If we was to bind him to any other trade to-morrow, he'd run

away simultaneous, your worship,' replied Bumble.

'And this man that's to be his master--you, sir--you'll treat him

well, and feed him, and do all that sort of thing, will you?'

said the old gentleman.

'When I says I will, I means I will,' replied Mr. Gamfield

doggedly.

'You're a rough speaker, my friend, but you look an honest,

open-hearted man,' said the old gentleman: turning his

spectacles in the direction of the candidate for Oliver's

premium, whose villainous countenance was a regular stamped

receipt for cruelty. But the magistrate was half blind and half

childish, so he couldn't reasonably be expected to discern what

other people did.

'I hope I am, sir,' said Mr. Gamfield, with an ugly leer.

'I have no doubt you are, my friend,' replied the old gentleman:

fixing his spectacles more firmly on his nose, and looking about

him for the inkstand.

It was the critical moment of Oliver's fate. If the inkstand had

been where the old gentleman thought it was, he would have dipped

his pen into it, and signed the indentures, and Oliver would have

been straightway hurried off. But, as it chanced to be

immediately under his nose, it followed, as a matter of course,

that he looked all over his desk for it, without finding it; and

happening in the course of his search to look straight before

him, his gaze encountered the pale and terrified face of Oliver

Twist: who, despite all the admonitory looks and pinches of

Bumble, was regarding the repulsive countenance of his future

master, with a mingled expression of horror and fear, too

palpable to be mistaken, even by a half-blind magistrate.

The old gentleman stopped, laid down his pen, and looked from

Oliver to Mr. Limbkins; who attempted to take snuff with a

cheerful and unconcerned aspect.

'My boy!' said the old gentleman, 'you look pale and alarmed.

What is the matter?'

'Stand a little away from him, Beadle,' said the other

magistrate: laying aside the paper, and leaning forward with an

expression of interest. 'Now, boy, tell us what's the matter:

don't be afraid.'

Oliver fell on his knees, and clasping his hands together, prayed

that they would order him back to the dark room--that they would

starve him--beat him--kill him if they pleased--rather than send

him away with that dreadful man.

'Well!' said Mr. Bumble, raising his hands and eyes with most

impressive solemnity. 'Well! of all the artful and designing

orphans that ever I see, Oliver, you are one of the most

bare-facedest.'

'Hold your tongue, Beadle,' said the second old gentleman, when

Mr. Bumble had given vent to this compound adjective.

'I beg your worship's pardon,' said Mr. Bumble, incredulous of

having heard aright. 'Did your worship speak to me?'

'Yes. Hold your tongue.'

Mr. Bumble was stupefied with astonishment. A beadle ordered to

hold his tongue! A moral revolution!

The old gentleman in the tortoise-shell spectacles looked at his

companion, he nodded significantly.

'We refuse to sanction these indentures,' said the old gentleman:

tossing aside the piece of parchment as he spoke.

'I hope,' stammered Mr. Limbkins: 'I hope the magistrates will

not form the opinion that the authorities have been guilty of any

improper conduct, on the unsupported testimony of a child.'

'The magistrates are not called upon to pronounce any opinion on

the matter,' said the second old gentleman sharply. 'Take the

boy back to the workhouse, and treat him kindly. He seems to

want it.'

That same evening, the gentleman in the white waistcoat most

positively and decidedly affirmed, not only that Oliver would be

hung, but that he would be drawn and quartered into the bargain.

Mr. Bumble shook his head with gloomy mystery, and said he wished

he might come to good; whereunto Mr. Gamfield replied, that he

wished he might come to him; which, although he agreed with the

beadle in most matters, would seem to be a wish of a totally

opposite description.

The next morning, the public were once informed that Oliver Twist

was again To Let, and that five pounds would be paid to anybody

who would take possession of him.

CHAPTER IV

OLIVER, BEING OFFERED ANOTHER PLACE, MAKES HIS FIRST ENTRY INTO

PUBLIC LIFE

In great families, when an advantageous place cannot be obtained,

either in possession, reversion, remainder, or expectancy, for

the young man who is growing up, it is a very general custom to

send him to sea. The board, in imitation of so wise and salutary

an example, took counsel together on the expediency of shipping

off Oliver Twist, in some small trading vessel bound to a good

unhealthy port. This suggested itself as the very best thing

that could possibly be done with him: the probability being, that

the skipper would flog him to death, in a playful mood, some day

after dinner, or would knock his brains out with an iron bar;

both pastimes being, as is pretty generally known, very favourite

and common recreations among gentleman of that class. The more

the case presented itself to the board, in this point of view,

the more manifold the advantages of the step appeared; so, they

came to the conclusion that the only way of providing for Oliver

effectually, was to send him to sea without delay.

Mr. Bumble had been despatched to make various preliminary

inquiries, with the view of finding out some captain or other who

wanted a cabin-boy without any friends; and was returning to the

workhouse to communicate the result of his mission; when he

encountered at the gate, no less a person than Mr. Sowerberry,

the parochial undertaker.

Mr. Sowerberry was a tall gaunt, large-jointed man, attired in a

suit of threadbare black, with darned cotton stockings of the

same colour, and shoes to answer. His features were not

naturally intended to wear a smiling aspect, but he was in

general rather given to professional jocosity. His step was

elastic, and his face betokened inward pleasantry, as he advanced

to Mr. Bumble, and shook him cordially by the hand.

'I have taken the measure of the two women that died last night,

Mr. Bumble,' said the undertaker.

'You'll make your fortune, Mr. Sowerberry,' said the beadle, as

he thrust his thumb and forefinger into the proffered snuff-box

of the undertaker: which was an ingenious little model of a

patent coffin. 'I say you'll make your fortune, Mr. Sowerberry,'

repeated Mr. Bumble, tapping the undertaker on the shoulder, in a

friendly manner, with his cane.

'Think so?' said the undertaker in a tone which half admitted and

half disputed the probability of the event. 'The prices allowed

by the board are very small, Mr. Bumble.'

'So are the coffins,' replied the beadle: with precisely as near

an approach to a laugh as a great official ought to indulge in.

Mr. Sowerberry was much tickled at this: as of course he ought

to be; and laughed a long time without cessation. 'Well, well,

Mr. Bumble,' he said at length, 'there's no denying that, since

the new system of feeding has come in, the coffins are something

narrower and more shallow than they used to be; but we must have

some profit, Mr. Bumble. Well-seasoned timber is an expensive

article, sir; and all the iron handles come, by canal, from

Birmingham.'

'Well, well,' said Mr. Bumble, 'every trade has its drawbacks. A

fair profit is, of course, allowable.'

'Of course, of course,' replied the undertaker; 'and if I don't

get a profit upon this or that particular article, why, I make it

up in the long-run, you see--he! he! he!'

'Just so,' said Mr. Bumble.

'Though I must say,' continued the undertaker, resuming the

current of observations which the beadle had interrupted: 'though

I must say, Mr. Bumble, that I have to contend against one very

great disadvantage: which is, that all the stout people go off

the quickest. The people who have been better off, and have paid

rates for many years, are the first to sink when they come into

the house; and let me tell you, Mr. Bumble, that three or four

inches over one's calculation makes a great hole in one's

profits: especially when one has a family to provide for, sir.'

As Mr. Sowerberry said this, with the becoming indignation of an

ill-used man; and as Mr. Bumble felt that it rather tended to

convey a reflection on the honour of the parish; the latter

gentleman thought it advisable to change the subject. Oliver

Twist being uppermost in his mind, he made him his theme.

'By the bye,' said Mr. Bumble, 'you don't know anybody who wants

a boy, do you? A porochial 'prentis, who is at present a

dead-weight; a millstone, as I may say, round the porochial

throat? Liberal terms, Mr. Sowerberry, liberal terms?' As Mr.

Bumble spoke, he raised his cane to the bill above him, and gave

three distinct raps upon the words 'five pounds': which were

printed thereon in Roman capitals of gigantic size.

'Gadso!' said the undertaker: taking Mr. Bumble by the

gilt-edged lappel of his official coat; 'that's just the very

thing I wanted to speak to you about. You know--dear me, what a

very elegant button this is, Mr. Bumble! I never noticed it

before.'

'Yes, I think it rather pretty,' said the beadle, glancing

proudly downwards at the large brass buttons which embellished

his coat. 'The die is the same as the porochial seal--the Good

Samaritan healing the sick and bruised man. The board presented

it to me on Newyear's morning, Mr. Sowerberry. I put it on, I

remember, for the first time, to attend the inquest on that

reduced tradesman, who died in a doorway at midnight.'

'I recollect,' said the undertaker. 'The jury brought it in,

"Died from exposure to the cold, and want of the common

necessaries of life," didn't they?'

Mr. Bumble nodded.

'And they made it a special verdict, I think,' said the

undertaker, 'by adding some words to the effect, that if the

relieving officer had--'

'Tush! Foolery!' interposed the beadle. 'If the board attended

to all the nonsense that ignorant jurymen talk, they'd have

enough to do.'

'Very true,' said the undertaker; 'they would indeed.'

'Juries,' said Mr. Bumble, grasping his cane tightly, as was his

wont when working into a passion: 'juries is ineddicated,

vulgar, grovelling wretches.'

'So they are,' said the undertaker.

'They haven't no more philosophy nor political economy about 'em

than that,' said the beadle, snapping his fingers contemptuously.

'No more they have,' acquiesced the undertaker.

'I despise 'em,' said the beadle, growing very red in the face.

'So do I,' rejoined the undertaker.

'And I only wish we'd a jury of the independent sort, in the

house for a week or two,' said the beadle; 'the rules and

regulations of the board would soon bring their spirit down for

'em.'

'Let 'em alone for that,' replied the undertaker. So saying, he

smiled, approvingly: to calm the rising wrath of the indignant

parish officer.

Mr Bumble lifted off his cocked hat; took a handkerchief from the

inside of the crown; wiped from his forehead the perspiration

which his rage had engendered; fixed the cocked hat on again;

and, turning to the undertaker, said in a calmer voice:

'Well; what about the boy?'

'Oh!' replied the undertaker; 'why, you know, Mr. Bumble, I pay a

good deal towards the poor's rates.'

'Hem!' said Mr. Bumble. 'Well?'

'Well,' replied the undertaker, 'I was thinking that if I pay so

much towards 'em, I've a right to get as much out of 'em as I

can, Mr. Bumble; and so--I think I'll take the boy myself.'

Mr. Bumble grasped the undertaker by the arm, and led him into

the building. Mr. Sowerberry was closeted with the board for

five minutes; and it was arranged that Oliver should go to him

that evening 'upon liking'--a phrase which means, in the case of

a parish apprentice, that if the master find, upon a short trial,

that he can get enough work out of a boy without putting too much

food into him, he shall have him for a term of years, to do what

he likes with.

When little Oliver was taken before 'the gentlemen' that evening;

and informed that he was to go, that night, as general house-lad

to a coffin-maker's; and that if he complained of his situation,

or ever came back to the parish again, he would be sent to sea,

there to be drowned, or knocked on the head, as the case might

be, he evinced so little emotion, that they by common consent

pronounced him a hardened young rascal, and ordered Mr. Bumble to

remove him forthwith.

Now, although it was very natural that the board, of all people

in the world, should feel in a great state of virtuous

astonishment and horror at the smallest tokens of want of feeling

on the part of anybody, they were rather out, in this particular

instance. The simple fact was, that Oliver, instead of

possessing too little feeling, possessed rather too much; and was

in a fair way of being reduced, for life, to a state of brutal

stupidity and sullenness by the ill usage he had received. He

heard the news of his destination, in perfect silence; and,

having had his luggage put into his hand--which was not very

difficult to carry, inasmuch as it was all comprised within the

limits of a brown paper parcel, about half a foot square by three

inches deep--he pulled his cap over his eyes; and once more

attaching himself to Mr. Bumble's coat cuff, was led away by that

dignitary to a new scene of suffering.

For some time, Mr. Bumble drew Oliver along, without notice or

remark; for the beadle carried his head very erect, as a beadle

always should: and, it being a windy day, little Oliver was

completely enshrouded by the skirts of Mr. Bumble's coat as they

blew open, and disclosed to great advantage his flapped waistcoat

and drab plush knee-breeches. As they drew near to their

destination, however, Mr. Bumble thought it expedient to look

down, and see that the boy was in good order for inspection by

his new master: which he accordingly did, with a fit and

becoming air of gracious patronage.

'Oliver!' said Mr. Bumble.

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver, in a low, tremulous voice.

'Pull that cap off your eyes, and hold up your head, sir.'

Although Oliver did as he was desired, at once; and passed the

back of his unoccupied hand briskly across his eyes, he left a

tear in them when he looked up at his conductor. As Mr. Bumble

gazed sternly upon him, it rolled down his cheek. It was followed

by another, and another. The child made a strong effort, but it

was an unsuccessful one. Withdrawing his other hand from Mr.

Bumble's he covered his face with both; and wept until the tears

sprung out from between his chin and bony fingers.

'Well!' exclaimed Mr. Bumble, stopping short, and darting at his

little charge a look of intense malignity. 'Well! Of \_all\_ the

ungratefullest, and worst-disposed boys as ever I see, Oliver,

you are the--'

'No, no, sir,' sobbed Oliver, clinging to the hand which held the

well-known cane; 'no, no, sir; I will be good indeed; indeed,

indeed I will, sir! I am a very little boy, sir; and it is

so--so--'

'So what?' inquired Mr. Bumble in amazement.

'So lonely, sir! So very lonely!' cried the child. 'Everybody

hates me. Oh! sir, don't, don't pray be cross to me!' The child

beat his hand upon his heart; and looked in his companion's face,

with tears of real agony.

Mr. Bumble regarded Oliver's piteous and helpless look, with some

astonishment, for a few seconds; hemmed three or four times in a

husky manner; and after muttering something about 'that

troublesome cough,' bade Oliver dry his eyes and be a good boy.

Then once more taking his hand, he walked on with him in silence.

The undertaker, who had just putup the shutters of his shop, was

making some entries in his day-book by the light of a most

appropriate dismal candle, when Mr. Bumble entered.

'Aha!' said the undertaker; looking up from the book, and pausing

in the middle of a word; 'is that you, Bumble?'

'No one else, Mr. Sowerberry,' replied the beadle. 'Here! I've

brought the boy.' Oliver made a bow.

'Oh! that's the boy, is it?' said the undertaker: raising the

candle above his head, to get a better view of Oliver. 'Mrs.

Sowerberry, will you have the goodness to come here a moment, my

dear?'

Mrs. Sowerberry emerged from a little room behind the shop, and

presented the form of a short, then, squeezed-up woman, with a

vixenish countenance.

'My dear,' said Mr. Sowerberry, deferentially, 'this is the boy

from the workhouse that I told you of.' Oliver bowed again.

'Dear me!' said the undertaker's wife, 'he's very small.'

'Why, he \_is\_ rather small,' replied Mr. Bumble: looking at Oliver

as if it were his fault that he was no bigger; 'he is small.

There's no denying it. But he'll grow, Mrs. Sowerberry--he'll

grow.'

'Ah! I dare say he will,' replied the lady pettishly, 'on our

victuals and our drink. I see no saving in parish children, not

I; for they always cost more to keep, than they're worth.

However, men always think they know best. There! Get downstairs,

little bag o' bones.' With this, the undertaker's wife opened a

side door, and pushed Oliver down a steep flight of stairs into a

stone cell, damp and dark: forming the ante-room to the

coal-cellar, and denominated 'kitchen'; wherein sat a slatternly

girl, in shoes down at heel, and blue worsted stockings very much

out of repair.

'Here, Charlotte,' said Mr. Sowerberry, who had followed Oliver

down, 'give this boy some of the cold bits that were put by for

Trip. He hasn't come home since the morning, so he may go

without 'em. I dare say the boy isn't too dainty to eat 'em--are

you, boy?'

Oliver, whose eyes had glistened at the mention of meat, and who

was trembling with eagerness to devour it, replied in the

negative; and a plateful of coarse broken victuals was set before

him.

I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to

gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron; could

have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the

dog had neglected. I wish he could have witnessed the horrible

avidity with which Oliver tore the bits asunder with all the

ferocity of famine. There is only one thing I should like

better; and that would be to see the Philosopher making the same

sort of meal himself, with the same relish.

'Well,' said the undertaker's wife, when Oliver had finished his

supper: which she had regarded in silent horror, and with

fearful auguries of his future appetite: 'have you done?'

There being nothing eatable within his reach, Oliver replied in

the affirmative.

'Then come with me,' said Mrs. Sowerberry: taking up a dim and

dirty lamp, and leading the way upstairs; 'your bed's under the

counter. You don't mind sleeping among the coffins, I suppose?

But it doesn't much matter whether you do or don't, for you can't

sleep anywhere else. Come; don't keep me here all night!'

Oliver lingered no longer, but meekly followed his new mistress.

CHAPTER V

OLIVER MINGLES WITH NEW ASSOCIATES. GOING TO A FUNERAL FOR THE

FIRST TIME, HE FORMS AN UNFAVOURABLE NOTION OF HIS MASTER'S

BUSINESS

Oliver, being left to himself in the undertaker's shop, set the

lamp down on a workman's bench, and gazed timidly about him with

a feeling of awe and dread, which many people a good deal older

than he will be at no loss to understand. An unfinished coffin

on black tressels, which stood in the middle of the shop, looked

so gloomy and death-like that a cold tremble came over him, every

time his eyes wandered in the direction of the dismal object:

from which he almost expected to see some frightful form slowly

rear its head, to drive him mad with terror. Against the wall

were ranged, in regular array, a long row of elm boards cut in

the same shape: looking in the dim light, like high-shouldered

ghosts with their hands in their breeches pockets.

Coffin-plates, elm-chips, bright-headed nails, and shreds of

black cloth, lay scattered on the floor; and the wall behind the

counter was ornamented with a lively representation of two mutes

in very stiff neckcloths, on duty at a large private door, with a

hearse drawn by four black steeds, approaching in the distance.

The shop was close and hot. The atmosphere seemed tainted with

the smell of coffins. The recess beneath the counter in which

his flock mattress was thrust, looked like a grave.

Nor were these the only dismal feelings which depressed Oliver.

He was alone in a strange place; and we all know how chilled and

desolate the best of us will sometimes feel in such a situation.

The boy had no friends to care for, or to care for him. The

regret of no recent separation was fresh in his mind; the absence

of no loved and well-remembered face sank heavily into his heart.

But his heart was heavy, notwithstanding; and he wished, as he

crept into his narrow bed, that that were his coffin, and that he

could be lain in a calm and lasting sleep in the churchyard

ground, with the tall grass waving gently above his head, and the

sound of the old deep bell to soothe him in his sleep.

Oliver was awakened in the morning, by a loud kicking at the

outside of the shop-door: which, before he could huddle on his

clothes, was repeated, in an angry and impetuous manner, about

twenty-five times. When he began to undo the chain, the legs

desisted, and a voice began.

'Open the door, will yer?' cried the voice which belonged to the

legs which had kicked at the door.

'I will, directly, sir,' replied Oliver: undoing the chain, and

turning the key.

'I suppose yer the new boy, ain't yer?' said the voice through

the key-hole.

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver.

'How old are yer?' inquired the voice.

'Ten, sir,' replied Oliver.

'Then I'll whop yer when I get in,' said the voice; 'you just see

if I don't, that's all, my work'us brat!' and having made this

obliging promise, the voice began to whistle.

Oliver had been too often subjected to the process to which the

very expressive monosyllable just recorded bears reference, to

entertain the smallest doubt that the owner of the voice, whoever

he might be, would redeem his pledge, most honourably. He drew

back the bolts with a trembling hand, and opened the door.

For a second or two, Oliver glanced up the street, and down the

street, and over the way: impressed with the belief that the

unknown, who had addressed him through the key-hole, had walked a

few paces off, to warm himself; for nobody did he see but a big

charity-boy, sitting on a post in front of the house, eating a

slice of bread and butter: which he cut into wedges, the size of

his mouth, with a clasp-knife, and then consumed with great

dexterity.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Oliver at length: seeing that no

other visitor made his appearance; 'did you knock?'

'I kicked,' replied the charity-boy.

'Did you want a coffin, sir?' inquired Oliver, innocently.

At this, the charity-boy looked monstrous fierce; and said that

Oliver would want one before long, if he cut jokes with his

superiors in that way.

'Yer don't know who I am, I suppose, Work'us?' said the

charity-boy, in continuation: descending from the top of the

post, meanwhile, with edifying gravity.

'No, sir,' rejoined Oliver.

'I'm Mister Noah Claypole,' said the charity-boy, 'and you're

under me. Take down the shutters, yer idle young ruffian!' With

this, Mr. Claypole administered a kick to Oliver, and entered the

shop with a dignified air, which did him great credit. It is

difficult for a large-headed, small-eyed youth, of lumbering make

and heavy countenance, to look dignified under any circumstances;

but it is more especially so, when superadded to these personal

attractions are a red nose and yellow smalls.

Oliver, having taken down the shutters, and broken a pane of

glass in his effort to stagger away beneath the weight of the

first one to a small court at the side of the house in which they

were kept during the day, was graciously assisted by Noah: who

having consoled him with the assurance that 'he'd catch it,'

condescended to help him. Mr. Sowerberry came down soon after.

Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Sowerberry appeared. Oliver having

'caught it,' in fulfilment of Noah's prediction, followed that

young gentleman down the stairs to breakfast.

'Come near the fire, Noah,' said Charlotte. 'I saved a nice

little bit of bacon for you from master's breakfast. Oliver,

shut that door at Mister Noah's back, and take them bits that

I've put out on the cover of the bread-pan. There's your tea;

take it away to that box, and drink it there, and make haste, for

they'll want you to mind the shop. D'ye hear?'

'D'ye hear, Work'us?' said Noah Claypole.

'Lor, Noah!' said Charlotte, 'what a rum creature you are! Why

don't you let the boy alone?'

'Let him alone!' said Noah. 'Why everybody lets him alone

enough, for the matter of that. Neither his father nor his

mother will ever interfere with him. All his relations let him

have his own way pretty well. Eh, Charlotte? He! he! he!'

'Oh, you queer soul!' said Charlotte, bursting into a hearty

laugh, in which she was joined by Noah; after which they both

looked scornfully at poor Oliver Twist, as he sat shivering on

the box in the coldest corner of the room, and ate the stale

pieces which had been specially reserved for him.

Noah was a charity-boy, but not a workhouse orphan. No

chance-child was he, for he could trace his genealogy all the way

back to his parents, who lived hard by; his mother being a

washerwoman, and his father a drunken soldier, discharged with a

wooden leg, and a diurnal pension of twopence-halfpenny and an

unstateable fraction. The shop-boys in the neighbourhood had

long been in the habit of branding Noah in the public streets,

with the ignominious epithets of 'leathers,' 'charity,' and the

like; and Noah had bourne them without reply. But, now that

fortune had cast in his way a nameless orphan, at whom even the

meanest could point the finger of scorn, he retorted on him with

interest. This affords charming food for contemplation. It

shows us what a beautiful thing human nature may be made to be;

and how impartially the same amiable qualities are developed in

the finest lord and the dirtiest charity-boy.

Oliver had been sojourning at the undertaker's some three weeks

or a month. Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry--the shop being shut

up--were taking their supper in the little back-parlour, when Mr.

Sowerberry, after several deferential glances at his wife, said,

'My dear--' He was going to say more; but, Mrs. Sowerberry

looking up, with a peculiarly unpropitious aspect, he stopped

short.

'Well,' said Mrs. Sowerberry, sharply.

'Nothing, my dear, nothing,' said Mr. Sowerberry.

'Ugh, you brute!' said Mrs. Sowerberry.

'Not at all, my dear,' said Mr. Sowerberry humbly. 'I thought

you didn't want to hear, my dear. I was only going to say--'

'Oh, don't tell me what you were going to say,' interposed Mrs.

Sowerberry. 'I am nobody; don't consult me, pray. \_I\_ don't

want to intrude upon your secrets.' As Mrs. Sowerberry said

this, she gave an hysterical laugh, which threatened violent

consequences.

'But, my dear,' said Sowerberry, 'I want to ask your advice.'

'No, no, don't ask mine,' replied Mrs. Sowerberry, in an

affecting manner: 'ask somebody else's.' Here, there was

another hysterical laugh, which frightened Mr. Sowerberry very

much. This is a very common and much-approved matrimonial course

of treatment, which is often very effective. It at once reduced

Mr. Sowerberry to begging, as a special favour, to be allowed to

say what Mrs. Sowerberry was most curious to hear. After a short

duration, the permission was most graciously conceded.

'It's only about young Twist, my dear,' said Mr. Sowerberry. 'A

very good-looking boy, that, my dear.'

'He need be, for he eats enough,' observed the lady.

'There's an expression of melancholy in his face, my dear,'

resumed Mr. Sowerberry, 'which is very interesting. He would

make a delightful mute, my love.'

Mrs. Sowerberry looked up with an expression of considerable

wonderment. Mr. Sowerberry remarked it and, without allowing

time for any observation on the good lady's part, proceeded.

'I don't mean a regular mute to attend grown-up people, my dear,

but only for children's practice. It would be very new to have a

mute in proportion, my dear. You may depend upon it, it would

have a superb effect.'

Mrs. Sowerberry, who had a good deal of taste in the undertaking

way, was much struck by the novelty of this idea; but, as it

would have been compromising her dignity to have said so, under

existing circumstances, she merely inquired, with much sharpness,

why such an obvious suggestion had not presented itself to her

husband's mind before? Mr. Sowerberry rightly construed this, as

an acquiescence in his proposition; it was speedily determined,

therefore, that Oliver should be at once initiated into the

mysteries of the trade; and, with this view, that he should

accompany his master on the very next occasion of his services

being required.

The occasion was not long in coming. Half an hour after

breakfast next morning, Mr. Bumble entered the shop; and

supporting his cane against the counter, drew forth his large

leathern pocket-book: from which he selected a small scrap of

paper, which he handed over to Sowerberry.

'Aha!' said the undertaker, glancing over it with a lively

countenance; 'an order for a coffin, eh?'

'For a coffin first, and a porochial funeral afterwards,' replied

Mr. Bumble, fastening the strap of the leathern pocket-book:

which, like himself, was very corpulent.

'Bayton,' said the undertaker, looking from the scrap of paper to

Mr. Bumble. 'I never heard the name before.'

Bumble shook his head, as he replied, 'Obstinate people, Mr.

Sowerberry; very obstinate. Proud, too, I'm afraid, sir.'

'Proud, eh?' exclaimed Mr. Sowerberry with a sneer. 'Come,

that's too much.'

'Oh, it's sickening,' replied the beadle. 'Antimonial, Mr.

Sowerberry!'

'So it is,' acquiesced the undertaker.

'We only heard of the family the night before last,' said the

beadle; 'and we shouldn't have known anything about them, then,

only a woman who lodges in the same house made an application to

the porochial committee for them to send the porochial surgeon to

see a woman as was very bad. He had gone out to dinner; but his

'prentice (which is a very clever lad) sent 'em some medicine in

a blacking-bottle, offhand.'

'Ah, there's promptness,' said the undertaker.

'Promptness, indeed!' replied the beadle. 'But what's the

consequence; what's the ungrateful behaviour of these rebels,

sir? Why, the husband sends back word that the medicine won't

suit his wife's complaint, and so she shan't take it--says she

shan't take it, sir! Good, strong, wholesome medicine, as was

given with great success to two Irish labourers and a

coal-heaver, only a week before--sent 'em for nothing, with a

blackin'-bottle in,--and he sends back word that she shan't take

it, sir!'

As the atrocity presented itself to Mr. Bumble's mind in full

force, he struck the counter sharply with his cane, and became

flushed with indignation.

'Well,' said the undertaker, 'I ne--ver--did--'

'Never did, sir!' ejaculated the beadle. 'No, nor nobody never

did; but now she's dead, we've got to bury her; and that's the

direction; and the sooner it's done, the better.'

Thus saying, Mr. Bumble put on his cocked hat wrong side first,

in a fever of parochial excitement; and flounced out of the shop.

'Why, he was so angry, Oliver, that he forgot even to ask after

you!' said Mr. Sowerberry, looking after the beadle as he strode

down the street.

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver, who had carefully kept himself out of

sight, during the interview; and who was shaking from head to

foot at the mere recollection of the sound of Mr. Bumble's voice.

He needn't haven taken the trouble to shrink from Mr. Bumble's

glance, however; for that functionary, on whom the prediction of

the gentleman in the white waistcoat had made a very strong

impression, thought that now the undertaker had got Oliver upon

trial the subject was better avoided, until such time as he

should be firmly bound for seven years, and all danger of his

being returned upon the hands of the parish should be thus

effectually and legally overcome.

'Well,' said Mr. Sowerberry, taking up his hat, 'the sooner this

job is done, the better. Noah, look after the shop. Oliver, put

on your cap, and come with me.' Oliver obeyed, and followed his

master on his professional mission.

They walked on, for some time, through the most crowded and

densely inhabited part of the town; and then, striking down a

narrow street more dirty and miserable than any they had yet

passed through, paused to look for the house which was the object

of their search. The houses on either side were high and large,

but very old, and tenanted by people of the poorest class: as

their neglected appearance would have sufficiently denoted,

without the concurrent testimony afforded by the squalid looks of

the few men and women who, with folded arms and bodies half

doubled, occasionally skulked along. A great many of the

tenements had shop-fronts; but these were fast closed, and

mouldering away; only the upper rooms being inhabited. Some

houses which had become insecure from age and decay, were

prevented from falling into the street, by huge beams of wood

reared against the walls, and firmly planted in the road; but

even these crazy dens seemed to have been selected as the nightly

haunts of some houseless wretches, for many of the rough boards

which supplied the place of door and window, were wrenched from

their positions, to afford an aperture wide enough for the

passage of a human body. The kennel was stagnant and filthy.

The very rats, which here and there lay putrefying in its

rottenness, were hideous with famine.

There was neither knocker nor bell-handle at the open door where

Oliver and his master stopped; so, groping his way cautiously

through the dark passage, and bidding Oliver keep close to him

and not be afraid the undertaker mounted to the top of the first

flight of stairs. Stumbling against a door on the landing, he

rapped at it with his knuckles.

It was opened by a young girl of thirteen or fourteen. The

undertaker at once saw enough of what the room contained, to know

it was the apartment to which he had been directed. He stepped

in; Oliver followed him.

There was no fire in the room; but a man was crouching,

mechanically, over the empty stove. An old woman, too, had drawn

a low stool to the cold hearth, and was sitting beside him.

There were some ragged children in another corner; and in a small

recess, opposite the door, there lay upon the ground, something

covered with an old blanket. Oliver shuddered as he cast his

eyes toward the place, and crept involuntarily closer to his

master; for though it was covered up, the boy felt that it was a

corpse.

The man's face was thin and very pale; his hair and beard were

grizzly; his eyes were bloodshot. The old woman's face was

wrinkled; her two remaining teeth protruded over her under lip;

and her eyes were bright and piercing. Oliver was afraid to look

at either her or the man. They seemed so like the rats he had

seen outside.

'Nobody shall go near her,' said the man, starting fiercely up,

as the undertaker approached the recess. 'Keep back! Damn you,

keep back, if you've a life to lose!'

'Nonsense, my good man,' said the undertaker, who was pretty well

used to misery in all its shapes. 'Nonsense!'

'I tell you,' said the man: clenching his hands, and stamping

furiously on the floor,--'I tell you I won't have her put into

the ground. She couldn't rest there. The worms would worry

her--not eat her--she is so worn away.'

The undertaker offered no reply to this raving; but producing a

tape from his pocket, knelt down for a moment by the side of the

body.

'Ah!' said the man: bursting into tears, and sinking on his

knees at the feet of the dead woman; 'kneel down, kneel down

--kneel round her, every one of you, and mark my words! I say

she was starved to death. I never knew how bad she was, till the

fever came upon her; and then her bones were starting through the

skin. There was neither fire nor candle; she died in the

dark--in the dark! She couldn't even see her children's faces,

though we heard her gasping out their names. I begged for her in

the streets: and they sent me to prison. When I came back, she

was dying; and all the blood in my heart has dried up, for they

starved her to death. I swear it before the God that saw it!

They starved her!' He twined his hands in his hair; and, with a

loud scream, rolled grovelling upon the floor: his eyes fixed,

and the foam covering his lips.

The terrified children cried bitterly; but the old woman, who had

hitherto remained as quiet as if she had been wholly deaf to all

that passed, menaced them into silence. Having unloosened the

cravat of the man who still remained extended on the ground, she

tottered towards the undertaker.

'She was my daughter,' said the old woman, nodding her head in

the direction of the corpse; and speaking with an idiotic leer,

more ghastly than even the presence of death in such a place.

'Lord, Lord! Well, it \_is\_ strange that I who gave birth to her,

and was a woman then, should be alive and merry now, and she

lying there: so cold and stiff! Lord, Lord!--to think of it;

it's as good as a play--as good as a play!'

As the wretched creature mumbled and chuckled in her hideous

merriment, the undertaker turned to go away.

'Stop, stop!' said the old woman in a loud whisper. 'Will she be

buried to-morrow, or next day, or to-night? I laid her out; and

I must walk, you know. Send me a large cloak: a good warm one:

for it is bitter cold. We should have cake and wine, too, before

we go! Never mind; send some bread--only a loaf of bread and a

cup of water. Shall we have some bread, dear?' she said eagerly:

catching at the undertaker's coat, as he once more moved towards

the door.

'Yes, yes,' said the undertaker,'of course. Anything you like!'

He disengaged himself from the old woman's grasp; and, drawing

Oliver after him, hurried away.

The next day, (the family having been meanwhile relieved with a

half-quartern loaf and a piece of cheese, left with them by Mr.

Bumble himself,) Oliver and his master returned to the miserable

abode; where Mr. Bumble had already arrived, accompanied by four

men from the workhouse, who were to act as bearers. An old black

cloak had been thrown over the rags of the old woman and the man;

and the bare coffin having been screwed down, was hoisted on the

shoulders of the bearers, and carried into the street.

'Now, you must put your best leg foremost, old lady!' whispered

Sowerberry in the old woman's ear; 'we are rather late; and it

won't do, to keep the clergyman waiting. Move on, my men,--as

quick as you like!'

Thus directed, the bearers trotted on under their light burden;

and the two mourners kept as near them, as they could. Mr.

Bumble and Sowerberry walked at a good smart pace in front; and

Oliver, whose legs were not so long as his master's, ran by the

side.

There was not so great a necessity for hurrying as Mr. Sowerberry

had anticipated, however; for when they reached the obscure

corner of the churchyard in which the nettles grew, and where the

parish graves were made, the clergyman had not arrived; and the

clerk, who was sitting by the vestry-room fire, seemed to think

it by no means improbable that it might be an hour or so, before

he came. So, they put the bier on the brink of the grave; and

the two mourners waited patiently in the damp clay, with a cold

rain drizzling down, while the ragged boys whom the spectacle had

attracted into the churchyard played a noisy game at

hide-and-seek among the tombstones, or varied their amusements by

jumping backwards and forwards over the coffin. Mr. Sowerberry

and Bumble, being personal friends of the clerk, sat by the fire

with him, and read the paper.

At length, after a lapse of something more than an hour, Mr.

Bumble, and Sowerberry, and the clerk, were seen running towards

the grave. Immediately afterwards, the clergyman appeared:

putting on his surplice as he came along. Mr. Bumble then

thrashed a boy or two, to keep up appearances; and the reverend

gentleman, having read as much of the burial service as could be

compressed into four minutes, gave his surplice to the clerk, and

walked away again.

'Now, Bill!' said Sowerberry to the grave-digger. 'Fill up!'

It was no very difficult task, for the grave was so full, that

the uppermost coffin was within a few feet of the surface. The

grave-digger shovelled in the earth; stamped it loosely down with

his feet: shouldered his spade; and walked off, followed by the

boys, who murmured very loud complaints at the fun being over so

soon.

'Come, my good fellow!' said Bumble, tapping the man on the back.

'They want to shut up the yard.'

The man who had never once moved, since he had taken his station

by the grave side, started, raised his head, stared at the person

who had addressed him, walked forward for a few paces; and fell

down in a swoon. The crazy old woman was too much occupied in

bewailing the loss of her cloak (which the undertaker had taken

off), to pay him any attention; so they threw a can of cold water

over him; and when he came to, saw him safely out of the

churchyard, locked the gate, and departed on their different

ways.

'Well, Oliver,' said Sowerberry, as they walked home, 'how do you

like it?'

'Pretty well, thank you, sir' replied Oliver, with considerable

hesitation. 'Not very much, sir.'

'Ah, you'll get used to it in time, Oliver,' said Sowerberry.

'Nothing when you \_are\_ used to it, my boy.'

Oliver wondered, in his own mind, whether it had taken a very

long time to get Mr. Sowerberry used to it. But he thought it

better not to ask the question; and walked back to the shop:

thinking over all he had seen and heard.

CHAPTER VI

OLIVER, BEING GOADED BY THE TAUNTS OF NOAH, ROUSES INTO ACTION,

AND RATHER ASTONISHES HIM

The month's trial over, Oliver was formally apprenticed. It was

a nice sickly season just at this time. In commercial phrase,

coffins were looking up; and, in the course of a few weeks,

Oliver acquired a great deal of experience. The success of Mr.

Sowerberry's ingenious speculation, exceeded even his most

sanguine hopes. The oldest inhabitants recollected no period at

which measles had been so prevalent, or so fatal to infant

existence; and many were the mournful processions which little

Oliver headed, in a hat-band reaching down to his knees, to the

indescribable admiration and emotion of all the mothers in the

town. As Oliver accompanied his master in most of his adult

expeditions too, in order that he might acquire that equanimity

of demeanour and full command of nerve which was essential to a

finished undertaker, he had many opportunities of observing the

beautiful resignation and fortitude with which some strong-minded

people bear their trials and losses.

For instance; when Sowerberry had an order for the burial of some

rich old lady or gentleman, who was surrounded by a great number

of nephews and nieces, who had been perfectly inconsolable during

the previous illness, and whose grief had been wholly

irrepressible even on the most public occasions, they would be as

happy among themselves as need be--quite cheerful and

contented--conversing together with as much freedom and gaiety,

as if nothing whatever had happened to disturb them. Husbands,

too, bore the loss of their wives with the most heroic calmness.

Wives, again, put on weeds for their husbands, as if, so far from

grieving in the garb of sorrow, they had made up their minds to

render it as becoming and attractive as possible. It was

observable, too, that ladies and gentlemen who were in passions

of anguish during the ceremony of interment, recovered almost as

soon as they reached home, and became quite composed before the

tea-drinking was over. All this was very pleasant and improving

to see; and Oliver beheld it with great admiration.

That Oliver Twist was moved to resignation by the example of

these good people, I cannot, although I am his biographer,

undertake to affirm with any degree of confidence; but I can most

distinctly say, that for many months he continued meekly to

submit to the domination and ill-treatment of Noah Claypole: who

used him far worse than before, now that his jealousy was roused

by seeing the new boy promoted to the black stick and hatband,

while he, the old one, remained stationary in the muffin-cap and

leathers. Charlotte treated him ill, because Noah did; and Mrs.

Sowerberry was his decided enemy, because Mr. Sowerberry was

disposed to be his friend; so, between these three on one side,

and a glut of funerals on the other, Oliver was not altogether as

comfortable as the hungry pig was, when he was shut up, by

mistake, in the grain department of a brewery.

And now, I come to a very important passage in Oliver's history;

for I have to record an act, slight and unimportant perhaps in

appearance, but which indirectly produced a material change in

all his future prospects and proceedings.

One day, Oliver and Noah had descended into the kitchen at the

usual dinner-hour, to banquet upon a small joint of mutton--a

pound and a half of the worst end of the neck--when Charlotte

being called out of the way, there ensued a brief interval of

time, which Noah Claypole, being hungry and vicious, considered

he could not possibly devote to a worthier purpose than

aggravating and tantalising young Oliver Twist.

Intent upon this innocent amusement, Noah put his feet on the

table-cloth; and pulled Oliver's hair; and twitched his ears; and

expressed his opinion that he was a 'sneak'; and furthermore

announced his intention of coming to see him hanged, whenever

that desirable event should take place; and entered upon various

topics of petty annoyance, like a malicious and ill-conditioned

charity-boy as he was. But, making Oliver cry, Noah attempted to

be more facetious still; and in his attempt, did what many

sometimes do to this day, when they want to be funny. He got

rather personal.

'Work'us,' said Noah, 'how's your mother?'

'She's dead,' replied Oliver; 'don't you say anything about her

to me!'

Oliver's colour rose as he said this; he breathed quickly; and

there was a curious working of the mouth and nostrils, which Mr.

Claypole thought must be the immediate precursor of a violent fit

of crying. Under this impression he returned to the charge.

'What did she die of, Work'us?' said Noah.

'Of a broken heart, some of our old nurses told me,' replied

Oliver: more as if he were talking to himself, than answering

Noah. 'I think I know what it must be to die of that!'

'Tol de rol lol lol, right fol lairy, Work'us,' said Noah, as a

tear rolled down Oliver's cheek. 'What's set you a snivelling

now?'

'Not \_you\_,' replied Oliver, sharply. 'There; that's enough. Don't

say anything more to me about her; you'd better not!'

'Better not!' exclaimed Noah. 'Well! Better not! Work'us,

don't be impudent. \_Your\_ mother, too! She was a nice 'un she

was. Oh, Lor!' And here, Noah nodded his head expressively; and

curled up as much of his small red nose as muscular action could

collect together, for the occasion.

'Yer know, Work'us,' continued Noah, emboldened by Oliver's

silence, and speaking in a jeering tone of affected pity: of all

tones the most annoying: 'Yer know, Work'us, it can't be helped

now; and of course yer couldn't help it then; and I am very sorry

for it; and I'm sure we all are, and pity yer very much. But yer

must know, Work'us, yer mother was a regular right-down bad 'un.'

'What did you say?' inquired Oliver, looking up very quickly.

'A regular right-down bad 'un, Work'us,' replied Noah, coolly.

'And it's a great deal better, Work'us, that she died when she

did, or else she'd have been hard labouring in Bridewell, or

transported, or hung; which is more likely than either, isn't

it?'

Crimson with fury, Oliver started up; overthrew the chair and

table; seized Noah by the throat; shook him, in the violence of

his rage, till his teeth chattered in his head; and collecting

his whole force into one heavy blow, felled him to the ground.

A minute ago, the boy had looked the quiet child, mild, dejected

creature that harsh treatment had made him. But his spirit was

roused at last; the cruel insult to his dead mother had set his

blood on fire. His breast heaved; his attitude was erect; his

eye bright and vivid; his whole person changed, as he stood

glaring over the cowardly tormentor who now lay crouching at his

feet; and defied him with an energy he had never known before.

'He'll murder me!' blubbered Noah. 'Charlotte! missis! Here's

the new boy a murdering of me! Help! help! Oliver's gone mad!

Char--lotte!'

Noah's shouts were responded to, by a loud scream from Charlotte,

and a louder from Mrs. Sowerberry; the former of whom rushed into

the kitchen by a side-door, while the latter paused on the

staircase till she was quite certain that it was consistent with

the preservation of human life, to come further down.

'Oh, you little wretch!' screamed Charlotte: seizing Oliver with

her utmost force, which was about equal to that of a moderately

strong man in particularly good training. 'Oh, you little

un-grate-ful, mur-de-rous, hor-rid villain!' And between every

syllable, Charlotte gave Oliver a blow with all her might:

accompanying it with a scream, for the benefit of society.

Charlotte's fist was by no means a light one; but, lest it should

not be effectual in calming Oliver's wrath, Mrs. Sowerberry

plunged into the kitchen, and assisted to hold him with one hand,

while she scratched his face with the other. In this favourable

position of affairs, Noah rose from the ground, and pommelled him

behind.

This was rather too violent exercise to last long. When they

were all wearied out, and could tear and beat no longer, they

dragged Oliver, struggling and shouting, but nothing daunted,

into the dust-cellar, and there locked him up. This being done,

Mrs. Sowerberry sunk into a chair, and burst into tears.

'Bless her, she's going off!' said Charlotte. 'A glass of water,

Noah, dear. Make haste!'

'Oh! Charlotte,' said Mrs. Sowerberry: speaking as well as she

could, through a deficiency of breath, and a sufficiency of cold

water, which Noah had poured over her head and shoulders. 'Oh!

Charlotte, what a mercy we have not all been murdered in our

beds!'

'Ah! mercy indeed, ma'am,' was the reply. I only hope this'll

teach master not to have any more of these dreadful creatures,

that are born to be murderers and robbers from their very cradle.

Poor Noah! He was all but killed, ma'am, when I come in.'

'Poor fellow!' said Mrs. Sowerberry: looking piteously on the

charity-boy.

Noah, whose top waistcoat-button might have been somewhere on a

level with the crown of Oliver's head, rubbed his eyes with the

inside of his wrists while this commiseration was bestowed upon

him, and performed some affecting tears and sniffs.

'What's to be done!' exclaimed Mrs. Sowerberry. 'Your master's

not at home; there's not a man in the house, and he'll kick that

door down in ten minutes.' Oliver's vigorous plunges against the

bit of timber in question, rendered this occurance highly

probable.

'Dear, dear! I don't know, ma'am,' said Charlotte, 'unless we

send for the police-officers.'

'Or the millingtary,' suggested Mr. Claypole.

'No, no,' said Mrs. Sowerberry: bethinking herself of Oliver's

old friend. 'Run to Mr. Bumble, Noah, and tell him to come here

directly, and not to lose a minute; never mind your cap! Make

haste! You can hold a knife to that black eye, as you run along.

It'll keep the swelling down.'

Noah stopped to make no reply, but started off at his fullest

speed; and very much it astonished the people who were out

walking, to see a charity-boy tearing through the streets

pell-mell, with no cap on his head, and a clasp-knife at his eye.

CHAPTER VII

OLIVER CONTINUES REFRACTORY

Noah Claypole ran along the streets at his swiftest pace, and

paused not once for breath, until he reached the workhouse-gate.

Having rested here, for a minute or so, to collect a good burst

of sobs and an imposing show of tears and terror, he knocked

loudly at the wicket; and presented such a rueful face to the

aged pauper who opened it, that even he, who saw nothing but

rueful faces about him at the best of times, started back in

astonishment.

'Why, what's the matter with the boy!' said the old pauper.

'Mr. Bumble! Mr. Bumble!' cried Noah, with well-affected dismay:

and in tones so loud and agitated, that they not only caught the

ear of Mr. Bumble himself, who happened to be hard by, but

alarmed him so much that he rushed into the yard without his

cocked hat,--which is a very curious and remarkable

circumstance: as showing that even a beadle, acted upon a sudden

and powerful impulse, may be afflicted with a momentary

visitation of loss of self-possession, and forgetfulness of

personal dignity.

'Oh, Mr. Bumble, sir!' said Noah: 'Oliver, sir,--Oliver has--'

'What? What?' interposed Mr. Bumble: with a gleam of pleasure

in his metallic eyes. 'Not run away; he hasn't run away, has he,

Noah?'

'No, sir, no. Not run away, sir, but he's turned wicious,'

replied Noah. 'He tried to murder me, sir; and then he tried to

murder Charlotte; and then missis. Oh! what dreadful pain it is!

Such agony, please, sir!' And here, Noah writhed and twisted his

body into an extensive variety of eel-like positions; thereby

giving Mr. Bumble to understand that, from the violent and

sanguinary onset of Oliver Twist, he had sustained severe

internal injury and damage, from which he was at that moment

suffering the acutest torture.

When Noah saw that the intelligence he communicated perfectly

paralysed Mr. Bumble, he imparted additional effect thereunto, by

bewailing his dreadful wounds ten times louder than before; and

when he observed a gentleman in a white waistcoat crossing the

yard, he was more tragic in his lamentations than ever: rightly

conceiving it highly expedient to attract the notice, and rouse

the indignation, of the gentleman aforesaid.

The gentleman's notice was very soon attracted; for he had not

walked three paces, when he turned angrily round, and inquired

what that young cur was howling for, and why Mr. Bumble did not

favour him with something which would render the series of

vocular exclamations so designated, an involuntary process?

'It's a poor boy from the free-school, sir,' replied Mr. Bumble,

'who has been nearly murdered--all but murdered, sir,--by young

Twist.'

'By Jove!' exclaimed the gentleman in the white waistcoat,

stopping short. 'I knew it! I felt a strange presentiment from

the very first, that that audacious young savage would come to be

hung!'

'He has likewise attempted, sir, to murder the female servant,'

said Mr. Bumble, with a face of ashy paleness.

'And his missis,' interposed Mr. Claypole.

'And his master, too, I think you said, Noah?' added Mr. Bumble.

'No! he's out, or he would have murdered him,' replied Noah. 'He

said he wanted to.'

'Ah! Said he wanted to, did he, my boy?' inquired the gentleman

in the white waistcoat.

'Yes, sir,' replied Noah. 'And please, sir, missis wants to know

whether Mr. Bumble can spare time to step up there, directly, and

flog him--'cause master's out.'

'Certainly, my boy; certainly,' said the gentleman in the white

waistcoat: smiling benignly, and patting Noah's head, which was

about three inches higher than his own. 'You're a good boy--a

very good boy. Here's a penny for you. Bumble, just step up to

Sowerberry's with your cane, and see what's best to be done.

Don't spare him, Bumble.'

'No, I will not, sir,' replied the beadle. And the cocked hat

and cane having been, by this time, adjusted to their owner's

satisfaction, Mr. Bumble and Noah Claypole betook themselves with

all speed to the undertaker's shop.

Here the position of affairs had not at all improved. Sowerberry

had not yet returned, and Oliver continued to kick, with

undiminished vigour, at the cellar-door. The accounts of his

ferocity as related by Mrs. Sowerberry and Charlotte, were of so

startling a nature, that Mr. Bumble judged it prudent to parley,

before opening the door. With this view he gave a kick at the

outside, by way of prelude; and, then, applying his mouth to the

keyhole, said, in a deep and impressive tone:

'Oliver!'

'Come; you let me out!' replied Oliver, from the inside.

'Do you know this here voice, Oliver?' said Mr. Bumble.

'Yes,' replied Oliver.

'Ain't you afraid of it, sir? Ain't you a-trembling while I

speak, sir?' said Mr. Bumble.

'No!' replied Oliver, boldly.

An answer so different from the one he had expected to elicit,

and was in the habit of receiving, staggered Mr. Bumble not a

little. He stepped back from the keyhole; drew himself up to his

full height; and looked from one to another of the three

bystanders, in mute astonishment.

'Oh, you know, Mr. Bumble, he must be mad,' said Mrs. Sowerberry.

'No boy in half his senses could venture to speak so to you.'

'It's not Madness, ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble, after a few

moments of deep meditation. 'It's Meat.'

'What?' exclaimed Mrs. Sowerberry.

'Meat, ma'am, meat,' replied Bumble, with stern emphasis.

'You've over-fed him, ma'am. You've raised a artificial soul and

spirit in him, ma'am unbecoming a person of his condition: as the

board, Mrs. Sowerberry, who are practical philosophers, will tell

you. What have paupers to do with soul or spirit? It's quite

enough that we let 'em have live bodies. If you had kept the boy

on gruel, ma'am, this would never have happened.'

'Dear, dear!' ejaculated Mrs. Sowerberry, piously raising her

eyes to the kitchen ceiling: 'this comes of being liberal!'

The liberality of Mrs. Sowerberry to Oliver, had consisted of a

profuse bestowal upon him of all the dirty odds and ends which

nobody else would eat; so there was a great deal of meekness and

self-devotion in her voluntarily remaining under Mr. Bumble's

heavy accusation. Of which, to do her justice, she was wholly

innocent, in thought, word, or deed.

'Ah!' said Mr. Bumble, when the lady brought her eyes down to

earth again; 'the only thing that can be done now, that I know

of, is to leave him in the cellar for a day or so, till he's a

little starved down; and then to take him out, and keep him on

gruel all through the apprenticeship. He comes of a bad family.

Excitable natures, Mrs. Sowerberry! Both the nurse and doctor

said, that that mother of his made her way here, against

difficulties and pain that would have killed any well-disposed

woman, weeks before.'

At this point of Mr. Bumble's discourse, Oliver, just hearing

enough to know that some allusion was being made to his mother,

recommenced kicking, with a violence that rendered every other

sound inaudible. Sowerberry returned at this juncture. Oliver's

offence having been explained to him, with such exaggerations as

the ladies thought best calculated to rouse his ire, he unlocked

the cellar-door in a twinkling, and dragged his rebellious

apprentice out, by the collar.

Oliver's clothes had been torn in the beating he had received;

his face was bruised and scratched; and his hair scattered over

his forehead. The angry flush had not disappeared, however; and

when he was pulled out of his prison, he scowled boldly on Noah,

and looked quite undismayed.

'Now, you are a nice young fellow, ain't you?' said Sowerberry;

giving Oliver a shake, and a box on the ear.

'He called my mother names,' replied Oliver.

'Well, and what if he did, you little ungrateful wretch?' said

Mrs. Sowerberry. 'She deserved what he said, and worse.'

'She didn't' said Oliver.

'She did,' said Mrs. Sowerberry.

'It's a lie!' said Oliver.

Mrs. Sowerberry burst into a flood of tears.

This flood of tears left Mr. Sowerberry no alternative. If he

had hesitated for one instant to punish Oliver most severely, it

must be quite clear to every experienced reader that he would

have been, according to all precedents in disputes of matrimony

established, a brute, an unnatural husband, an insulting

creature, a base imitation of a man, and various other agreeable

characters too numerous for recital within the limits of this

chapter. To do him justice, he was, as far as his power went--it

was not very extensive--kindly disposed towards the boy; perhaps,

because it was his interest to be so; perhaps, because his wife

disliked him. The flood of tears, however, left him no resource;

so he at once gave him a drubbing, which satisfied even Mrs.

Sowerberry herself, and rendered Mr. Bumble's subsequent

application of the parochial cane, rather unnecessary. For the

rest of the day, he was shut up in the back kitchen, in company

with a pump and a slice of bread; and at night, Mrs. Sowerberry,

after making various remarks outside the door, by no means

complimentary to the memory of his mother, looked into the room,

and, amidst the jeers and pointings of Noah and Charlotte,

ordered him upstairs to his dismal bed.

It was not until he was left alone in the silence and stillness

of the gloomy workshop of the undertaker, that Oliver gave way to

the feelings which the day's treatment may be supposed likely to

have awakened in a mere child. He had listened to their taunts

with a look of contempt; he had borne the lash without a cry:

for he felt that pride swelling in his heart which would have

kept down a shriek to the last, though they had roasted him

alive. But now, when there were none to see or hear him, he fell

upon his knees on the floor; and, hiding his face in his hands,

wept such tears as, God send for the credit of our nature, few so

young may ever have cause to pour out before him!

For a long time, Oliver remained motionless in this attitude. The

candle was burning low in the socket when he rose to his feet.

Having gazed cautiously round him, and listened intently, he

gently undid the fastenings of the door, and looked abroad.

It was a cold, dark night. The stars seemed, to the boy's eyes,

farther from the earth than he had ever seen them before; there

was no wind; and the sombre shadows thrown by the trees upon the

ground, looked sepulchral and death-like, from being so still.

He softly reclosed the door. Having availed himself of the

expiring light of the candle to tie up in a handkerchief the few

articles of wearing apparel he had, sat himself down upon a

bench, to wait for morning.

With the first ray of light that struggled through the crevices

in the shutters, Oliver arose, and again unbarred the door. One

timid look around--one moment's pause of hesitation--he had

closed it behind him, and was in the open street.

He looked to the right and to the left, uncertain whither to fly.

He remembered to have seen the waggons, as they went out, toiling

up the hill. He took the same route; and arriving at a footpath

across the fields: which he knew, after some distance, led out

again into the road; struck into it, and walked quickly on.

Along this same footpath, Oliver well-remembered he had trotted

beside Mr. Bumble, when he first carried him to the workhouse

from the farm. His way lay directly in front of the cottage.

His heart beat quickly when he bethought himself of this; and he

half resolved to turn back. He had come a long way though, and

should lose a great deal of time by doing so. Besides, it was so

early that there was very little fear of his being seen; so he

walked on.

He reached the house. There was no appearance of its inmates

stirring at that early hour. Oliver stopped, and peeped into the

garden. A child was weeding one of the little beds; as he

stopped, he raised his pale face and disclosed the features of

one of his former companions. Oliver felt glad to see him,

before he went; for, though younger than himself, he had been his

little friend and playmate. They had been beaten, and starved,

and shut up together, many and many a time.

'Hush, Dick!' said Oliver, as the boy ran to the gate, and thrust

his thin arm between the rails to greet him. 'Is any one up?'

'Nobody but me,' replied the child.

'You musn't say you saw me, Dick,' said Oliver. 'I am running

away. They beat and ill-use me, Dick; and I am going to seek my

fortune, some long way off. I don't know where. How pale you

are!'

'I heard the doctor tell them I was dying,' replied the child

with a faint smile. 'I am very glad to see you, dear; but don't

stop, don't stop!'

'Yes, yes, I will, to say good-b'ye to you,' replied Oliver. 'I

shall see you again, Dick. I know I shall! You will be well and

happy!'

'I hope so,' replied the child. 'After I am dead, but not

before. I know the doctor must be right, Oliver, because I dream

so much of Heaven, and Angels, and kind faces that I never see

when I am awake. Kiss me,' said the child, climbing up the low

gate, and flinging his little arms round Oliver's neck.

'Good-b'ye, dear! God bless you!'

The blessing was from a young child's lips, but it was the first

that Oliver had ever heard invoked upon his head; and through the

struggles and sufferings, and troubles and changes, of his after

life, he never once forgot it.

CHAPTER VIII

OLIVER WALKS TO LONDON. HE ENCOUNTERS ON THE ROAD A STRANGE SORT

OF YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Oliver reached the stile at which the by-path terminated; and

once more gained the high-road. It was eight o'clock now. Though

he was nearly five miles away from the town, he ran, and hid

behind the hedges, by turns, till noon: fearing that he might be

pursued and overtaken. Then he sat down to rest by the side of

the milestone, and began to think, for the first time, where he

had better go and try to live.

The stone by which he was seated, bore, in large characters, an

intimation that it was just seventy miles from that spot to

London. The name awakened a new train of ideas in the boy's mind.

London!--that great place!--nobody--not even Mr. Bumble--could

ever find him there! He had often heard the old men in the

workhouse, too, say that no lad of spirit need want in London;

and that there were ways of living in that vast city, which those

who had been bred up in country parts had no idea of. It was the

very place for a homeless boy, who must die in the streets unless

some one helped him. As these things passed through his thoughts,

he jumped upon his feet, and again walked forward.

He had diminished the distance between himself and London by full

four miles more, before he recollected how much he must undergo

ere he could hope to reach his place of destination. As this

consideration forced itself upon him, he slackened his pace a

little, and meditated upon his means of getting there. He had a

crust of bread, a coarse shirt, and two pairs of stockings, in

his bundle. He had a penny too--a gift of Sowerberry's after

some funeral in which he had acquitted himself more than

ordinarily well--in his pocket. 'A clean shirt,' thought Oliver,

'is a very comfortable thing; and so are two pairs of darned

stockings; and so is a penny; but they are small helps to a

sixty-five miles' walk in winter time.' But Oliver's thoughts,

like those of most other people, although they were extremely

ready and active to point out his difficulties, were wholly at a

loss to suggest any feasible mode of surmounting them; so, after

a good deal of thinking to no particular purpose, he changed his

little bundle over to the other shoulder, and trudged on.

Oliver walked twenty miles that day; and all that time tasted

nothing but the crust of dry bread, and a few draughts of water,

which he begged at the cottage-doors by the road-side. When the

night came, he turned into a meadow; and, creeping close under a

hay-rick, determined to lie there, till morning. He felt

frightened at first, for the wind moaned dismally over the empty

fields: and he was cold and hungry, and more alone than he had

ever felt before. Being very tired with his walk, however, he

soon fell asleep and forgot his troubles.

He felt cold and stiff, when he got up next morning, and so

hungry that he was obliged to exchange the penny for a small

loaf, in the very first village through which he passed. He had

walked no more than twelve miles, when night closed in again.

His feet were sore, and his legs so weak that they trembled

beneath him. Another night passed in the bleak damp air, made

him worse; when he set forward on his journey next morning he

could hardly crawl along.

He waited at the bottom of a steep hill till a stage-coach came

up, and then begged of the outside passengers; but there were

very few who took any notice of him: and even those told him to

wait till they got to the top of the hill, and then let them see

how far he could run for a halfpenny. Poor Oliver tried to keep

up with the coach a little way, but was unable to do it, by

reason of his fatigue and sore feet. When the outsides saw this,

they put their halfpence back into their pockets again, declaring

that he was an idle young dog, and didn't deserve anything; and

the coach rattled away and left only a cloud of dust behind.

In some villages, large painted boards were fixed up: warning all

persons who begged within the district, that they would be sent

to jail. This frightened Oliver very much, and made him glad to

get out of those villages with all possible expedition. In

others, he would stand about the inn-yards, and look mournfully

at every one who passed: a proceeding which generally terminated

in the landlady's ordering one of the post-boys who were lounging

about, to drive that strange boy out of the place, for she was

sure he had come to steal something. If he begged at a farmer's

house, ten to one but they threatened to set the dog on him; and

when he showed his nose in a shop, they talked about the

beadle--which brought Oliver's heart into his mouth,--very often

the only thing he had there, for many hours together.

In fact, if it had not been for a good-hearted turnpike-man, and

a benevolent old lady, Oliver's troubles would have been

shortened by the very same process which had put an end to his

mother's; in other words, he would most assuredly have fallen

dead upon the king's highway. But the turnpike-man gave him a

meal of bread and cheese; and the old lady, who had a shipwrecked

grandson wandering barefoot in some distant part of the earth,

took pity upon the poor orphan, and gave him what little she

could afford--and more--with such kind and gentle words, and such

tears of sympathy and compassion, that they sank deeper into

Oliver's soul, than all the sufferings he had ever undergone.

Early on the seventh morning after he had left his native place,

Oliver limped slowly into the little town of Barnet. The

window-shutters were closed; the street was empty; not a soul had

awakened to the business of the day. The sun was rising in all

its splendid beauty; but the light only served to show the boy

his own lonesomeness and desolation, as he sat, with bleeding

feet and covered with dust, upon a door-step.

By degrees, the shutters were opened; the window-blinds were

drawn up; and people began passing to and fro. Some few stopped

to gaze at Oliver for a moment or two, or turned round to stare

at him as they hurried by; but none relieved him, or troubled

themselves to inquire how he came there. He had no heart to beg.

And there he sat.

He had been crouching on the step for some time: wondering at

the great number of public-houses (every other house in Barnet

was a tavern, large or small), gazing listlessly at the coaches

as they passed through, and thinking how strange it seemed that

they could do, with ease, in a few hours, what it had taken him a

whole week of courage and determination beyond his years to

accomplish: when he was roused by observing that a boy, who had

passed him carelessly some minutes before, had returned, and was

now surveying him most earnestly from the opposite side of the

way. He took little heed of this at first; but the boy remained

in the same attitude of close observation so long, that Oliver

raised his head, and returned his steady look. Upon this, the

boy crossed over; and walking close up to Oliver, said,

'Hullo, my covey! What's the row?'

The boy who addressed this inquiry to the young wayfarer, was

about his own age: but one of the queerest looking boys that

Oliver had even seen. He was a snub-nosed, flat-browed,

common-faced boy enough; and as dirty a juvenile as one would

wish to see; but he had about him all the airs and manners of a

man. He was short of his age: with rather bow-legs, and little,

sharp, ugly eyes. His hat was stuck on the top of his head so

lightly, that it threatened to fall off every moment--and would

have done so, very often, if the wearer had not had a knack of

every now and then giving his head a sudden twitch, which brought

it back to its old place again. He wore a man's coat, which

reached nearly to his heels. He had turned the cuffs back,

half-way up his arm, to get his hands out of the sleeves:

apparently with the ultimate view of thrusting them into the

pockets of his corduroy trousers; for there he kept them. He

was, altogether, as roystering and swaggering a young gentleman

as ever stood four feet six, or something less, in the bluchers.

'Hullo, my covey! What's the row?' said this strange young

gentleman to Oliver.

'I am very hungry and tired,' replied Oliver: the tears standing

in his eyes as he spoke. 'I have walked a long way. I have been

walking these seven days.'

'Walking for sivin days!' said the young gentleman. 'Oh, I see.

Beak's order, eh? But,' he added, noticing Oliver's look of

surprise, 'I suppose you don't know what a beak is, my flash

com-pan-i-on.'

Oliver mildly replied, that he had always heard a bird's mouth

described by the term in question.

'My eyes, how green!' exclaimed the young gentleman. 'Why, a

beak's a madgst'rate; and when you walk by a beak's order, it's

not straight forerd, but always agoing up, and niver a coming

down agin. Was you never on the mill?'

'What mill?' inquired Oliver.

'What mill! Why, \_the\_ mill--the mill as takes up so little room

that it'll work inside a Stone Jug; and always goes better when

the wind's low with people, than when it's high; acos then they

can't get workmen. But come,' said the young gentleman; 'you

want grub, and you shall have it. I'm at low-water-mark

myself--only one bob and a magpie; but, as far as it goes, I'll

fork out and stump. Up with you on your pins. There! Now then!

'Morrice!'

Assisting Oliver to rise, the young gentleman took him to an

adjacent chandler's shop, where he purchased a sufficiency of

ready-dressed ham and a half-quartern loaf, or, as he himself

expressed it, 'a fourpenny bran!' the ham being kept clean and

preserved from dust, by the ingenious expedient of making a hole

in the loaf by pulling out a portion of the crumb, and stuffing

it therein. Taking the bread under his arm, the young gentlman

turned into a small public-house, and led the way to a tap-room

in the rear of the premises. Here, a pot of beer was brought in,

by direction of the mysterious youth; and Oliver, falling to, at

his new friend's bidding, made a long and hearty meal, during the

progress of which the strange boy eyed him from time to time with

great attention.

'Going to London?' said the strange boy, when Oliver had at

length concluded.

'Yes.'

'Got any lodgings?'

'No.'

'Money?'

'No.'

The strange boy whistled; and put his arms into his pockets, as

far as the big coat-sleeves would let them go.

'Do you live in London?' inquired Oliver.

'Yes. I do, when I'm at home,' replied the boy. 'I suppose you

want some place to sleep in to-night, don't you?'

'I do, indeed,' answered Oliver. 'I have not slept under a roof

since I left the country.'

'Don't fret your eyelids on that score,' said the young

gentleman. 'I've got to be in London to-night; and I know a

'spectable old gentleman as lives there, wot'll give you lodgings

for nothink, and never ask for the change--that is, if any

genelman he knows interduces you. And don't he know me? Oh, no!

Not in the least! By no means. Certainly not!'

The young gentleman smiled, as if to intimate that the latter

fragments of discourse were playfully ironical; and finished the

beer as he did so.

This unexpected offer of shelter was too tempting to be resisted;

especially as it was immediately followed up, by the assurance

that the old gentleman referred to, would doubtless provide

Oliver with a comfortable place, without loss of time. This led

to a more friendly and confidential dialogue; from which Oliver

discovered that his friend's name was Jack Dawkins, and that he

was a peculiar pet and protege of the elderly gentleman before

mentioned.

Mr. Dawkin's appearance did not say a vast deal in favour of the

comforts which his patron's interest obtained for those whom he

took under his protection; but, as he had a rather flightly and

dissolute mode of conversing, and furthermore avowed that among

his intimate friends he was better known by the sobriquet of 'The

Artful Dodger,' Oliver concluded that, being of a dissipated and

careless turn, the moral precepts of his benefactor had hitherto

been thrown away upon him. Under this impression, he secretly

resolved to cultivate the good opinion of the old gentleman as

quickly as possible; and, if he found the Dodger incorrigible, as

he more than half suspected he should, to decline the honour of

his farther acquaintance.

As John Dawkins objected to their entering London before

nightfall, it was nearly eleven o'clock when they reached the

turnpike at Islington. They crossed from the Angel into St.

John's Road; struck down the small street which terminates at

Sadler's Wells Theatre; through Exmouth Street and Coppice Row;

down the little court by the side of the workhouse; across the

classic ground which once bore the name of Hockley-in-the-Hole;

thence into Little Saffron Hill; and so into Saffron Hill the

Great: along which the Dodger scudded at a rapid pace, directing

Oliver to follow close at his heels.

Although Oliver had enough to occupy his attention in keeping

sight of his leader, he could not help bestowing a few hasty

glances on either side of the way, as he passed along. A dirtier

or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very

narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours.

There were a good many small shops; but the only stock in trade

appeared to be heaps of children, who, even at that time of

night, were crawling in and out at the doors, or screaming from

the inside. The sole places that seemed to prosper amid the

general blight of the place, were the public-houses; and in them,

the lowest orders of Irish were wrangling with might and main.

Covered ways and yards, which here and there diverged from the

main street, disclosed little knots of houses, where drunken men

and women were positively wallowing in filth; and from several of

the door-ways, great ill-looking fellows were cautiously

emerging, bound, to all appearance, on no very well-disposed or

harmless errands.

Oliver was just considering whether he hadn't better run away,

when they reached the bottom of the hill. His conductor,

catching him by the arm, pushed open the door of a house near

Field Lane; and drawing him into the passage, closed it behind

them.

'Now, then!' cried a voice from below, in reply to a whistle from

the Dodger.

'Plummy and slam!' was the reply.

This seemed to be some watchword or signal that all was right;

for the light of a feeble candle gleamed on the wall at the

remote end of the passage; and a man's face peeped out, from

where a balustrade of the old kitchen staircase had been broken

away.

'There's two on you,' said the man, thrusting the candle farther

out, and shielding his eyes with his hand. 'Who's the t'other

one?'

'A new pal,' replied Jack Dawkins, pulling Oliver forward.

'Where did he come from?'

'Greenland. Is Fagin upstairs?'

'Yes, he's a sortin' the wipes. Up with you!' The candle was

drawn back, and the face disappeared.

Oliver, groping his way with one hand, and having the other

firmly grasped by his companion, ascended with much difficulty

the dark and broken stairs: which his conductor mounted with an

ease and expedition that showed he was well acquainted with them.

He threw open the door of a back-room, and drew Oliver in after

him.

The walls and ceiling of the room were perfectly black with age

and dirt. There was a deal table before the fire: upon which

were a candle, stuck in a ginger-beer bottle, two or three pewter

pots, a loaf and butter, and a plate. In a frying-pan, which was

on the fire, and which was secured to the mantelshelf by a

string, some sausages were cooking; and standing over them, with

a toasting-fork in his hand, was a very old shrivelled Jew, whose

villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity

of matted red hair. He was dressed in a greasy flannel gown, with

his throat bare; and seemed to be dividing his attention between

the frying-pan and the clothes-horse, over which a great number

of silk handkerchiefs were hanging. Several rough beds made of

old sacks, were huddled side by side on the floor. Seated round

the table were four or five boys, none older than the Dodger,

smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits with the air of

middle-aged men. These all crowded about their associate as he

whispered a few words to the Jew; and then turned round and

grinned at Oliver. So did the Jew himself, toasting-fork in

hand.

'This is him, Fagin,' said Jack Dawkins;'my friend Oliver

Twist.'

The Jew grinned; and, making a low obeisance to Oliver, took him

by the hand, and hoped he should have the honour of his intimate

acquaintance. Upon this, the young gentleman with the pipes came

round him, and shook both his hands very hard--especially the one

in which he held his little bundle. One young gentleman was very

anxious to hang up his cap for him; and another was so obliging

as to put his hands in his pockets, in order that, as he was very

tired, he might not have the trouble of emptying them, himself,

when he went to bed. These civilities would probably be extended

much farther, but for a liberal exercise of the Jew's

toasting-fork on the heads and shoulders of the affectionate

youths who offered them.

'We are very glad to see you, Oliver, very,' said the Jew.

'Dodger, take off the sausages; and draw a tub near the fire for

Oliver. Ah, you're a-staring at the pocket-handkerchiefs! eh, my

dear. There are a good many of 'em, ain't there? We've just

looked 'em out, ready for the wash; that's all, Oliver; that's

all. Ha! ha! ha!'

The latter part of this speech, was hailed by a boisterous shout

from all the hopeful pupils of the merry old gentleman. In the

midst of which they went to supper.

Oliver ate his share, and the Jew then mixed him a glass of hot

gin-and-water: telling him he must drink it off directly,

because another gentleman wanted the tumbler. Oliver did as he

was desired. Immediately afterwards he felt himself gently

lifted on to one of the sacks; and then he sunk into a deep

sleep.

CHAPTER IX

CONTAINING FURTHER PARTICULARS CONCERNING THE PLEASANT OLD

GENTLEMAN, AND HIS HOPEFUL PUPILS

It was late next morning when Oliver awoke, from a sound, long

sleep. There was no other person in the room but the old Jew,

who was boiling some coffee in a saucepan for breakfast, and

whistling softly to himself as he stirred it round and round,

with an iron spoon. He would stop every now and then to listen

when there was the least noise below: and when he had satisfied

himself, he would go on whistling and stirring again, as before.

Although Oliver had roused himself from sleep, he was not

thoroughly awake. There is a drowsy state, between sleeping and

waking, when you dream more in five minutes with your eyes half

open, and yourself half conscious of everything that is passing

around you, than you would in five nights with your eyes fast

closed, and your senses wrapt in perfect unconsciousness. At

such time, a mortal knows just enough of what his mind is doing,

to form some glimmering conception of its mighty powers, its

bounding from earth and spurning time and space, when freed from

the restraint of its corporeal associate.

Oliver was precisely in this condition. He saw the Jew with his

half-closed eyes; heard his low whistling; and recognised the

sound of the spoon grating against the saucepan's sides: and yet

the self-same senses were mentally engaged, at the same time, in

busy action with almost everybody he had ever known.

When the coffee was done, the Jew drew the saucepan to the hob.

Standing, then in an irresolute attitude for a few minutes, as if

he did not well know how to employ himself, he turned round and

looked at Oliver, and called him by his name. He did not answer,

and was to all appearances asleep.

After satisfying himself upon this head, the Jew stepped gently

to the door: which he fastened. He then drew forth: as it

seemed to Oliver, from some trap in the floor: a small box,

which he placed carefully on the table. His eyes glistened as he

raised the lid, and looked in. Dragging an old chair to the

table, he sat down; and took from it a magnificent gold watch,

sparkling with jewels.

'Aha!' said the Jew, shrugging up his shoulders, and distorting

every feature with a hideous grin. 'Clever dogs! Clever dogs!

Staunch to the last! Never told the old parson where they were.

Never poached upon old Fagin! And why should they? It wouldn't

have loosened the knot, or kept the drop up, a minute longer.

No, no, no! Fine fellows! Fine fellows!'

With these, and other muttered reflections of the like nature,

the Jew once more deposited the watch in its place of safety. At

least half a dozen more were severally drawn forth from the same

box, and surveyed with equal pleasure; besides rings, brooches,

bracelets, and other articles of jewellery, of such magnificent

materials, and costly workmanship, that Oliver had no idea, even

of their names.

Having replaced these trinkets, the Jew took out another: so

small that it lay in the palm of his hand. There seemed to be

some very minute inscription on it; for the Jew laid it flat upon

the table, and shading it with his hand, pored over it, long and

earnestly. At length he put it down, as if despairing of

success; and, leaning back in his chair, muttered:

'What a fine thing capital punishment is! Dead men never repent;

dead men never bring awkward stories to light. Ah, it's a fine

thing for the trade! Five of 'em strung up in a row, and none

left to play booty, or turn white-livered!'

As the Jew uttered these words, his bright dark eyes, which had

been staring vacantly before him, fell on Oliver's face; the

boy's eyes were fixed on his in mute curiousity; and although the

recognition was only for an instant--for the briefest space of

time that can possibly be conceived--it was enough to show the

old man that he had been observed.

He closed the lid of the box with a loud crash; and, laying his

hand on a bread knife which was on the table, started furiously

up. He trembled very much though; for, even in his terror,

Oliver could see that the knife quivered in the air.

'What's that?' said the Jew. 'What do you watch me for? Why are

you awake? What have you seen? Speak out, boy! Quick--quick!

for your life.

'I wasn't able to sleep any longer, sir,' replied Oliver, meekly.

'I am very sorry if I have disturbed you, sir.'

'You were not awake an hour ago?' said the Jew, scowling fiercely

on the boy.

'No! No, indeed!' replied Oliver.

'Are you sure?' cried the Jew: with a still fiercer look than

before: and a threatening attitude.

'Upon my word I was not, sir,' replied Oliver, earnestly. 'I was

not, indeed, sir.'

'Tush, tush, my dear!' said the Jew, abruptly resuming his old

manner, and playing with the knife a little, before he laid it

down; as if to induce the belief that he had caught it up, in

mere sport. 'Of course I know that, my dear. I only tried to

frighten you. You're a brave boy. Ha! ha! you're a brave boy,

Oliver.' The Jew rubbed his hands with a chuckle, but glanced

uneasily at the box, notwithstanding.

'Did you see any of these pretty things, my dear?' said the Jew,

laying his hand upon it after a short pause.

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver.

'Ah!' said the Jew, turning rather pale. 'They--they're mine,

Oliver; my little property. All I have to live upon, in my old

age. The folks call me a miser, my dear. Only a miser; that's

all.'

Oliver thought the old gentleman must be a decided miser to live

in such a dirty place, with so many watches; but, thinking that

perhaps his fondness for the Dodger and the other boys, cost him

a good deal of money, he only cast a deferential look at the Jew,

and asked if he might get up.

'Certainly, my dear, certainly,' replied the old gentleman.

'Stay. There's a pitcher of water in the corner by the door.

Bring it here; and I'll give you a basin to wash in, my dear.'

Oliver got up; walked across the room; and stooped for an instant

to raise the pitcher. When he turned his head, the box was gone.

He had scarcely washed himself, and made everything tidy, by

emptying the basin out of the window, agreeably to the Jew's

directions, when the Dodger returned: accompanied by a very

sprightly young friend, whom Oliver had seen smoking on the

previous night, and who was now formally introduced to him as

Charley Bates. The four sat down, to breakfast, on the coffee,

and some hot rolls and ham which the Dodger had brought home in

the crown of his hat.

'Well,' said the Jew, glancing slyly at Oliver, and addressing

himself to the Dodger, 'I hope you've been at work this morning,

my dears?'

'Hard,' replied the Dodger.

'As nails,' added Charley Bates.

'Good boys, good boys!' said the Jew. 'What have you got,

Dodger?'

'A couple of pocket-books,' replied that young gentlman.

'Lined?' inquired the Jew, with eagerness.

'Pretty well,' replied the Dodger, producing two pocket-books;

one green, and the other red.

'Not so heavy as they might be,' said the Jew, after looking at

the insides carefully; 'but very neat and nicely made. Ingenious

workman, ain't he, Oliver?'

'Very indeed, sir,' said Oliver. At which Mr. Charles Bates

laughed uproariously; very much to the amazement of Oliver, who

saw nothing to laugh at, in anything that had passed.

'And what have you got, my dear?' said Fagin to Charley Bates.

'Wipes,' replied Master Bates; at the same time producing four

pocket-handkerchiefs.

'Well,' said the Jew, inspecting them closely; 'they're very good

ones, very. You haven't marked them well, though, Charley; so

the marks shall be picked out with a needle, and we'll teach

Oliver how to do it. Shall us, Oliver, eh? Ha! ha! ha!'

'If you please, sir,' said Oliver.

'You'd like to be able to make pocket-handkerchiefs as easy as

Charley Bates, wouldn't you, my dear?' said the Jew.

'Very much, indeed, if you'll teach me, sir,' replied Oliver.

Master Bates saw something so exquisitely ludicrous in this

reply, that he burst into another laugh; which laugh, meeting the

coffee he was drinking, and carrying it down some wrong channel,

very nearly terminated in his premature suffocation.

'He is so jolly green!' said Charley when he recovered, as an

apology to the company for his unpolite behaviour.

The Dodger said nothing, but he smoothed Oliver's hair over his

eyes, and said he'd know better, by and by; upon which the old

gentleman, observing Oliver's colour mounting, changed the

subject by asking whether there had been much of a crowd at the

execution that morning? This made him wonder more and more; for

it was plain from the replies of the two boys that they had both

been there; and Oliver naturally wondered how they could possibly

have found time to be so very industrious.

When the breakfast was cleared away; the merry old gentlman and

the two boys played at a very curious and uncommon game, which

was performed in this way. The merry old gentleman, placing a

snuff-box in one pocket of his trousers, a note-case in the

other, and a watch in his waistcoat pocket, with a guard-chain

round his neck, and sticking a mock diamond pin in his shirt:

buttoned his coat tight round him, and putting his spectacle-case

and handkerchief in his pockets, trotted up and down the room

with a stick, in imitation of the manner in which old gentlemen

walk about the streets any hour in the day. Sometimes he stopped

at the fire-place, and sometimes at the door, making believe that

he was staring with all his might into shop-windows. At such

times, he would look constantly round him, for fear of thieves,

and would keep slapping all his pockets in turn, to see that he

hadn't lost anything, in such a very funny and natural manner,

that Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face. All this

time, the two boys followed him closely about: getting out of

his sight, so nimbly, every time he turned round, that it was

impossible to follow their motions. At last, the Dodger trod

upon his toes, or ran upon his boot accidently, while Charley

Bates stumbled up against him behind; and in that one moment they

took from him, with the most extraordinary rapidity, snuff-box,

note-case, watch-guard, chain, shirt-pin, pocket-handkerchief,

even the spectacle-case. If the old gentlman felt a hand in any

one of his pockets, he cried out where it was; and then the game

began all over again.

When this game had been played a great many times, a couple of

young ladies called to see the young gentleman; one of whom was

named Bet, and the other Nancy. They wore a good deal of hair,

not very neatly turned up behind, and were rather untidy about

the shoes and stockings. They were not exactly pretty, perhaps;

but they had a great deal of colour in their faces, and looked

quite stout and hearty. Being remarkably free and agreeable in

their manners, Oliver thought them very nice girls indeed. As

there is no doubt they were.

The visitors stopped a long time. Spirits were produced, in

consequence of one of the young ladies complaining of a coldness

in her inside; and the conversation took a very convivial and

improving turn. At length, Charley Bates expressed his opinion

that it was time to pad the hoof. This, it occurred to Oliver,

must be French for going out; for directly afterwards, the

Dodger, and Charley, and the two young ladies, went away

together, having been kindly furnished by the amiable old Jew

with money to spend.

'There, my dear,' said Fagin. 'That's a pleasant life, isn't it?

They have gone out for the day.'

'Have they done work, sir?' inquired Oliver.

'Yes,' said the Jew; 'that is, unless they should unexpectedly

come across any, when they are out; and they won't neglect it, if

they do, my dear, depend upon it. Make 'em your models, my dear.

Make 'em your models,' tapping the fire-shovel on the hearth to

add force to his words; 'do everything they bid you, and take

their advice in all matters--especially the Dodger's, my dear.

He'll be a great man himself, and will make you one too, if you

take pattern by him.--Is my handkerchief hanging out of my

pocket, my dear?' said the Jew, stopping short.

'Yes, sir,' said Oliver.

'See if you can take it out, without my feeling it; as you saw

them do, when we were at play this morning.'

Oliver held up the bottom of the pocket with one hand, as he had

seen the Dodger hold it, and drew the handkerchief lightly out of

it with the other.

'Is it gone?' cried the Jew.

'Here it is, sir,' said Oliver, showing it in his hand.

'You're a clever boy, my dear,' said the playful old gentleman,

patting Oliver on the head approvingly. 'I never saw a sharper

lad. Here's a shilling for you. If you go on, in this way,

you'll be the greatest man of the time. And now come here, and

I'll show you how to take the marks out of the handkerchiefs.'

Oliver wondered what picking the old gentleman's pocket in play,

had to do with his chances of being a great man. But, thinking

that the Jew, being so much his senior, must know best, he

followed him quietly to the table, and was soon deeply involved

in his new study.

CHAPTER X

OLIVER BECOMES BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH THE CHARACTERS OF HIS NEW

ASSOCIATES; AND PURCHASES EXPERIENCE AT A HIGH PRICE. BEING A

SHORT, BUT VERY IMPORTANT CHAPTER, IN THIS HISTORY

For many days, Oliver remained in the Jew's room, picking the

marks out of the pocket-handkerchief, (of which a great number

were brought home,) and sometimes taking part in the game already

described: which the two boys and the Jew played, regularly,

every morning. At length, he began to languish for fresh air, and

took many occasions of earnestly entreating the old gentleman to

allow him to go out to work with his two companions.

Oliver was rendered the more anxious to be actively employed, by

what he had seen of the stern morality of the old gentleman's

character. Whenever the Dodger or Charley Bates came home at

night, empty-handed, he would expatiate with great vehemence on

the misery of idle and lazy habits; and would enforce upon them

the necessity of an active life, by sending them supperless to

bed. On one occasion, indeed, he even went so far as to knock

them both down a flight of stairs; but this was carrying out his

virtuous precepts to an unusual extent.

At length, one morning, Oliver obtained the permission he had so

eagerly sought. There had been no handkerchiefs to work upon,

for two or three days, and the dinners had been rather meagre.

Perhaps these were reasons for the old gentleman's giving his

assent; but, whether they were or no, he told Oliver he might go,

and placed him under the joint guardianship of Charley Bates, and

his friend the Dodger.

The three boys sallied out; the Dodger with his coat-sleeves

tucked up, and his hat cocked, as usual; Master Bates sauntering

along with his hands in his pockets; and Oliver between them,

wondering where they were going, and what branch of manufacture

he would be instructed in, first.

The pace at which they went, was such a very lazy, ill-looking

saunter, that Oliver soon began to think his companions were

going to deceive the old gentleman, by not going to work at all.

The Dodger had a vicious propensity, too, of pulling the caps

from the heads of small boys and tossing them down areas; while

Charley Bates exhibited some very loose notions concerning the

rights of property, by pilfering divers apples and onions from

the stalls at the kennel sides, and thrusting them into pockets

which were so surprisingly capacious, that they seemed to

undermine his whole suit of clothes in every direction. These

things looked so bad, that Oliver was on the point of declaring

his intention of seeking his way back, in the best way he could;

when his thoughts were suddenly directed into another channel, by

a very mysterious change of behaviour on the part of the Dodger.

They were just emerging from a narrow court not far from the open

square in Clerkenwell, which is yet called, by some strange

perversion of terms, 'The Green': when the Dodger made a sudden

stop; and, laying his finger on his lip, drew his companions back

again, with the greatest caution and circumspection.

'What's the matter?' demanded Oliver.

'Hush!' replied the Dodger. 'Do you see that old cove at the

book-stall?'

'The old gentleman over the way?' said Oliver. 'Yes, I see him.'

'He'll do,' said the Doger.

'A prime plant,' observed Master Charley Bates.

Oliver looked from one to the other, with the greatest surprise;

but he was not permitted to make any inquiries; for the two boys

walked stealthily across the road, and slunk close behind the old

gentleman towards whom his attention had been directed. Oliver

walked a few paces after them; and, not knowing whether to

advance or retire, stood looking on in silent amazement.

The old gentleman was a very respectable-looking personage, with

a powdered head and gold spectacles. He was dressed in a

bottle-green coat with a black velvet collar; wore white

trousers; and carried a smart bamboo cane under his arm. He had

taken up a book from the stall, and there he stood, reading away,

as hard as if he were in his elbow-chair, in his own study. It

is very possible that he fancied himself there, indeed; for it

was plain, from his abstraction, that he saw not the book-stall,

nor the street, nor the boys, nor, in short, anything but the

book itself: which he was reading straight through: turning

over the leaf when he got to the bottom of a page, beginning at

the top line of the next one, and going regularly on, with the

greatest interest and eagerness.

What was Oliver's horror and alarm as he stood a few paces off,

looking on with his eyelids as wide open as they would possibly

go, to see the Dodger plunge his hand into the old gentleman's

pocket, and draw from thence a handkerchief! To see him hand the

same to Charley Bates; and finally to behold them, both running

away round the corner at full speed!

In an instant the whole mystery of the hankerchiefs, and the

watches, and the jewels, and the Jew, rushed upon the boy's mind.

He stood, for a moment, with the blood so tingling through all

his veins from terror, that he felt as if he were in a burning

fire; then, confused and frightened, he took to his heels; and,

not knowing what he did, made off as fast as he could lay his

feet to the ground.

This was all done in a minute's space. In the very instant when

Oliver began to run, the old gentleman, putting his hand to his

pocket, and missing his handkerchief, turned sharp round. Seeing

the boy scudding away at such a rapid pace, he very naturally

concluded him to be the depredator; and shouting 'Stop thief!'

with all his might, made off after him, book in hand.

But the old gentleman was not the only person who raised the

hue-and-cry. The Dodger and Master Bates, unwilling to attract

public attention by running down the open street, had merely

retired into the very first doorway round the corner. They no

sooner heard the cry, and saw Oliver running, than, guessing

exactly how the matter stood, they issued forth with great

promptitude; and, shouting 'Stop thief!' too, joined in the

pursuit like good citizens.

Although Oliver had been brought up by philosophers, he was not

theoretically acquainted with the beautiful axiom that

self-preservation is the first law of nature. If he had been,

perhaps he would have been prepared for this. Not being

prepared, however, it alarmed him the more; so away he went like

the wind, with the old gentleman and the two boys roaring and

shouting behind him.

'Stop thief! Stop thief!' There is a magic in the sound. The

tradesman leaves his counter, and the car-man his waggon; the

butcher throws down his tray; the baker his basket; the milkman

his pail; the errand-boy his parcels; the school-boy his marbles;

the paviour his pickaxe; the child his battledore. Away they

run, pell-mell, helter-skelter, slap-dash: tearing, yelling,

screaming, knocking down the passengers as they turn the corners,

rousing up the dogs, and astonishing the fowls: and streets,

squares, and courts, re-echo with the sound.

'Stop thief! Stop thief!' The cry is taken up by a hundred

voices, and the crowd accumulate at every turning. Away they

fly, splashing through the mud, and rattling along the pavements:

up go the windows, out run the people, onward bear the mob, a

whole audience desert Punch in the very thickest of the plot,

and, joining the rushing throng, swell the shout, and lend fresh

vigour to the cry, 'Stop thief! Stop thief!'

'Stop thief! Stop thief!' There is a passion FOR \_hunting\_

\_something\_ deeply implanted in the human breast. One wretched

breathless child, panting with exhaustion; terror in his looks;

agony in his eyes; large drops of perspiration streaming down

his face; strains every nerve to make head upon his pursuers; and

as they follow on his track, and gain upon him every instant,

they hail his decreasing strength with joy. 'Stop thief!' Ay,

stop him for God's sake, were it only in mercy!

Stopped at last! A clever blow. He is down upon the pavement;

and the crowd eagerly gather round him: each new comer, jostling

and struggling with the others to catch a glimpse. 'Stand

aside!' 'Give him a little air!' 'Nonsense! he don't deserve

it.' 'Where's the gentleman?' 'Here his is, coming down the

street.' 'Make room there for the gentleman!' 'Is this the boy,

sir!' 'Yes.'

Oliver lay, covered with mud and dust, and bleeding from the

mouth, looking wildly round upon the heap of faces that

surrounded him, when the old gentleman was officiously dragged

and pushed into the circle by the foremost of the pursuers.

'Yes,' said the gentleman, 'I am afraid it is the boy.'

'Afraid!' murmured the crowd. 'That's a good 'un!'

'Poor fellow!' said the gentleman, 'he has hurt himself.'

'\_I\_ did that, sir,' said a great lubberly fellow, stepping

forward; 'and preciously I cut my knuckle agin' his mouth. I

stopped him, sir.'

The follow touched his hat with a grin, expecting something for

his pains; but, the old gentleman, eyeing him with an expression

of dislike, look anxiously round, as if he contemplated running

away himself: which it is very possible he might have attempted

to do, and thus have afforded another chase, had not a police

officer (who is generally the last person to arrive in such

cases) at that moment made his way through the crowd, and seized

Oliver by the collar.

'Come, get up,' said the man, roughly.

'It wasn't me indeed, sir. Indeed, indeed, it was two other

boys,' said Oliver, clasping his hands passionately, and looking

round. 'They are here somewhere.'

'Oh no, they ain't,' said the officer. He meant this to be

ironical, but it was true besides; for the Dodger and Charley

Bates had filed off down the first convenient court they came to.

'Come, get up!'

'Don't hurt him,' said the old gentleman, compassionately.

'Oh no, I won't hurt him,' replied the officer, tearing his

jacket half off his back, in proof thereof. 'Come, I know you;

it won't do. Will you stand upon your legs, you young devil?'

Oliver, who could hardly stand, made a shift to raise himself on

his feet, and was at once lugged along the streets by the

jacket-collar, at a rapid pace. The gentleman walked on with

them by the officer's side; and as many of the crowd as could

achieve the feat, got a little ahead, and stared back at Oliver

from time to time. The boys shouted in triumph; and on they

went.

CHAPTER XI

TREATS OF MR. FANG THE POLICE MAGISTRATE; AND FURNISHES A SLIGHT

SPECIMEN OF HIS MODE OF ADMINISTERING JUSTICE

The offence had been committed within the district, and indeed in

the immediate neighborhood of, a very notorious metropolitan

police office. The crowd had only the satisfaction of

accompanying Oliver through two or three streets, and down a

place called Mutton Hill, when he was led beneath a low archway,

and up a dirty court, into this dispensary of summary justice, by

the back way. It was a small paved yard into which they turned;

and here they encountered a stout man with a bunch of whiskers on

his face, and a bunch of keys in his hand.

'What's the matter now?' said the man carelessly.

'A young fogle-hunter,' replied the man who had Oliver in charge.

'Are you the party that's been robbed, sir?' inquired the man

with the keys.

'Yes, I am,' replied the old gentleman; 'but I am not sure that

this boy actually took the handkerchief. I--I would rather not

press the case.'

'Must go before the magistrate now, sir,' replied the man. 'His

worship will be disengaged in half a minute. Now, young

gallows!'

This was an invitation for Oliver to enter through a door which

he unlocked as he spoke, and which led into a stone cell. Here

he was searched; and nothing being found upon him, locked up.

This cell was in shape and size something like an area cellar,

only not so light. It was most intolerably dirty; for it was

Monday morning; and it had been tenanted by six drunken people,

who had been locked up, elsewhere, since Saturday night. But

this is little. In our station-houses, men and women are every

night confined on the most trivial charges--the word is worth

noting--in dungeons, compared with which, those in Newgate,

occupied by the most atrocious felons, tried, found guilty, and

under sentence of death, are palaces. Let any one who doubts

this, compare the two.

The old gentleman looked almost as rueful as Oliver when the key

grated in the lock. He turned with a sigh to the book, which had

been the innocent cause of all this disturbance.

'There is something in that boy's face,' said the old gentleman

to himself as he walked slowly away, tapping his chin with the

cover of the book, in a thoughtful manner; 'something that

touches and interests me. \_Can\_ he be innocent? He looked

like--Bye the bye,' exclaimed the old gentleman, halting very

abruptly, and staring up into the sky, 'Bless my soul!--where

have I seen something like that look before?'

After musing for some minutes, the old gentleman walked, with the

same meditative face, into a back anteroom opening from the yard;

and there, retiring into a corner, called up before his mind's

eye a vast amphitheatre of faces over which a dusky curtain had

hung for many years. 'No,' said the old gentleman, shaking his

head; 'it must be imagination.

He wandered over them again. He had called them into view, and

it was not easy to replace the shroud that had so long concealed

them. There were the faces of friends, and foes, and of many

that had been almost strangers peering intrusively from the

crowd; there were the faces of young and blooming girls that were

now old women; there were faces that the grave had changed and

closed upon, but which the mind, superior to its power, still

dressed in their old freshness and beauty, calling back the

lustre of the eyes, the brightness of the smile, the beaming of

the soul through its mask of clay, and whispering of beauty

beyond the tomb, changed but to be heightened, and taken from

earth only to be set up as a light, to shed a soft and gentle

glow upon the path to Heaven.

But the old gentleman could recall no one countenance of which

Oliver's features bore a trace. So, he heaved a sigh over the

recollections he awakened; and being, happily for himself, an

absent old gentleman, buried them again in the pages of the musty

book.

He was roused by a touch on the shoulder, and a request from the

man with the keys to follow him into the office. He closed his

book hastily; and was at once ushered into the imposing presence

of the renowned Mr. Fang.

The office was a front parlour, with a panelled wall. Mr. Fang

sat behind a bar, at the upper end; and on one side the door was

a sort of wooden pen in which poor little Oliver was already

deposited; trembling very much at the awfulness of the scene.

Mr. Fang was a lean, long-backed, stiff-necked, middle-sized man,

with no great quantity of hair, and what he had, growing on the

back and sides of his head. His face was stern, and much

flushed. If he were really not in the habit of drinking rather

more than was exactly good for him, he might have brought action

against his countenance for libel, and have recovered heavy

damages.

The old gentleman bowed respectfully; and advancing to the

magistrate's desk, said, suiting the action to the word, 'That is

my name and address, sir.' He then withdrew a pace or two; and,

with another polite and gentlemanly inclination of the head,

waited to be questioned.

Now, it so happened that Mr. Fang was at that moment perusing a

leading article in a newspaper of the morning, adverting to some

recent decision of his, and commending him, for the three hundred

and fiftieth time, to the special and particular notice of the

Secretary of State for the Home Department. He was out of

temper; and he looked up with an angry scowl.

'Who are you?' said Mr. Fang.

The old gentleman pointed, with some surprise, to his card.

'Officer!' said Mr. Fang, tossing the card contemptuously away

with the newspaper. 'Who is this fellow?'

'My name, sir,' said the old gentleman, speaking \_like\_ a

gentleman, 'my name, sir, is Brownlow. Permit me to inquire the

name of the magistrate who offers a gratuitous and unprovoked

insult to a respectable person, under the protection of the

bench.' Saying this, Mr. Brownlow looked around the office as if

in search of some person who would afford him the required

information.

'Officer!' said Mr. Fang, throwing the paper on one side, 'what's

this fellow charged with?'

'He's not charged at all, your worship,' replied the officer. 'He

appears against this boy, your worship.'

His worship knew this perfectly well; but it was a good annoyance,

and a safe one.

'Appears against the boy, does he?' said Mr. Fang, surveying Mr.

Brownlow contemptuously from head to foot. 'Swear him!'

'Before I am sworn, I must beg to say one word,' said Mr.

Brownlow; 'and that is, that I really never, without actual

experience, could have believed--'

'Hold your tongue, sir!' said Mr. Fang, peremptorily.

'I will not, sir!' replied the old gentleman.

'Hold your tongue this instant, or I'll have you turned out of

the office!' said Mr. Fang. 'You're an insolent impertinent

fellow. How dare you bully a magistrate!'

'What!' exclaimed the old gentleman, reddening.

'Swear this person!' said Fang to the clerk. 'I'll not hear

another word. Swear him.'

Mr. Brownlow's indignation was greatly roused; but reflecting

perhaps, that he might only injure the boy by giving vent to it,

he suppressed his feelings and submitted to be sworn at once.

'Now,' said Fang, 'what's the charge against this boy? What have

you got to say, sir?'

'I was standing at a bookstall--' Mr. Brownlow began.

'Hold your tongue, sir,' said Mr. Fang. 'Policeman! Where's the

policeman? Here, swear this policeman. Now, policeman, what is

this?'

The policeman, with becoming humility, related how he had taken

the charge; how he had searched Oliver, and found nothing on his

person; and how that was all he knew about it.

'Are there any witnesses?' inquired Mr. Fang.

'None, your worship,' replied the policeman.

Mr. Fang sat silent for some minutes, and then, turning round to

the prosecutor, said in a towering passion.

'Do you mean to state what your complaint against this boy is,

man, or do you not? You have been sworn. Now, if you stand

there, refusing to give evidence, I'll punish you for disrespect

to the bench; I will, by--'

By what, or by whom, nobody knows, for the clerk and jailor

coughed very loud, just at the right moment; and the former

dropped a heavy book upon the floor, thus preventing the word

from being heard--accidently, of course.

With many interruptions, and repeated insults, Mr. Brownlow

contrived to state his case; observing that, in the surprise of

the moment, he had run after the boy because he had saw him

running away; and expressing his hope that, if the magistrate

should believe him, although not actually the thief, to be

connected with the thieves, he would deal as leniently with him

as justice would allow.

'He has been hurt already,' said the old gentleman in conclusion.

'And I fear,' he added, with great energy, looking towards the

bar, 'I really fear that he is ill.'

'Oh! yes, I dare say!' said Mr. Fang, with a sneer. 'Come, none

of your tricks here, you young vagabond; they won't do. What's

your name?'

Oliver tried to reply but his tongue failed him. He was deadly

pale; and the whole place seemed turning round and round.

'What's your name, you hardened scoundrel?' demanded Mr. Fang.

'Officer, what's his name?'

This was addressed to a bluff old fellow, in a striped waistcoat,

who was standing by the bar. He bent over Oliver, and repeated

the inquiry; but finding him really incapable of understanding

the question; and knowing that his not replying would only

infuriate the magistrate the more, and add to the severity of his

sentence; he hazarded a guess.

'He says his name's Tom White, your worship,' said the

kind-hearted thief-taker.

'Oh, he won't speak out, won't he?' said Fang. 'Very well, very

well. Where does he live?'

'Where he can, your worship,' replied the officer; again

pretending to receive Oliver's answer.

'Has he any parents?' inquired Mr. Fang.

'He says they died in his infancy, your worship,' replied the

officer: hazarding the usual reply.

At this point of the inquiry, Oliver raised his head; and,

looking round with imploring eyes, murmured a feeble prayer for a

draught of water.

'Stuff and nonsense!' said Mr. Fang: 'don't try to make a fool

of me.'

'I think he really is ill, your worship,' remonstrated the

officer.

'I know better,' said Mr. Fang.

'Take care of him, officer,' said the old gentleman, raising his

hands instinctively; 'he'll fall down.'

'Stand away, officer,' cried Fang; 'let him, if he likes.'

Oliver availed himself of the kind permission, and fell to the

floor in a fainting fit. The men in the office looked at each

other, but no one dared to stir.

'I knew he was shamming,' said Fang, as if this were

incontestable proof of the fact. 'Let him lie there; he'll soon

be tired of that.'

'How do you propose to deal with the case, sir?' inquired the

clerk in a low voice.

'Summarily,' replied Mr. Fang. 'He stands committed for three

months--hard labour of course. Clear the office.'

The door was opened for this purpose, and a couple of men were

preparing to carry the insensible boy to his cell; when an

elderly man of decent but poor appearance, clad in an old suit of

black, rushed hastily into the office, and advanced towards the

bench.

'Stop, stop! don't take him away! For Heaven's sake stop a

moment!' cried the new comer, breathless with haste.

Although the presiding Genii in such an office as this, exercise

a summary and arbitrary power over the liberties, the good name,

the character, almost the lives, of Her Majesty's subjects,

expecially of the poorer class; and although, within such walls,

enough fantastic tricks are daily played to make the angels blind

with weeping; they are closed to the public, save through the

medium of the daily press.[Footnote: Or were virtually, then.]

Mr. Fang was consequently not a little indignant to see an

unbidden guest enter in such irreverent disorder.

'What is this? Who is this? Turn this man out. Clear the

office!' cried Mr. Fang.

'I \_will\_ speak,' cried the man; 'I will not be turned out. I saw

it all. I keep the book-stall. I demand to be sworn. I will not

be put down. Mr. Fang, you must hear me. You must not refuse,

sir.'

The man was right. His manner was determined; and the matter was

growing rather too serious to be hushed up.

'Swear the man,' growled Mr. Fang, with a very ill grace. 'Now,

man, what have you got to say?'

'This,' said the man: 'I saw three boys: two others and the

prisoner here: loitering on the opposite side of the way, when

this gentleman was reading. The robbery was committed by another

boy. I saw it done; and I saw that this boy was perfectly amazed

and stupified by it.' Having by this time recovered a little

breath, the worthy book-stall keeper proceeded to relate, in a

more coherent manner the exact circumstances of the robbery.

'Why didn't you come here before?' said Fang, after a pause.

'I hadn't a soul to mind the shop,' replied the man. 'Everybody

who could have helped me, had joined in the pursuit. I could get

nobody till five minutes ago; and I've run here all the way.'

'The prosecutor was reading, was he?' inquired Fang, after

another pause.

'Yes,' replied the man. 'The very book he has in his hand.'

'Oh, that book, eh?' said Fang. 'Is it paid for?'

'No, it is not,' replied the man, with a smile.

'Dear me, I forgot all about it!' exclaimed the absent old

gentleman, innocently.

'A nice person to prefer a charge against a poor boy!' said Fang,

with a comical effort to look humane. 'I consider, sir, that you

have obtained possession of that book, under very suspicious and

disreputable circumstances; and you may think yourself very

fortunate that the owner of the property declines to prosecute.

Let this be a lesson to you, my man, or the law will overtake you

yet. The boy is discharged. Clear the office!'

'D--n me!' cried the old gentleman, bursting out with the rage he

had kept down so long, 'd--n me! I'll--'

'Clear the office!' said the magistrate. 'Officers, do you hear?

Clear the office!'

The mandate was obeyed; and the indignant Mr. Brownlow was

conveyed out, with the book in one hand, and the bamboo cane in

the other: in a perfect phrenzy of rage and defiance. He

reached the yard; and his passion vanished in a moment. Little

Oliver Twist lay on his back on the pavement, with his shirt

unbuttoned, and his temples bathed with water; his face a deadly

white; and a cold tremble convulsing his whole frame.

'Poor boy, poor boy!' said Mr. Brownlow, bending over him. 'Call

a coach, somebody, pray. Directly!'

A coach was obtained, and Oliver having been carefully laid on

the seat, the old gentleman got in and sat himself on the other.

'May I accompany you?' said the book-stall keeper, looking in.

'Bless me, yes, my dear sir,' said Mr. Brownlow quickly. 'I

forgot you. Dear, dear! I have this unhappy book still! Jump

in. Poor fellow! There's no time to lose.'

The book-stall keeper got into the coach; and away they drove.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH OLIVER IS TAKEN BETTER CARE OF THAN HE EVER WAS BEFORE.

AND IN WHICH THE NARRATIVE REVERTS TO THE MERRY OLD GENTLEMAN AND

HIS YOUTHFUL FRIENDS.

The coach rattled away, over nearly the same ground as that which

Oliver had traversed when he first entered London in company with

the Dodger; and, turning a different way when it reached the

Angel at Islington, stopped at length before a neat house, in a

quiet shady street near Pentonville. Here, a bed was prepared,

without loss of time, in which Mr. Brownlow saw his young charge

carefully and comfortably deposited; and here, he was tended with

a kindness and solicitude that knew no bounds.

But, for many days, Oliver remained insensible to all the

goodness of his new friends. The sun rose and sank, and rose and

sank again, and many times after that; and still the boy lay

stretched on his uneasy bed, dwindling away beneath the dry and

wasting heat of fever. The worm does not work more surely on the

dead body, than does this slow creeping fire upon the living

frame.

Weak, and thin, and pallid, he awoke at last from what seemed to

have been a long and troubled dream. Feebly raising himself in

the bed, with his head resting on his trembling arm, he looked

anxiously around.

'What room is this? Where have I been brought to?' said Oliver.

'This is not the place I went to sleep in.'

He uttered these words in a feeble voice, being very faint and

weak; but they were overheard at once. The curtain at the bed's

head was hastily drawn back, and a motherly old lady, very neatly

and precisely dressed, rose as she undrew it, from an arm-chair

close by, in which she had been sitting at needle-work.

'Hush, my dear,' said the old lady softly. 'You must be very

quiet, or you will be ill again; and you have been very bad,--as

bad as bad could be, pretty nigh. Lie down again; there's a

dear!' With those words, the old lady very gently placed

Oliver's head upon the pillow; and, smoothing back his hair from

his forehead, looked so kindly and loving in his face, that he

could not help placing his little withered hand in hers, and

drawing it round his neck.

'Save us!' said the old lady, with tears in her eyes. 'What a

grateful little dear it is. Pretty creetur! What would his

mother feel if she had sat by him as I have, and could see him

now!'

'Perhaps she does see me,' whispered Oliver, folding his hands

together; 'perhaps she has sat by me. I almost feel as if she

had.'

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

'I suppose it was,' replied Oliver, 'because heaven is a long way

off; and they are too happy there, to come down to the bedside of

a poor boy. But if she knew I was ill, she must have pitied me,

even there; for she was very ill herself before she died. She

can't know anything about me though,' added Oliver after a

moment's silence. 'If she had seen me hurt, it would have made

her sorrowful; and her face has always looked sweet and happy,

when I have dreamed of her.'

The old lady made no reply to this; but wiping her eyes first,

and her spectacles, which lay on the counterpane, afterwards, as

if they were part and parcel of those features, brought some cool

stuff for Oliver to drink; and then, patting him on the cheek,

told him he must lie very quiet, or he would be ill again.

So, Oliver kept very still; partly because he was anxious to obey

the kind old lady in all things; and partly, to tell the truth,

because he was completely exhausted with what he had already

said. He soon fell into a gentle doze, from which he was

awakened by the light of a candle: which, being brought near the

bed, showed him a gentleman with a very large and loud-ticking

gold watch in his hand, who felt his pulse, and said he was a

great deal better.

'You \_are\_ a great deal better, are you not, my dear?' said the

gentleman.

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

'Yes, I know you are,' said the gentleman: 'You're hungry too,

an't you?'

'No, sir,' answered Oliver.

'Hem!' said the gentleman. 'No, I know you're not. He is not

hungry, Mrs. Bedwin,' said the gentleman: looking very wise.

The old lady made a respectful inclination of the head, which

seemed to say that she thought the doctor was a very clever man.

The doctor appeared much of the same opinion himself.

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

'No, sir,' replied Oliver.

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

'You're not sleepy. Nor thirsty. Are you?'

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

'Just as I expected, Mrs. Bedwin,' said the doctor. 'It's very

natural that he should be thirsty. You may give him a little

tea, ma'am, and some dry toast without any butter. Don't keep

him too warm, ma'am; but be careful that you don't let him be too

cold; will you have the goodness?'

The old lady dropped a curtsey. The doctor, after tasting the

cool stuff, and expressing a qualified approval of it, hurried

away: his boots creaking in a very important and wealthy manner

as he went downstairs.

Oliver dozed off again, soon after this; when he awoke, it was

nearly twelve o'clock. The old lady tenderly bade him good-night

shortly afterwards, and left him in charge of a fat old woman who

had just come: bringing with her, in a little bundle, a small

Prayer Book and a large nightcap. Putting the latter on her head

and the former on the table, the old woman, after telling Oliver

that she had come to sit up with him, drew her chair close to the

fire and went off into a series of short naps, chequered at

frequent intervals with sundry tumblings forward, and divers

moans and chokings. These, however, had no worse effect than

causing her to rub her nose very hard, and then fall asleep

again.

And thus the night crept slowly on. Oliver lay awake for some

time, counting the little circles of light which the reflection

of the rushlight-shade threw upon the ceiling; or tracing with

his languid eyes the intricate pattern of the paper on the wall.

The darkness and the deep stillness of the room were very solemn;

as they brought into the boy's mind the thought that death had

been hovering there, for many days and nights, and might yet fill

it with the gloom and dread of his awful presence, he turned his

face upon the pillow, and fervently prayed to Heaven.

Gradually, he fell into that deep tranquil sleep which ease from

recent suffering alone imparts; that calm and peaceful rest which

it is pain to wake from. Who, if this were death, would be

roused again to all the struggles and turmoils of life; to all

its cares for the present; its anxieties for the future; more

than all, its weary recollections of the past!

It had been bright day, for hours, when Oliver opened his eyes;

he felt cheerful and happy. The crisis of the disease was safely

past. He belonged to the world again.

In three days' time he was able to sit in an easy-chair, well

propped up with pillows; and, as he was still too weak to walk,

Mrs. Bedwin had him carried downstairs into the little

housekeeper's room, which belonged to her. Having him set, here,

by the fire-side, the good old lady sat herself down too; and,

being in a state of considerable delight at seeing him so much

better, forthwith began to cry most violently.

'Never mind me, my dear,' said the old lady; 'I'm only having a

regular good cry. There; it's all over now; and I'm quite

comfortable.'

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

'Well, never you mind that, my dear,' said the old lady; 'that's

got nothing to do with your broth; and it's full time you had it;

for the doctor says Mr. Brownlow may come in to see you this

morning; and we must get up our best looks, because the better we

look, the more he'll be pleased.' And with this, the old lady

applied herself to warming up, in a little saucepan, a basin full

of broth: strong enough, Oliver thought, to furnish an ample

dinner, when reduced to the regulation strength, for three

hundred and fifty paupers, at the lowest computation.

'Are you fond of pictures, dear?' inquired the old lady, seeing

that Oliver had fixed his eyes, most intently, on a portrait

which hung against the wall; just opposite his chair.

'I don't quite know, ma'am,' said Oliver, without taking his eyes

from the canvas; 'I have seen so few that I hardly know. What a

beautiful, mild face that lady's is!'

'Ah!' said the old lady, 'painters always make ladies out

prettier than they are, or they wouldn't get any custom, child.

The man that invented the machine for taking likenesses might

have known that would never succeed; it's a deal too honest. A

deal,' said the old lady, laughing very heartily at her own

acuteness.

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

'Yes,' said the old lady, looking up for a moment from the broth;

'that's a portrait.'

'Whose, ma'am?' asked Oliver.

'Why, really, my dear, I don't know,' answered the old lady in a

good-humoured manner. 'It's not a likeness of anybody that you

or I know, I expect. It seems to strike your fancy, dear.'

'It is so pretty,' replied Oliver.

'Why, sure you're not afraid of it?' said the old lady: observing

in great surprise, the look of awe with which the child regarded

the painting.

'Oh no, no,' returned Oliver quickly; 'but the eyes look so

sorrowful; and where I sit, they seem fixed upon me. It makes my

heart beat,' added Oliver in a low voice, 'as if it was alive,

and wanted to speak to me, but couldn't.'

'Lord save us!' exclaimed the old lady, starting; 'don't talk in

that way, child. You're weak and nervous after your illness.

Let me wheel your chair round to the other side; and then you

won't see it. There!' said the old lady, suiting the action to

the word; 'you don't see it now, at all events.'

Oliver \_did\_ see it in his mind's eye as distinctly as if he had

not altered his position; but he thought it better not to worry

the kind old lady; so he smiled gently when she looked at him;

and Mrs. Bedwin, satisfied that he felt more comfortable, salted

and broke bits of toasted bread into the broth, with all the

bustle befitting so solemn a preparation. Oliver got through it

with extraordinary expedition. He had scarcely swallowed the

last spoonful, when there came a soft rap at the door. 'Come

in,' said the old lady; and in walked Mr. Brownlow.

Now, the old gentleman came in as brisk as need be; but, he had

no sooner raised his spectacles on his forehead, and thrust his

hands behind the skirts of his dressing-gown to take a good long

look at Oliver, than his countenance underwent a very great

variety of odd contortions. Oliver looked very worn and shadowy

from sickness, and made an ineffectual attempt to stand up, out

of respect to his benefactor, which terminated in his sinking

back into the chair again; and the fact is, if the truth must be

told, that Mr. Brownlow's heart, being large enough for any six

ordinary old gentlemen of humane disposition, forced a supply of

tears into his eyes, by some hydraulic process which we are not

sufficiently philosophical to be in a condition to explain.

'Poor boy, poor boy!' said Mr. Brownlow, clearing his throat.

'I'm rather hoarse this morning, Mrs. Bedwin. I'm afraid I have

caught cold.'

'I hope not, sir,' said Mrs. Bedwin. 'Everything you have had,

has been well aired, sir.'

'I don't know, Bedwin. I don't know,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'I

rather think I had a damp napkin at dinner-time yesterday; but

never mind that. How do you feel, my dear?'

'Very happy, sir,' replied Oliver. 'And very grateful indeed,

sir, for your goodness to me.'

'Good by,' said Mr. Brownlow, stoutly. 'Have you given him any

nourishment, Bedwin? Any slops, eh?'

'He has just had a basin of beautiful strong broth, sir,' replied

Mrs. Bedwin: drawing herself up slightly, and laying strong

emphasis on the last word: to intimate that between slops, and

broth will compounded, there existed no affinity or connection

whatsoever.

'Ugh!' said Mr. Brownlow, with a slight shudder; 'a couple of

glasses of port wine would have done him a great deal more good.

Wouldn't they, Tom White, eh?'

'My name is Oliver, sir,' replied the little invalid: with a

look of great astonishment.

'Oliver,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'Oliver what? Oliver White, eh?'

'No, sir, Twist, Oliver Twist.'

'Queer name!' said the old gentleman. 'What made you tell the

magistrate your name was White?'

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

This sounded so like a falsehood, that the old gentleman looked

somewhat sternly in Oliver's face. It was impossible to doubt

him; there was truth in every one of its thin and sharpened

lineaments.

'Some mistake,' said Mr. Brownlow. But, although his motive for

looking steadily at Oliver no longer existed, the old idea of the

resemblance between his features and some familiar face came upon

him so strongly, that he could not withdraw his gaze.

'I hope you are not angry with me, sir?' said Oliver, raising his

eyes beseechingly.

'No, no,' replied the old gentleman. 'Why! what's this? Bedwin,

look there!'

As he spoke, he pointed hastily to the picture over Oliver's

head, and then to the boy's face. There was its living copy. The

eyes, the head, the mouth; every feature was the same. The

expression was, for the instant, so precisely alike, that the

minutest line seemed copied with startling accuracy!

Oliver knew not the cause of this sudden exclamation; for, not

being strong enough to bear the start it gave him, he fainted

away. A weakness on his part, which affords the narrative an

opportunity of relieving the reader from suspense, in behalf of

the two young pupils of the Merry Old Gentleman; and of

recording--

That when the Dodger, and his accomplished friend Master Bates,

joined in the hue-and-cry which was raised at Oliver's heels, in

consequence of their executing an illegal conveyance of Mr.

Brownlow's personal property, as has been already described, they

were actuated by a very laudable and becoming regard for

themselves; and forasmuch as the freedom of the subject and the

liberty of the individual are among the first and proudest boasts

of a true-hearted Englishman, so, I need hardly beg the reader to

observe, that this action should tend to exalt them in the

opinion of all public and patriotic men, in almost as great a

degree as this strong proof of their anxiety for their own

preservation and safety goes to corroborate and confirm the

little code of laws which certain profound and sound-judging

philosophers have laid down as the main-springs of all Nature's

deeds and actions: the said philosophers very wisely reducing

the good lady's proceedings to matters of maxim and theory: and,

by a very neat and pretty compliment to her exalted wisdom and

understanding, putting entirely out of sight any considerations

of heart, or generous impulse and feeling. For, these are matters

totally beneath a female who is acknowledged by universal

admission to be far above the numerous little foibles and

weaknesses of her sex.

If I wanted any further proof of the strictly philosophical

nature of the conduct of these young gentlemen in their very

delicate predicament, I should at once find it in the fact (also

recorded in a foregoing part of this narrative), of their

quitting the pursuit, when the general attention was fixed upon

Oliver; and making immediately for their home by the shortest

possible cut. Although I do not mean to assert that it is

usually the practice of renowned and learned sages, to shorten

the road to any great conclusion (their course indeed being

rather to lengthen the distance, by various circumlocutions and

discursive staggerings, like unto those in which drunken men

under the pressure of a too mighty flow of ideas, are prone to

indulge); still, I do mean to say, and do say distinctly, that it

is the invariable practice of many mighty philosophers, in

carrying out their theories, to evince great wisdom and foresight

in providing against every possible contingency which can be

supposed at all likely to affect themselves. Thus, to do a great

right, you may do a little wrong; and you may take any means

which the end to be attained, will justify; the amount of the

right, or the amount of the wrong, or indeed the distinction

between the two, being left entirely to the philosopher

concerned, to be settled and determined by his clear,

comprehensive, and impartial view of his own particular case.

It was not until the two boys had scoured, with great rapidity,

through a most intricate maze of narrow streets and courts, that

they ventured to halt beneath a low and dark archway. Having

remained silent here, just long enough to recover breath to

speak, Master Bates uttered an exclamation of amusement and

delight; and, bursting into an uncontrollable fit of laughter,

flung himself upon a doorstep, and rolled thereon in a transport

of mirth.

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

'Ha! ha! ha!' roared Charley Bates.

'Hold your noise,' remonstrated the Dodger, looking cautiously

round. 'Do you want to be grabbed, stupid?'

'I can't help it,' said Charley, 'I can't help it! To see him

splitting away at that pace, and cutting round the corners, and

knocking up again' the posts, and starting on again as if he was

made of iron as well as them, and me with the wipe in my pocket,

singing out arter him--oh, my eye!' The vivid imagination of

Master Bates presented the scene before him in too strong

colours. As he arrived at this apostrophe, he again rolled upon

the door-step, and laughed louder than before.

'What'll Fagin say?' inquired the Dodger; taking advantage of the

next interval of breathlessness on the part of his friend to

propound the question.

'What?' repeated Charley Bates.

'Ah, what?' said the Dodger.

'Why, what should he say?' inquired Charley: stopping rather

suddenly in his merriment; for the Dodger's manner was

impressive. 'What should he say?'

Mr. Dawkins whistled for a couple of minutes; then, taking off

his hat, scratched his head, and nodded thrice.

'What do you mean?' said Charley.

'Toor rul lol loo, gammon and spinnage, the frog he wouldn't, and

high cockolorum,' said the Dodger: with a slight sneer on his

intellectual countenance.

This was explanatory, but not satisfactory. Master Bates felt it

so; and again said, 'What do you mean?'

The Dodger made no reply; but putting his hat on again, and

gathering the skirts of his long-tailed coat under his arm,

thrust his tongue into his cheek, slapped the bridge of his nose

some half-dozen times in a familiar but expressive manner, and

turning on his heel, slunk down the court. Master Bates

followed, with a thoughtful countenance.

The noise of footsteps on the creaking stairs, a few minutes

after the occurrence of this conversation, roused the merry old

gentleman as he sat over the fire with a saveloy and a small loaf

in his hand; a pocket-knife in his right; and a pewter pot on the

trivet. There was a rascally smile on his white face as he

turned round, and looking sharply out from under his thick red

eyebrows, bent his ear towards the door, and listened.

'Why, how's this?' muttered the Jew: changing countenance; 'only

two of 'em? Where's the third? They can't have got into

trouble. Hark!'

The footsteps approached nearer; they reached the landing. The

door was slowly opened; and the Dodger and Charley Bates entered,

closing it behind them.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME NEW ACQUAINTANCES ARE INTRODUCED TO THE INTELLIGENT READER,

CONNECTED WITH WHOM VARIOUS PLEASANT MATTERS ARE RELATED,

APPERTAINING TO THIS HISTORY

'Where's Oliver?' said the Jew, rising with a menacing look.

'Where's the boy?'

The young thieves eyed their preceptor as if they were alarmed at

his violence; and looked uneasily at each other. But they made

no reply.

'What's become of the boy?' said the Jew, seizing the Dodger

tightly by the collar, and threatening him with horrid

imprecations. 'Speak out, or I'll throttle you!'

Mr. Fagin looked so very much in earnest, that Charley Bates, who

deemed it prudent in all cases to be on the safe side, and who

conceived it by no means improbable that it might be his turn to

be throttled second, dropped upon his knees, and raised a loud,

well-sustained, and continuous roar--something between a mad bull

and a speaking trumpet.

'Will you speak?' thundered the Jew: shaking the Dodger so much

that his keeping in the big coat at all, seemed perfectly

miraculous.

'Why, the traps have got him, and that's all about it,' said the

Dodger, sullenly. 'Come, let go o' me, will you!' And,

swinging himself, at one jerk, clean out of the big coat, which

he left in the Jew's hands, the Dodger snatched up the toasting

fork, and made a pass at the merry old gentleman's waistcoat;

which, if it had taken effect, would have let a little more

merriment out than could have been easily replaced.

The Jew stepped back in this emergency, with more agility than

could have been anticipated in a man of his apparent decrepitude;

and, seizing up the pot, prepared to hurl it at his assailant's

head. But Charley Bates, at this moment, calling his attention

by a perfectly terrific howl, he suddenly altered its

destination, and flung it full at that young gentleman.

'Why, what the blazes is in the wind now!' growled a deep voice.

'Who pitched that 'ere at me? It's well it's the beer, and not

the pot, as hit me, or I'd have settled somebody. I might have

know'd, as nobody but an infernal, rich, plundering, thundering

old Jew could afford to throw away any drink but water--and not

that, unless he done the River Company every quarter. Wot's it

all about, Fagin? D--me, if my neck-handkercher an't lined with

beer! Come in, you sneaking warmint; wot are you stopping

outside for, as if you was ashamed of your master! Come in!'

The man who growled out these words, was a stoutly-built fellow

of about five-and-thirty, in a black velveteen coat, very soiled

drab breeches, lace-up half boots, and grey cotton stockings

which inclosed a bulky pair of legs, with large swelling

calves;--the kind of legs, which in such costume, always look in

an unfinished and incomplete state without a set of fetters to

garnish them. He had a brown hat on his head, and a dirty

belcher handkerchief round his neck: with the long frayed ends

of which he smeared the beer from his face as he spoke. He

disclosed, when he had done so, a broad heavy countenance with a

beard of three days' growth, and two scowling eyes; one of which

displayed various parti-coloured symptoms of having been recently

damaged by a blow.

'Come in, d'ye hear?' growled this engaging ruffian.

A white shaggy dog, with his face scratched and torn in twenty

different places, skulked into the room.

'Why didn't you come in afore?' said the man. 'You're getting

too proud to own me afore company, are you? Lie down!'

This command was accompanied with a kick, which sent the animal

to the other end of the room. He appeared well used to it,

however; for he coiled himself up in a corner very quietly,

without uttering a sound, and winking his very ill-looking eyes

twenty times in a minute, appeared to occupy himself in taking a

survey of the apartment.

'What are you up to? Ill-treating the boys, you covetous,

avaricious, in-sa-ti-a-ble old fence?' said the man, seating

himself deliberately. 'I wonder they don't murder you! I would

if I was them. If I'd been your 'prentice, I'd have done it long

ago, and--no, I couldn't have sold you afterwards, for you're fit

for nothing but keeping as a curiousity of ugliness in a glass

bottle, and I suppose they don't blow glass bottles large

enough.'

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

loud!'

'None of your mistering,' replied the ruffian; 'you always mean

mischief when you come that. You know my name: out with it! I

shan't disgrace it when the time comes.'

'Well, well, then--Bill Sikes,' said the Jew, with abject

humility. 'You seem out of humour, Bill.'

'Perhaps I am,' replied Sikes; 'I should think you was rather out

of sorts too, unless you mean as little harm when you throw

pewter pots about, as you do when you blab and--'

'Are you mad?' said the Jew, catching the man by the sleeve, and

pointing towards the boys.

Mr. Sikes contented himself with tying an imaginary knot under

his left ear, and jerking his head over on the right shoulder; a

piece of dumb show which the Jew appeared to understand

perfectly. He then, in cant terms, with which his whole

conversation was plentifully besprinkled, but which would be

quite unintelligible if they were recorded here, demanded a glass

of liquor.

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

upon the table.

This was said in jest; but if the speaker could have seen the

evil leer with which the Jew bit his pale lip as he turned round

to the cupboard, he might have thought the caution not wholly

unnecessary, or the wish (at all events) to improve upon the

distiller's ingenuity not very far from the old gentleman's merry

heart.

After swallowing two of three glasses of spirits, Mr. Sikes

condescended to take some notice of the young gentlemen; which

gracious act led to a conversation, in which the cause and manner

of Oliver's capture were circumstantially detailed, with such

alterations and improvements on the truth, as to the Dodger

appeared most advisable under the circumstances.

'I'm afraid,' said the Jew, 'that he may say something which will

get us into trouble.'

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

'You're blowed upon, Fagin.'

'And I'm afraid, you see,' added the Jew, speaking as if he had

not noticed the interruption; and regarding the other closely as

he did so,--'I'm afraid that, if the game was up with us, it

might be up with a good many more, and that it would come out

rather worse for you than it would for me, my dear.'

The man started, and turned round upon the Jew. But the old

gentleman's shoulders were shrugged up to his ears; and his eyes

were vacantly staring on the opposite wall.

There was a long pause. Every member of the respectable coterie

appeared plunged in his own reflections; not excepting the dog,

who by a certain malicious licking of his lips seemed to be

meditating an attack upon the legs of the first gentleman or lady

he might encounter in the streets when he went out.

'Somebody must find out wot's been done at the office,' said Mr.

Sikes in a much lower tone than he had taken since he came in.

The Jew nodded assent.

'If he hasn't peached, and is committed, there's no fear till he

comes out again,' said Mr. Sikes, 'and then he must be taken care

on. You must get hold of him somehow.'

Again the Jew nodded.

The prudence of this line of action, indeed, was obvious; but,

unfortunately, there was one very strong objection to its being

adopted. This was, that the Dodger, and Charley Bates, and

Fagin, and Mr. William Sikes, happened, one and all, to entertain

a violent and deeply-rooted antipathy to going near a

police-office on any ground or pretext whatever.

How long they might have sat and looked at each other, in a state

of uncertainty not the most pleasant of its kind, it is difficult

to guess. It is not necessary to make any guesses on the

subject, however; for the sudden entrance of the two young ladies

whom Oliver had seen on a former occasion, caused the

conversation to flow afresh.

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

dear?'

'Wheres?' inquired the young lady.

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

It is due to the young lady to say that she did not positively

affirm that she would not, but that she merely expressed an

emphatic and earnest desire to be 'blessed' if she would; a

polite and delicate evasion of the request, which shows the young

lady to have been possessed of that natural good breeding which

cannot bear to inflict upon a fellow-creature, the pain of a

direct and pointed refusal.

The Jew's countenance fell. He turned from this young lady, who

was gaily, not to say gorgeously attired, in a red gown, green

boots, and yellow curl-papers, to the other female.

'Nancy, my dear,' said the Jew in a soothing manner, 'what do YOU

say?'

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

Nancy.

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

manner.

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

'Why, you're just the very person for it,' reasoned Mr. Sikes:

'nobody about here knows anything of you.'

'And as I don't want 'em to, neither,' replied Nancy in the same

composed manner, 'it's rather more no than yes with me, Bill.'

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

'No, she won't, Fagin,' said Nancy.

'Yes, she will, Fagin,' said Sikes.

And Mr. Sikes was right. By dint of alternate threats, promises,

and bribes, the lady in question was ultimately prevailed upon to

undertake the commission. She was not, indeed, withheld by the

same considerations as her agreeable friend; for, having recently

removed into the neighborhood of Field Lane from the remote but

genteel suburb of Ratcliffe, she was not under the same

apprehension of being recognised by any of her numerous

acquaintances.

Accordingly, with a clean white apron tied over her gown, and her

curl-papers tucked up under a straw bonnet,--both articles of

dress being provided from the Jew's inexhaustible stock,--Miss

Nancy prepared to issue forth on her errand.

'Stop a minute, my dear,' said the Jew, producing, a little

covered basket. 'Carry that in one hand. It looks more

respectable, my dear.'

'Give her a door-key to carry in her t'other one, Fagin,' said

Sikes; 'it looks real and genivine like.'

'Yes, yes, my dear, so it does,' said the Jew, hanging a large

street-door key on the forefinger of the young lady's right hand.

'There; very good! Very good indeed, my dear!' said the Jew,

rubbing his hands.

'Oh, my brother! My poor, dear, sweet, innocent little brother!'

exclaimed Nancy, bursting into tears, and wringing the little

basket and the street-door key in an agony of distress. 'What

has become of him! Where have they taken him to! Oh, do have

pity, and tell me what's been done with the dear boy, gentlemen;

do, gentlemen, if you please, gentlemen!'

Having uttered those words in a most lamentable and heart-broken

tone: to the immeasurable delight of her hearers: Miss Nancy

paused, winked to the company, nodded smilingly round, and

disappeared.

'Ah, she's a clever girl, my dears,' said the Jew, turning round

to his young friends, and shaking his head gravely, as if in mute

admonition to them to follow the bright example they had just

beheld.

'She's a honour to her sex,' said Mr. Sikes, filling his glass,

and smiting the table with his enormous fist. 'Here's her

health, and wishing they was all like her!'

While these, and many other encomiums, were being passed on the

accomplished Nancy, that young lady made the best of her way to

the police-office; whither, notwithstanding a little natural

timidity consequent upon walking through the streets alone and

unprotected, she arrived in perfect safety shortly afterwards.

Entering by the back way, she tapped softly with the key at one

of the cell-doors, and listened. There was no sound within: so

she coughed and listened again. Still there was no reply: so

she spoke.

'Nolly, dear?' murmured Nancy in a gentle voice; 'Nolly?'

There was nobody inside but a miserable shoeless criminal, who

had been taken up for playing the flute, and who, the offence

against society having been clearly proved, had been very

properly committed by Mr. Fang to the House of Correction for one

month; with the appropriate and amusing remark that since he had

so much breath to spare, it would be more wholesomely expended on

the treadmill than in a musical instrument. He made no answer:

being occupied mentally bewailing the loss of the flute, which

had been confiscated for the use of the county: so Nancy passed

on to the next cell, and knocked there.

'Well!' cried a faint and feeble voice.

'Is there a little boy here?' inquired Nancy, with a preliminary

sob.

'No,' replied the voice; 'God forbid.'

This was a vagrant of sixty-five, who was going to prison for \_not\_

playing the flute; or, in other words, for begging in the

streets, and doing nothing for his livelihood. In the next cell

was another man, who was going to the same prison for hawking tin

saucepans without license; thereby doing something for his

living, in defiance of the Stamp-office.

But, as neither of these criminals answered to the name of

Oliver, or knew anything about him, Nancy made straight up to the

bluff officer in the striped waistcoat; and with the most piteous

wailings and lamentations, rendered more piteous by a prompt and

efficient use of the street-door key and the little basket,

demanded her own dear brother.

'I haven't got him, my dear,' said the old man.

'Where is he?' screamed Nancy, in a distracted manner.

'Why, the gentleman's got him,' replied the officer.

'What gentleman! Oh, gracious heavens! What gentleman?'

exclaimed Nancy.

In reply to this incoherent questioning, the old man informed the

deeply affected sister that Oliver had been taken ill in the

office, and discharged in consequence of a witness having proved

the robbery to have been committed by another boy, not in

custody; and that the prosecutor had carried him away, in an

insensible condition, to his own residence: of and concerning

which, all the informant knew was, that it was somewhere in

Pentonville, he having heard that word mentioned in the

directions to the coachman.

In a dreadful state of doubt and uncertainty, the agonised young

woman staggered to the gate, and then, exchanging her faltering

walk for a swift run, returned by the most devious and

complicated route she could think of, to the domicile of the Jew.

Mr. Bill Sikes no sooner heard the account of the expedition

delivered, than he very hastily called up the white dog, and,

putting on his hat, expeditiously departed: without devoting any

time to the formality of wishing the company good-morning.

'We must know where he is, my dears; he must be found,' said the

Jew greatly excited. 'Charley, do nothing but skulk about, till

you bring home some news of him! Nancy, my dear, I must have him

found. I trust to you, my dear,--to you and the Artful for

everything! Stay, stay,' added the Jew, unlocking a drawer with

a shaking hand; 'there's money, my dears. I shall shut up this

shop to-night. You'll know where to find me! Don't stop here a

minute. Not an instant, my dears!'

With these words, he pushed them from the room: and carefully

double-locking and barring the door behind them, drew from its

place of concealment the box which he had unintentionally

disclosed to Oliver. Then, he hastily proceeded to dispose the

watches and jewellery beneath his clothing.

A rap at the door startled him in this occupation. 'Who's

there?' he cried in a shrill tone.

'Me!' replied the voice of the Dodger, through the key-hole.

'What now?' cried the Jew impatiently.

'Is he to be kidnapped to the other ken, Nancy says?' inquired

the Dodger.

'Yes,' replied the Jew, 'wherever she lays hands on him. Find

him, find him out, that's all. I shall know what to do next;

never fear.'

The boy murmured a reply of intelligence: and hurried downstairs

after his companions.

'He has not peached so far,' said the Jew as he pursued his

occupation. 'If he means to blab us among his new friends, we

may stop his mouth yet.'

CHAPTER XIV

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 recovering from the fainting-fit into which Mr.

Brownlow's abrupt exclamation had thrown him, 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. '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. 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 he 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 about 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.

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

then 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 he

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. On Mr.

Brownlow calling to him to come in, he 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, 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 always those,' said the old gentleman, patting Oliver on the

head, and smiling as he did so; 'there are 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 book-seller; 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. 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 known him assume 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 well able to understand me, as

many older persons would be.'

'Oh, don't tell you are going to send me away, sir, pray!'

exclaimed Oliver, alarmed at 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!'

'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 I am more 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,

forever, on my best affections. Deep affliction has but

strengthened and refined them.'

As the old gentleman said this in a low voice: more to himself

than to his companion: and as he remained silent for a short

time afterwards: Oliver sat quite still.

'Well, well!' said the old gentleman at length, in a more

cheerful tone, '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; all the inquiries I

have been able to make, confirm the statement. Let me hear your

story; where you come from; who brought you up; and how you got

into the company in which I found you. Speak the truth, and you

shall not be friendless while I live.'

Oliver's sobs checked his utterance for some minutes; when he was

on the point of beginning to relate how he had been brought up at

the farm, and carried to the workhouse by Mr. Bumble, a

peculiarly impatient little double-knock was heard at the

street-door: and the servant, running upstairs, 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 that 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 downstairs, sir?' inquired Oliver.

'No,' replied Mr. Brownlow, 'I would rather you remained 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 on one side when he spoke; and of 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 poor surgeon's friend on the staircase? I've been

lamed with orange-peel once, and I know 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

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!' 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 who had the fever, I hope?'

said Mr. Grimwig, recoiling a little more. '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 who had the orange! If that's not the boy, sir, who 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 red 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's the boy,' replied Mr. Brownlow.

'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

downstairs 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 Mr. Grimwig, pettishly.

'Don't know?'

'No. I don't know. I never see any difference in boys. I only

knew two sort of boys. Mealy boys, and beef-faced boys.'

'And which is Oliver?'

'Mealy. I know a friend who has 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 Mr. 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 who

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 a satisfactory answer; and that he had postponed any

investigation into Oliver's previous history until he thought the

boy was strong enough to hear it; Mr. Grimwig chuckled

maliciously. And he 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--and so forth.

All this, Mr. Brownlow, although himself somewhat of an impetuous

gentleman: knowing his friend's peculiarities, bore with great

good humour; as Mr. Grimwig, at tea, was graciously 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 his 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 good 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 anger.

'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; having laid them 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 is 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 ran

another; and Mrs. Bedwin stood on the step and screamed for the

boy; but there was no boy in sight. 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 that, by his prompt discharge

of the commission, he should 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,' said Oliver, eagerly. 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. Having superadded many injunctions to be

sure and not take cold, the 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 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 by any means a bad-hearted man, and though he 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.

It grew so dark, that the figures on the dial-plate were scarcely

discernible; but there the two old gentlemen continued to sit, in

silence, with the watch between them.

CHAPTER XV

SHOWING HOW VERY FOND OF OLIVER TWIST, THE MERRY OLD JEW AND MISS

NANCY WERE

In the obscure parlour of a low public-house, 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 the police would have hesitated 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. Having given in a

hearty shake, he retired, growling, under a form; 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; who, dropping

on his knees, 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. Mr. Sikes, being disappointed of the dog's participation,

at once transferred his share in 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 a dog how he

likes,' replied Sikes, shutting up the knife 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. He was

obviously very ill at 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. Sikes,

snatching it from him, hastily opened it; 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 an 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. 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 an observant 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

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.

'Nancy!' exclaimed Sikes. 'Where? Strike me blind, if I don't

honour 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 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 eye-brows,

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 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; they went away together, followed, at a

little distant, 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 we 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 book-stall. When he got into Clerkenwell, he accidently

turned down a by-street which was not exactly in his way; but not

discovering his mistake until he had got half-way 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 weeping bitterly

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 a little

basket and a street-door key in her hand.

'Oh my gracious!' said the young woman, 'I have 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!'

'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 went 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 am not,' replied Oliver, greatly alarmed. 'I don't know her.

I haven't any sister, or father and mother either. I'm an

orphan; I live at Pentonville.'

'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 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; overpowered by the conviction

of the bystanders that he really was the hardened little wretch

he was described to be; what could one poor child do! Darkness

had set in; it was a low neighborhood; no help was near;

resistance was useless. In another moment he was dragged into a

labyrinth of dark narrow courts, and was forced along them at a

pace which rendered the few cries he dared to give utterance to,

unintelligible. It was of little moment, indeed, whether they

were intelligible or no; 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.

CHAPTER XVI

RELATES WHAT BECAME OF OLIVER TWIST, AFTER HE HAD BEEN CLAIMED BY

NANCY

The narrow streets and courts, at length, terminated in a large

open space; scattered about which, were pens for beasts, and

other indications of a cattle-market. Sikes slackened his pace

when they reached this spot: the girl being quite unable to

support any longer, the rapid rate at which they had hitherto

walked. Turning to Oliver, he roughly commanded him to take hold

of Nancy's hand.

'Do you hear?' growled Sikes, as Oliver hesitated, and looked

round.

They were in a dark corner, quite out of the track of passengers.

Oliver saw, but too plainly, that resistance would be of no

avail. He held out his hand, which Nancy clasped tight in hers.

'Give me the other,' said Sikes, seizing Oliver's unoccupied

hand. 'Here, Bull's-Eye!'

The dog looked up, and growled.

'See here, boy!' said Sikes, putting his other hand to Oliver's

throat; 'if he speaks ever so soft a word, hold him! D'ye mind!'

The dog growled again; and licking his lips, eyed Oliver as if he

were anxious to attach himself to his windpipe without delay.

'He's as willing as a Christian, strike me blind if he isn't!'

said Sikes, regarding the animal with a kind of grim and

ferocious approval. 'Now, you know what you've got to expect,

master, so call away as quick as you like; the dog will soon stop

that game. Get on, young'un!'

Bull's-eye wagged his tail in acknowledgment of this unusually

endearing form of speech; and, giving vent to another admonitory

growl for the benefit of Oliver, led the way onward.

It was Smithfield that they were crossing, although it might have

been Grosvenor Square, for anything Oliver knew to the contrary.

The night was dark and foggy. The lights in the shops could

scarecely struggle through the heavy mist, which thickened every

moment and shrouded the streets and houses in gloom; rendering

the strange place still stranger in Oliver's eyes; and making his

uncertainty the more dismal and depressing.

They had hurried on a few paces, when a deep church-bell struck

the hour. With its first stroke, his two conductors stopped, and

turned their heads in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

'Eight o' clock, Bill,' said Nancy, when the bell ceased.

'What's the good of telling me that; I can hear it, can't I!'

replied Sikes.

'I wonder whether THEY can hear it,' said Nancy.

'Of course they can,' replied Sikes. 'It was Bartlemy time when

I was shopped; and there warn't a penny trumpet in the fair, as I

couldn't hear the squeaking on. Arter I was locked up for the

night, the row and din outside made the thundering old jail so

silent, that I could almost have beat my brains out against the

iron plates of the door.'

'Poor fellow!' said Nancy, who still had her face turned towards

the quarter in which the bell had sounded. 'Oh, Bill, such fine

young chaps as them!'

'Yes; that's all you women think of,' answered Sikes. 'Fine

young chaps! Well, they're as good as dead, so it don't much

matter.'

With this consolation, Mr. Sikes appeared to repress a rising

tendency to jealousy, and, clasping Oliver's wrist more firmly,

told him to step out again.

'Wait a minute!' said the girl: 'I wouldn't hurry by, if it was

you that was coming out to be hung, the next time eight o'clock

struck, Bill. I'd walk round and round the place till I dropped,

if the snow was on the ground, and I hadn't a shawl to cover me.'

'And what good would that do?' inquired the unsentimental Mr.

Sikes. 'Unless you could pitch over a file and twenty yards of

good stout rope, you might as well be walking fifty mile off, or

not walking at all, for all the good it would do me. Come on,

and don't stand preaching there.'

The girl burst into a laugh; drew her shawl more closely round

her; and they walked away. But Oliver felt her hand tremble,

and, looking up in her face as they passed a gas-lamp, saw that

it had turned a deadly white.

They walked on, by little-frequented and dirty ways, for a full

half-hour: meeting very few people, and those appearing from

their looks to hold much the same position in society as Mr.

Sikes himself. At length they turned into a very filthy narrow

street, nearly full of old-clothes shops; the dog running

forward, as if conscious that there was no further occasion for

his keeping on guard, stopped before the door of a shop that was

closed and apparently untenanted; the house was in a ruinous

condition, and on the door was nailed a board, intimating that it

was to let: which looked as if it had hung there for many years.

'All right,' cried Sikes, glancing cautiously about.

Nancy stooped below the shutters, and Oliver heard the sound of a

bell. They crossed to the opposite side of the street, and stood

for a few moments under a lamp. A noise, as if a sash window

were gently raised, was heard; and soon afterwards the door

softly opened. Mr. Sikes then seized the terrified boy by the

collar with very little ceremony; and all three were quickly

inside the house.

The passage was perfectly dark. They waited, while the person

who had let them in, chained and barred the door.

'Anybody here?' inquired Sikes.

'No,' replied a voice, which Oliver thought he had heard before.

'Is the old 'un here?' asked the robber.

'Yes,' replied the voice, 'and precious down in the mouth he has

been. Won't he be glad to see you? Oh, no!'

The style of this reply, as well as the voice which delivered it,

seemed familiar to Oliver's ears: but it was impossible to

distinguish even the form of the speaker in the darkness.

'Let's have a glim,' said Sikes, 'or we shall go breaking our

necks, or treading on the dog. Look after your legs if you do!'

'Stand still a moment, and I'll get you one,' replied the voice.

The receding footsteps of the speaker were heard; and, in another

minute, the form of Mr. John Dawkins, otherwise the Artful

Dodger, appeared. He bore in his right hand a tallow candle

stuck in the end of a cleft stick.

The young gentleman did not stop to bestow any other mark of

recognition upon Oliver than a humourous grin; but, turning away,

beckoned the visitors to follow him down a flight of stairs.

They crossed an empty kitchen; and, opening the door of a low

earthy-smelling room, which seemed to have been built in a small

back-yard, were received with a shout of laughter.

'Oh, my wig, my wig!' cried Master Charles Bates, from whose

lungs the laughter had proceeded: 'here he is! oh, cry, here he

is! Oh, Fagin, look at him! Fagin, do look at him! I can't bear

it; it is such a jolly game, I cant' bear it. Hold me, somebody,

while I laugh it out.'

With this irrepressible ebullition of mirth, Master Bates laid

himself flat on the floor: and kicked convulsively for five

minutes, in an ectasy of facetious joy. Then jumping to his

feet, he snatched the cleft stick from the Dodger; and, advancing

to Oliver, viewed him round and round; while the Jew, taking off

his nightcap, made a great number of low bows to the bewildered

boy. The Artful, meantime, who was of a rather saturnine

disposition, and seldom gave way to merriment when it interfered

with business, rifled Oliver's pockets with steady assiduity.

'Look at his togs, Fagin!' said Charley, putting the light so

close to his new jacket as nearly to set him on fire. 'Look at

his togs! Superfine cloth, and the heavy swell cut! Oh, my eye,

what a game! And his books, too! Nothing but a gentleman,

Fagin!'

'Delighted to see you looking so well, my dear,' said the Jew,

bowing with mock humility. 'The Artful shall give you another

suit, my dear, for fear you should spoil that Sunday one. Why

didn't you write, my dear, and say you were coming? We'd have

got something warm for supper.'

At his, Master Bates roared again: so loud, that Fagin himself

relaxed, and even the Dodger smiled; but as the Artful drew forth

the five-pound note at that instant, it is doubtful whether the

sally of the discovery awakened his merriment.

'Hallo, what's that?' inquired Sikes, stepping forward as the Jew

seized the note. 'That's mine, Fagin.'

'No, no, my dear,' said the Jew. 'Mine, Bill, mine. You shall

have the books.'

'If that ain't mine!' said Bill Sikes, putting on his hat with a

determined air; 'mine and Nancy's that is; I'll take the boy back

again.'

The Jew started. Oliver started too, though from a very

different cause; for he hoped that the dispute might really end

in his being taken back.

'Come! Hand over, will you?' said Sikes.

'This is hardly fair, Bill; hardly fair, is it, Nancy?' inquired

the Jew.

'Fair, or not fair,' retorted Sikes, 'hand over, I tell you! Do

you think Nancy and me has got nothing else to do with our

precious time but to spend it in scouting arter, and kidnapping,

every young boy as gets grabbed through you? Give it here, you

avaricious old skeleton, give it here!'

With this gentle remonstrance, Mr. Sikes plucked the note from

between the Jew's finger and thumb; and looking the old man

coolly in the face, folded it up small, and tied it in his

neckerchief.

'That's for our share of the trouble,' said Sikes; 'and not half

enough, neither. You may keep the books, if you're fond of

reading. If you ain't, sell 'em.'

'They're very pretty,' said Charley Bates: who, with sundry

grimaces, had been affecting to read one of the volumes in

question; 'beautiful writing, isn't is, Oliver?' At sight of the

dismayed look with which Oliver regarded his tormentors, Master

Bates, who was blessed with a lively sense of the ludicrous, fell

into another ectasy, more boisterous than the first.

'They belong to the old gentleman,' said Oliver, wringing his

hands; 'to the good, kind, old gentleman who took me into his

house, and had me nursed, when I was near dying of the fever.

Oh, pray send them back; send him back the books and money. Keep

me here all my life long; but pray, pray send them back. He'll

think I stole them; the old lady: all of them who were so kind

to me: will think I stole them. Oh, do have mercy upon me, and

send them back!'

With these words, which were uttered with all the energy of

passionate grief, Oliver fell upon his knees at the Jew's feet;

and beat his hands together, in perfect desperation.

'The boy's right,' remarked Fagin, looking covertly round, and

knitting his shaggy eyebrows into a hard knot. 'You're right,

Oliver, you're right; they WILL think you have stolen 'em. Ha!

ha!' chuckled the Jew, rubbing his hands, 'it couldn't have

happened better, if we had chosen our time!'

'Of course it couldn't,' replied Sikes; 'I know'd that, directly

I see him coming through Clerkenwell, with the books under his

arm. It's all right enough. They're soft-hearted psalm-singers,

or they wouldn't have taken him in at all; and they'll ask no

questions after him, fear they should be obliged to prosecute,

and so get him lagged. He's safe enough.'

Oliver had looked from one to the other, while these words were

being spoken, as if he were bewildered, and could scarecely

understand what passed; but when Bill Sikes concluded, he jumped

suddenly to his feet, and tore wildly from the room: uttering

shrieks for help, which made the bare old house echo to the roof.

'Keep back the dog, Bill!' cried Nancy, springing before the

door, and closing it, as the Jew and his two pupils darted out in

pursuit. 'Keep back the dog; he'll tear the boy to pieces.'

'Serve him right!' cried Sikes, struggling to disengage himself

from the girl's grasp. 'Stand off from me, or I'll split your

head against the wall.'

'I don't care for that, Bill, I don't care for that,' screamed

the girl, struggling violently with the man, 'the child shan't be

torn down by the dog, unless you kill me first.'

'Shan't he!' said Sikes, setting his teeth. 'I'll soon do that,

if you don't keep off.'

The housebreaker flung the girl from him to the further end of

the room, just as the Jew and the two boys returned, dragging

Oliver among them.

'What's the matter here!' said Fagin, looking round.

'The girl's gone mad, I think,' replied Sikes, savagely.

'No, she hasn't,' said Nancy, pale and breathless from the

scuffle; 'no, she hasn't, Fagin; don't think it.'

'Then keep quiet, will you?' said the Jew, with a threatening

look.

'No, I won't do that, neither,' replied Nancy, speaking very

loud. 'Come! What do you think of that?'

Mr. Fagin was sufficiently well acquainted with the manners and

customs of that particular species of humanity to which Nancy

belonged, to feel tolerably certain that it would be rather

unsafe to prolong any conversation with her, at present. With

the view of diverting the attention of the company, he turned to

Oliver.

'So you wanted to get away, my dear, did you?' said the Jew,

taking up a jagged and knotted club which law in a corner of the

fireplace; 'eh?'

Oliver made no reply. But he watched the Jew's motions, and

breathed quickly.

'Wanted to get assistance; called for the police; did you?'

sneered the Jew, catching the boy by the arm. 'We'll cure you of

that, my young master.'

The Jew inflicted a smart blow on Oliver's shoulders with the

club; and was raising it for a second, when the girl, rushing

forward, wrested it from his hand. She flung it into the fire,

with a force that brought some of the glowing coals whirling out

into the room.

'I won't stand by and see it done, Fagin,' cried the girl.

'You've got the boy, and what more would you have?--Let him

be--let him be--or I shall put that mark on some of you, that

will bring me to the gallows before my time.'

The girl stamped her foot violently on the floor as she vented

this threat; and with her lips compressed, and her hands

clenched, looked alternately at the Jew and the other robber:

her face quite colourless from the passion of rage into which she

had gradually worked herself.

'Why, Nancy!' said the Jew, in a soothing tone; after a pause,

during which he and Mr. Sikes had stared at one another in a

disconcerted manner; 'you,--you're more clever than ever

to-night. Ha! ha! my dear, you are acting beautifully.'

'Am I!' said the girl. 'Take care I don't overdo it. You will

be the worse for it, Fagin, if I do; and so I tell you in good

time to keep clear of me.'

There is something about a roused woman: especially if she add to

all her other strong passions, the fierce impulses of

recklessness and despair; which few men like to provoke. The Jew

saw that it would be hopeless to affect any further mistake

regarding the reality of Miss Nancy's rage; and, shrinking

involuntarily back a few paces, cast a glance, half imploring and

half cowardly, at Sikes: as if to hint that he was the fittest

person to pursue the dialogue.

Mr. Sikes, thus mutely appealed to; and possibly feeling his

personal pride and influence interested in the immediate

reduction of Miss Nancy to reason; gave utterance to about a

couple of score of curses and threats, the rapid production of

which reflected great credit on the fertility of his invention.

As they produced no visible effect on the object against whom

they were discharged, however, he resorted to more tangible

arguments.

'What do you mean by this?' said Sikes; backing the inquiry with

a very common imprecation concerning the most beautiful of human

features: which, if it were heard above, only once out of every

fifty thousand times that it is uttered below, would render

blindness as common a disorder as measles: 'what do you mean by

it? Burn my body! Do you know who you are, and what you are?'

'Oh, yes, I know all about it,' replied the girl, laughing

hysterically; and shaking her head from side to side, with a poor

assumption of indifference.

'Well, then, keep quiet,' rejoined Sikes, with a growl like that

he was accustomed to use when addressing his dog, 'or I'll quiet

you for a good long time to come.'

The girl laughed again: even less composedly than before; and,

darting a hasty look at Sikes, turned her face aside, and bit her

lip till the blood came.

'You're a nice one,' added Sikes, as he surveyed her with a

contemptuous air, 'to take up the humane and gen--teel side! A

pretty subject for the child, as you call him, to make a friend

of!'

'God Almighty help me, I am!' cried the girl passionately; 'and I

wish I had been struck dead in the street, or had changed places

with them we passed so near to-night, before I had lent a hand in

bringing him here. He's a thief, a liar, a devil, all that's

bad, from this night forth. Isn't that enough for the old

wretch, without blows?'

'Come, come, Sikes,' said the Jew appealing to him in a

remonstratory tone, and motioning towards the boys, who were

eagerly attentive to all that passed; 'we must have civil words;

civil words, Bill.'

'Civil words!' cried the girl, whose passion was frightful to

see. 'Civil words, you villain! Yes, you deserve 'em from me.

I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as this!'

pointing to Oliver. 'I have been in the same trade, and in the

same service, for twelve years since. Don't you know it? Speak

out! Don't you know it?'

'Well, well,' replied the Jew, with an attempt at pacification;

'and, if you have, it's your living!'

'Aye, it is!' returned the girl; not speaking, but pouring out

the words in one continuous and vehement scream. 'It is my

living; and the cold, wet, dirty streets are my home; and you're

the wretch that drove me to them long ago, and that'll keep me

there, day and night, day and night, till I die!'

'I shall do you a mischief!' interposed the Jew, goaded by these

reproaches; 'a mischief worse than that, if you say much more!'

The girl said nothing more; but, tearing her hair and dress in a

transport of passion, made such a rush at the Jew as would

probably have left signal marks of her revenge upon him, had not

her wrists been seized by Sikes at the right moment; upon which,

she made a few ineffectual struggles, and fainted.

'She's all right now,' said Sikes, laying her down in a corner.

'She's uncommon strong in the arms, when she's up in this way.'

The Jew wiped his forehead: and smiled, as if it were a relief to

have the disturbance over; but neither he, nor Sikes, nor the

dog, nor the boys, seemed to consider it in any other light than

a common occurance incidental to business.

'It's the worst of having to do with women,' said the Jew,

replacing his club; 'but they're clever, and we can't get on, in

our line, without 'em. Charley, show Oliver to bed.'

'I suppose he'd better not wear his best clothes tomorrow, Fagin,

had he?' inquired Charley Bates.

'Certainly not,' replied the Jew, reciprocating the grin with

which Charley put the question.

Master Bates, apparently much delighted with his commission, took

the cleft stick: and led Oliver into an adjacent kitchen, where

there were two or three of the beds on which he had slept before;

and here, with many uncontrollable bursts of laughter, he

produced the identical old suit of clothes which Oliver had so

much congratulated himself upon leaving off at Mr. Brownlow's;

and the accidental display of which, to Fagin, by the Jew who

purchased them, had been the very first clue received, of his

whereabout.

'Put off the smart ones,' said Charley, 'and I'll give 'em to

Fagin to take care of. What fun it is!'

Poor Oliver unwillingly complied. Master Bates rolling up the

new clothes under his arm, departed from the room, leaving Oliver

in the dark, and locking the door behind him.

The noise of Charley's laughter, and the voice of Miss Betsy, who

opportunely arrived to throw water over her friend, and perform

other feminine offices for the promotion of her recovery, might

have kept many people awake under more happy circumstances than

those in which Oliver was placed. But he was sick and weary; and

he soon fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER XVII

OLIVER'S DESTINY CONTINUING UNPROPITIOUS, BRINGS A GREAT MAN TO

LONDON TO INJURE HIS REPUTATION

It is the custom on the stage, in all good murderous melodramas,

to present the tragic and the comic scenes, in as regular

alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky

bacon. The hero sinks upon his straw bed, weighed down by

fetters and misfortunes; in the next scene, his faithful but

unconscious squire regales the audience with a comic song. We

behold, with throbbing bosoms, the heroine in the grasp of a

proud and ruthless baron: her virtue and her life alike in

danger, drawing forth her dagger to preserve the one at the cost

of the other; and just as our expectations are wrought up to the

highest pitch, a whistle is heard, and we are straightway

transported to the great hall of the castle; where a grey-headed

seneschal sings a funny chorus with a funnier body of vassals,

who are free of all sorts of places, from church vaults to

palaces, and roam about in company, carolling perpetually.

Such changes appear absurd; but they are not so unnatural as they

would seem at first sight. The transitions in real life from

well-spread boards to death-beds, and from mourning-weeds to

holiday garments, are not a whit less startling; only, there, we

are busy actors, instead of passive lookers-on, which makes a

vast difference. The actors in the mimic life of the theatre,

are blind to violent transitions and abrupt impulses of passion

or feeling, which, presented before the eyes of mere spectators,

are at once condemned as outrageous and preposterous.

As sudden shiftings of the scene, and rapid changes of time and

place, are not only sanctioned in books by long usage, but are by

many considered as the great art of authorship: an author's skill

in his craft being, by such critics, chiefly estimated with

relation to the dilemmas in which he leaves his characters at the

end of every chapter: this brief introduction to the present one

may perhaps be deemed unnecessary. If so, let it be considered a

delicate intimation on the part of the historian that he is going

back to the town in which Oliver Twist was born; the reader

taking it for granted that there are good and substantial reasons

for making the journey, or he would not be invited to proceed

upon such an expedition.

Mr. Bumble emerged at early morning from the workhouse-gate, and

walked with portly carriage and commanding steps, up the High

Street. He was in the full bloom and pride of beadlehood; his

cocked hat and coat were dazzling in the morning sun; he clutched

his cane with the vigorous tenacity of health and power. Mr.

Bumble always carried his head high; but this morning it was

higher than usual. There was an abstraction in his eye, an

elevation in his air, which might have warned an observant

stranger that thoughts were passing in the beadle's mind, too

great for utterance.

Mr. Bumble stopped not to converse with the small shopkeepers and

others who spoke to him, deferentially, as he passed along. He

merely returned their salutations with a wave of his hand, and

relaxed not in his dignified pace, until he reached the farm

where Mrs. Mann tended the infant paupers with parochial care.

'Drat that beadle!' said Mrs. Mann, hearing the well-known

shaking at the garden-gate. 'If it isn't him at this time in the

morning! Lauk, Mr. Bumble, only think of its being you! Well,

dear me, it IS a pleasure, this is! Come into the parlour, sir,

please.'

The first sentence was addressed to Susan; and the exclamations

of delight were uttered to Mr. Bumble: as the good lady unlocked

the garden-gate: and showed him, with great attention and

respect, into the house.

'Mrs. Mann,' said Mr. Bumble; not sitting upon, or dropping

himself into a seat, as any common jackanapes would: but letting

himself gradually and slowly down into a chair; 'Mrs. Mann,

ma'am, good morning.'

'Well, and good morning to \_you\_, sir,' replied Mrs. Mann, with

many smiles; 'and hoping you find yourself well, sir!'

'So-so, Mrs. Mann,' replied the beadle. 'A porochial life is not

a bed of roses, Mrs. Mann.'

'Ah, that it isn't indeed, Mr. Bumble,' rejoined the lady. And

all the infant paupers might have chorussed the rejoinder with

great propriety, if they had heard it.

'A porochial life, ma'am,' continued Mr. Bumble, striking the

table with his cane, 'is a life of worrit, and vexation, and

hardihood; but all public characters, as I may say, must suffer

prosecution.'

Mrs. Mann, not very well knowing what the beadle meant, raised

her hands with a look of sympathy, and sighed.

'Ah! You may well sigh, Mrs. Mann!' said the beadle.

Finding she had done right, Mrs. Mann sighed again: evidently to

the satisfaction of the public character: who, repressing a

complacent smile by looking sternly at his cocked hat, said,

'Mrs. Mann, I am going to London.'

'Lauk, Mr. Bumble!' cried Mrs. Mann, starting back.

'To London, ma'am,' resumed the inflexible beadle, 'by coach. I

and two paupers, Mrs. Mann! A legal action is a coming on, about

a settlement; and the board has appointed me--me, Mrs. Mann--to

dispose to the matter before the quarter-sessions at Clerkinwell.

And I very much question,' added Mr. Bumble, drawing himself up,

'whether the Clerkinwell Sessions will not find themselves in the

wrong box before they have done with me.'

'Oh! you mustn't be too hard upon them, sir,' said Mrs. Mann,

coaxingly.

'The Clerkinwell Sessions have brought it upon themselves,

ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble; 'and if the Clerkinwell Sessions find

that they come off rather worse than they expected, the

Clerkinwell Sessions have only themselves to thank.'

There was so much determination and depth of purpose about the

menacing manner in which Mr. Bumble delivered himself of these

words, that Mrs. Mann appeared quite awed by them. At length she

said,

'You're going by coach, sir? I thought it was always usual to

send them paupers in carts.'

'That's when they're ill, Mrs. Mann,' said the beadle. 'We put

the sick paupers into open carts in the rainy weather, to prevent

their taking cold.'

'Oh!' said Mrs. Mann.

'The opposition coach contracts for these two; and takes them

cheap,' said Mr. Bumble. 'They are both in a very low state, and

we find it would come two pound cheaper to move 'em than to bury

'em--that is, if we can throw 'em upon another parish, which I

think we shall be able to do, if they don't die upon the road to

spite us. Ha! ha! ha!'

When Mr. Bumble had laughed a little while, his eyes again

encountered the cocked hat; and he became grave.

'We are forgetting business, ma'am,' said the beadle; 'here is

your porochial stipend for the month.'

Mr. Bumble produced some silver money rolled up in paper, from

his pocket-book; and requested a receipt: which Mrs. Mann wrote.

'It's very much blotted, sir,' said the farmer of infants; 'but

it's formal enough, I dare say. Thank you, Mr. Bumble, sir, I am

very much obliged to you, I'm sure.'

Mr. Bumble nodded, blandly, in acknowledgment of Mrs. Mann's

curtsey; and inquired how the children were.

'Bless their dear little hearts!' said Mrs. Mann with emotion,

'they're as well as can be, the dears! Of course, except the two

that died last week. And little Dick.'

'Isn't that boy no better?' inquired Mr. Bumble.

Mrs. Mann shook her head.

'He's a ill-conditioned, wicious, bad-disposed porochial child

that,' said Mr. Bumble angrily. 'Where is he?'

'I'll bring him to you in one minute, sir,' replied Mrs. Mann.

'Here, you Dick!'

After some calling, Dick was discovered. Having had his face put

under the pump, and dried upon Mrs. Mann's gown, he was led into

the awful presence of Mr. Bumble, the beadle.

The child was pale and thin; his cheeks were sunken; and his eyes

large and bright. The scanty parish dress, the livery of his

misery, hung loosely on his feeble body; and his young limbs had

wasted away, like those of an old man.

Such was the little being who stood trembling beneath Mr.

Bumble's glance; not daring to lift his eyes from the floor; and

dreading even to hear the beadle's voice.

'Can't you look at the gentleman, you obstinate boy?' said Mrs.

Mann.

The child meekly raised his eyes, and encountered those of Mr.

Bumble.

'What's the matter with you, porochial Dick?' inquired Mr.

Bumble, with well-timed jocularity.

'Nothing, sir,' replied the child faintly.

'I should think not,' said Mrs. Mann, who had of course laughed

very much at Mr. Bumble's humour.

'You want for nothing, I'm sure.'

'I should like--' faltered the child.

'Hey-day!' interposed Mr. Mann, 'I suppose you're going to say

that you DO want for something, now? Why, you little wretch--'

'Stop, Mrs. Mann, stop!' said the beadle, raising his hand with a

show of authority. 'Like what, sir, eh?'

'I should like,' faltered the child, 'if somebody that can write,

would put a few words down for me on a piece of paper, and fold it

up and seal it, and keep it for me, after I am laid in the ground.'

'Why, what does the boy mean?' exclaimed Mr. Bumble, on whom the

earnest manner and wan aspect of the child had made some impression:

accustomed as he was to such things. 'What do you mean, sir?'

'I should like,' said the child, 'to leave my dear love to poor

Oliver Twist; and to let him know how often I have sat by myself

and cried to think of his wandering about in the dark nights with

nobody to help him. And I should like to tell him,' said the

child pressing his small hands together, and speaking with great

fervour, 'that I was glad to die when I was very young; for,

perhaps, if I had lived to be a man, and had grown old, my little

sister who is in Heaven, might forget me, or be unlike me; and it

would be so much happier if we were both children there

together.'

Mr. Bumble surveyed the little speaker, from head to foot, with

indescribable astonishment; and, turning to his companion, said,

'They're all in one story, Mrs. Mann. That out-dacious Oliver

had demogalized them all!'

'I couldn't have believed it, sir' said Mrs Mann, holding up her

hands, and looking malignantly at Dick. 'I never see such a

hardened little wretch!'

'Take him away, ma'am!' said Mr. Bumble imperiously. 'This must

be stated to the board, Mrs. Mann.

'I hope the gentleman will understand that it isn't my fault,

sir?' said Mrs. Mann, whimpering pathetically.

'They shall understand that, ma'am; they shall be acquainted with

the true state of the case,' said Mr. Bumble. 'There; take him

away, I can't bear the sight on him.'

Dick was immediately taken away, and locked up in the

coal-cellar. Mr. Bumble shortly afterwards took himself off, to

prepare for his journey.

At six o'clock next morning, Mr. Bumble: having exchanged his

cocked hat for a round one, and encased his person in a blue

great-coat with a cape to it: took his place on the outside of

the coach, accompanied by the criminals whose settlement was

disputed; with whom, in due course of time, he arrived in London.

He experienced no other crosses on the way, than those which

originated in the perverse behaviour of the two paupers, who

persisted in shivering, and complaining of the cold, in a manner

which, Mr. Bumble declared, caused his teeth to chatter in his

head, and made him feel quite uncomfortable; although he had a

great-coat on.

Having disposed of these evil-minded persons for the night, Mr.

Bumble sat himself down in the house at which the coach stopped;

and took a temperate dinner of steaks, oyster sauce, and porter.

Putting a glass of hot gin-and-water on the chimney-piece, he

drew his chair to the fire; and, with sundry moral reflections on

the too-prevalent sin of discontent and complaining, composed

himself to read the paper.

The very first paragraph upon which Mr. Bumble's eye rested, was

the following advertisement.

 'FIVE GUINEAS REWARD

'Whereas a young boy, named Oliver Twist, absconded, or was

enticed, on Thursday evening last, from his home, at Pentonville;

and has not since been heard of. The above reward will be paid

to any person who will give such information as will lead to the

discovery of the said Oliver Twist, or tend to throw any light

upon his previous history, in which the advertiser is, for many

reasons, warmly interested.'

And then followed a full description of Oliver's dress, person,

appearance, and disappearance: with the name and address of Mr.

Brownlow at full length.

Mr. Bumble opened his eyes; read the advertisement, slowly and

carefully, three several times; and in something more than five

minutes was on his way to Pentonville: having actually, in his

excitement, left the glass of hot gin-and-water, untasted.

'Is Mr. Brownlow at home?' inquired Mr. Bumble of the girl who

opened the door.

To this inquiry the girl returned the not uncommon, but rather

evasive reply of 'I don't know; where do you come from?'

Mr. Bumble no sooner uttered Oliver's name, in explanation of his

errand, than Mrs. Bedwin, who had been listening at the parlour

door, hastened into the passage in a breathless state.

'Come in, come in,' said the old lady: 'I knew we should hear of

him. Poor dear! I knew we should! I was certain of it. Bless

his heart! I said so all along.'

Having heard this, the worthy old lady hurried back into the

parlour again; and seating herself on a sofa, burst into tears.

The girl, who was not quite so susceptible, had run upstairs

meanwhile; and now returned with a request that Mr. Bumble would

follow her immediately: which he did.

He was shown into the little back study, where sat Mr. Brownlow

and his friend Mr. Grimwig, with decanters and glasses before

them. The latter gentleman at once burst into the exclamation:

'A beadle. A parish beadle, or I'll eat my head.'

'Pray don't interrupt just now,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'Take a

seat, will you?'

Mr. Bumble sat himself down; quite confounded by the oddity of

Mr. Grimwig's manner. Mr. Brownlow moved the lamp, so as to

obtain an uninterrupted view of the beadle's countenance; and

said, with a little impatience,

'Now, sir, you come in consequence of having seen the

advertisement?'

'Yes, sir,' said Mr. Bumble.

'And you ARE a beadle, are you not?' inquired Mr. Grimwig.

'I am a porochial beadle, gentlemen,' rejoined Mr. Bumble

proudly.

'Of course,' observed Mr. Grimwig aside to his friend, 'I knew he

was. A beadle all over!'

Mr. Brownlow gently shook his head to impose silence on his

friend, and resumed:

'Do you know where this poor boy is now?'

'No more than nobody,' replied Mr. Bumble.

'Well, what DO you know of him?' inquired the old gentleman.

'Speak out, my friend, if you have anything to say. What DO you

know of him?'

'You don't happen to know any good of him, do you?' said Mr.

Grimwig, caustically; after an attentive perusal of Mr. Bumble's

features.

Mr. Bumble, catching at the inquiry very quickly, shook his head

with portentous solemnity.

'You see?' said Mr. Grimwig, looking triumphantly at Mr.

Brownlow.

Mr. Brownlow looked apprehensively at Mr. Bumble's pursed-up

countenance; and requested him to communicate what he knew

regarding Oliver, in as few words as possible.

Mr. Bumble put down his hat; unbuttoned his coat; folded his

arms; inclined his head in a retrospective manner; and, after a

few moments' reflection, commenced his story.

It would be tedious if given in the beadle's words: occupying,

as it did, some twenty minutes in the telling; but the sum and

substance of it was, that Oliver was a foundling, born of low and

vicious parents. That he had, from his birth, displayed no

better qualities than treachery, ingratitude, and malice. That

he had terminated his brief career in the place of his birth, by

making a sanguinary and cowardly attack on an unoffending lad,

and running away in the night-time from his master's house. In

proof of his really being the person he represented himself, Mr.

Bumble laid upon the table the papers he had brought to town.

Folding his arms again, he then awaited Mr. Brownlow's

observations.

'I fear it is all too true,' said the old gentleman sorrowfully,

after looking over the papers. 'This is not much for your

intelligence; but I would gladly have given you treble the money,

if it had been favourable to the boy.'

It is not improbable that if Mr. Bumble had been possessed of

this information at an earlier period of the interview, he might

have imparted a very different colouring to his little history.

It was too late to do it now, however; so he shook his head

gravely, and, pocketing the five guineas, withdrew.

Mr. Brownlow paced the room to and fro for some minutes;

evidently so much disturbed by the beadle's tale, that even Mr.

Grimwig forbore to vex him further.

At length he stopped, and rang the bell violently.

'Mrs. Bedwin,' said Mr. Brownlow, when the housekeeper appeared;

'that boy, Oliver, is an imposter.'

'It can't be, sir. It cannot be,' said the old lady

energetically.

'I tell you he is,' retorted the old gentleman. 'What do you

mean by can't be? We have just heard a full account of him from

his birth; and he has been a thorough-paced little villain, all

his life.'

'I never will believe it, sir,' replied the old lady, firmly.

'Never!'

'You old women never believe anything but quack-doctors, and

lying story-books,' growled Mr. Grimwig. 'I knew it all along.

Why didn't you take my advise in the beginning; you would if he

hadn't had a fever, I suppose, eh? He was interesting, wasn't

he? Interesting! Bah!' And Mr. Grimwig poked the fire with a

flourish.

'He was a dear, grateful, gentle child, sir,' retorted Mrs.

Bedwin, indignantly. 'I know what children are, sir; and have

done these forty years; and people who can't say the same,

shouldn't say anything about them. That's my opinion!'

This was a hard hit at Mr. Grimwig, who was a bachelor. As it

extorted nothing from that gentleman but a smile, the old lady

tossed her head, and smoothed down her apron preparatory to

another speech, when she was stopped by Mr. Brownlow.

'Silence!' said the old gentleman, feigning an anger he was far

from feeling. 'Never let me hear the boy's name again. I rang

to tell you that. Never. Never, on any pretence, mind! You may

leave the room, Mrs. Bedwin. Remember! I am in earnest.'

There were sad hearts at Mr. Brownlow's that night.

Oliver's heart sank within him, when he thought of his good

friends; it was well for him that he could not know what they had

heard, or it might have broken outright.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW OLIVER PASSED HIS TIME IN THE IMPROVING SOCIETY OF HIS

REPUTABLE FRIENDS

About noon next day, when the Dodger and Master Bates had gone

out to pursue their customary avocations, Mr. Fagin took the

opportunity of reading Oliver a long lecture on the crying sin of

ingratitude; of which he clearly demonstrated he had been guilty,

to no ordinary extent, in wilfully absenting himself from the

society of his anxious friends; and, still more, in endeavouring

to escape from them after so much trouble and expense had been

incurred in his recovery. Mr. Fagin laid great stress on the fact

of his having taken Oliver in, and cherished him, when, without

his timely aid, he might have perished with hunger; and he

related the dismal and affecting history of a young lad whom, in

his philanthropy, he had succoured under parallel circumstances,

but who, proving unworthy of his confidence and evincing a desire

to communicate with the police, had unfortunately come to be

hanged at the Old Bailey one morning. Mr. Fagin did not seek to

conceal his share in the catastrophe, but lamented with tears in

his eyes that the wrong-headed and treacherous behaviour of the

young person in question, had rendered it necessary that he

should become the victim of certain evidence for the crown:

which, if it were not precisely true, was indispensably necessary

for the safety of him (Mr. Fagin) and a few select friends. Mr.

Fagin concluded by drawing a rather disagreeable picture of the

discomforts of hanging; and, with great friendliness and

politeness of manner, expressed his anxious hopes that he might

never be obliged to submit Oliver Twist to that unpleasant

operation.

Little Oliver's blood ran cold, as he listened to the Jew's

words, and imperfectly comprehended the dark threats conveyed in

them. That it was possible even for justice itself to confound

the innocent with the guilty when they were in accidental

companionship, he knew already; and that deeply-laid plans for

the destruction of inconveniently knowing or over-communicative

persons, had been really devised and carried out by the Jew on

more occasions than one, he thought by no means unlikely, when he

recollected the general nature of the altercations between that

gentleman and Mr. Sikes: which seemed to bear reference to some

foregone conspiracy of the kind. As he glanced timidly up, and

met the Jew's searching look, he felt that his pale face and

trembling limbs were neither unnoticed nor unrelished by that

wary old gentleman.

The Jew, smiling hideously, patted Oliver on the head, and said,

that if he kept himself quiet, and applied himself to business,

he saw they would be very good friends yet. Then, taking his

hat, and covering himself with an old patched great-coat, he went

out, and locked the room-door behind him.

And so Oliver remained all that day, and for the greater part of

many subsequent days, seeing nobody, between early morning and

midnight, and left during the long hours to commune with his own

thoughts. Which, never failing to revert to his kind friends,

and the opinion they must long ago have formed of him, were sad

indeed.

After the lapse of a week or so, the Jew left the room-door

unlocked; and he was at liberty to wander about the house.

It was a very dirty place. The rooms upstairs had great high

wooden chimney-pieces and large doors, with panelled walls and

cornices to the ceiling; which, although they were black with

neglect and dust, were ornamented in various ways. From all of

these tokens Oliver concluded that a long time ago, before the

old Jew was born, it had belonged to better people, and had

perhaps been quite gay and handsome: dismal and dreary as it

looked now.

Spiders had built their webs in the angles of the walls and

ceilings; and sometimes, when Oliver walked softly into a room,

the mice would scamper across the floor, and run back terrified

to their holes. With these exceptions, there was neither sight

nor sound of any living thing; and often, when it grew dark, and

he was tired of wandering from room to room, he would crouch in

the corner of the passage by the street-door, to be as near

living people as he could; and would remain there, listening and

counting the hours, until the Jew or the boys returned.

In all the rooms, the mouldering shutters were fast closed: the

bars which held them were screwed tight into the wood; the only

light which was admitted, stealing its way through round holes at

the top: which made the rooms more gloomy, and filled them with

strange shadows. There was a back-garret window with rusty bars

outside, which had no shutter; and out of this, Oliver often

gazed with a melancholy face for hours together; but nothing was

to be descried from it but a confused and crowded mass of

housetops, blackened chimneys, and gable-ends. Sometimes,

indeed, a grizzly head might be seen, peering over the

parapet-wall of a distant house; but it was quickly withdrawn

again; and as the window of Oliver's observatory was nailed down,

and dimmed with the rain and smoke of years, it was as much as he

could do to make out the forms of the different objects beyond,

without making any attempt to be seen or heard,--which he had as

much chance of being, as if he had lived inside the ball of St.

Paul's Cathedral.

One afternoon, the Dodger and Master Bates being engaged out that

evening, the first-named young gentleman took it into his head to

evince some anxiety regarding the decoration of his person (to do

him justice, this was by no means an habitual weakness with him);

and, with this end and aim, he condescendingly commanded Oliver

to assist him in his toilet, straightway.

Oliver was but too glad to make himself useful; too happy to have

some faces, however bad, to look upon; too desirous to conciliate

those about him when he could honestly do so; to throw any

objection in the way of this proposal. So he at once expressed

his readiness; and, kneeling on the floor, while the Dodger sat

upon the table so that he could take his foot in his laps, he

applied himself to a process which Mr. Dawkins designated as

'japanning his trotter-cases.' The phrase, rendered into plain

English, signifieth, cleaning his boots.

Whether it was the sense of freedom and independence which a

rational animal may be supposed to feel when he sits on a table

in an easy attitude smoking a pipe, swinging one leg carelessly

to and fro, and having his boots cleaned all the time, without

even the past trouble of having taken them off, or the

prospective misery of putting them on, to disturb his

reflections; or whether it was the goodness of the tobacco that

soothed the feelings of the Dodger, or the mildness of the beer

that mollified his thoughts; he was evidently tinctured, for the

nonce, with a spice of romance and enthusiasm, foreign to his

general nature. He looked down on Oliver, with a thoughtful

countenance, for a brief space; and then, raising his head, and

heaving a gentle sign, said, half in abstraction, and half to

Master Bates:

'What a pity it is he isn't a prig!'

'Ah!' said Master Charles Bates; 'he don't know what's good for

him.'

The Dodger sighed again, and resumed his pipe: as did Charley

Bates. They both smoked, for some seconds, in silence.

'I suppose you don't even know what a prig is?' said the Dodger

mournfully.

'I think I know that,' replied Oliver, looking up. 'It's a

the--; you're one, are you not?' inquired Oliver, checking

himself.

'I am,' replied the Doger. 'I'd scorn to be anything else.' Mr.

Dawkins gave his hat a ferocious cock, after delivering this

sentiment, and looked at Master Bates, as if to denote that he

would feel obliged by his saying anything to the contrary.

'I am,' repeated the Dodger. 'So's Charley. So's Fagin. So's

Sikes. So's Nancy. So's Bet. So we all are, down to the dog.

And he's the downiest one of the lot!'

'And the least given to peaching,' added Charley Bates.

'He wouldn't so much as bark in a witness-box, for fear of

committing himself; no, not if you tied him up in one, and left

him there without wittles for a fortnight,' said the Dodger.

'Not a bit of it,' observed Charley.

'He's a rum dog. Don't he look fierce at any strange cove that

laughs or sings when he's in company!' pursued the Dodger.

'Won't he growl at all, when he hears a fiddle playing! And

don't he hate other dogs as ain't of his breed! Oh, no!'

'He's an out-and-out Christian,' said Charley.

This was merely intended as a tribute to the animal's abilities,

but it was an appropriate remark in another sense, if Master

Bates had only known it; for there are a good many ladies and

gentlemen, claiming to be out-and-out Christians, between whom,

and Mr. Sikes' dog, there exist strong and singular points of

resemblance.

'Well, well,' said the Dodger, recurring to the point from which

they had strayed: with that mindfulness of his profession which

influenced all his proceedings. 'This hasn't go anything to do

with young Green here.'

'No more it has,' said Charley. 'Why don't you put yourself

under Fagin, Oliver?'

'And make your fortun' out of hand?' added the Dodger, with a

grin.

'And so be able to retire on your property, and do the gen-teel:

as I mean to, in the very next leap-year but four that ever

comes, and the forty-second Tuesday in Trinity-week,' said

Charley Bates.

'I don't like it,' rejoined Oliver, timidly; 'I wish they would

let me go. I--I--would rather go.'

'And Fagin would RATHER not!' rejoined Charley.

Oliver knew this too well; but thinking it might be dangerous to

express his feelings more openly, he only sighed, and went on

with his boot-cleaning.

'Go!' exclaimed the Dodger. 'Why, where's your spirit?' Don't

you take any pride out of yourself? Would you go and be

dependent on your friends?'

'Oh, blow that!' said Master Bates: drawing two or three silk

handkerchiefs from his pocket, and tossing them into a cupboard,

'that's too mean; that is.'

'\_I\_ couldn't do it,' said the Dodger, with an air of haughty

disgust.

'You can leave your friends, though,' said Oliver with a half

smile; 'and let them be punished for what you did.'

'That,' rejoined the Dodger, with a wave of his pipe, 'That was

all out of consideration for Fagin, 'cause the traps know that we

work together, and he might have got into trouble if we hadn't

made our lucky; that was the move, wasn't it, Charley?'

Master Bates nodded assent, and would have spoken, but the

recollection of Oliver's flight came so suddenly upon him, that

the smoke he was inhaling got entangled with a laugh, and went up

into his head, and down into his throat: and brought on a fit of

coughing and stamping, about five minutes long.

'Look here!' said the Dodger, drawing forth a handful of

shillings and halfpence. 'Here's a jolly life! What's the odds

where it comes from? Here, catch hold; there's plenty more where

they were took from. You won't, won't you? Oh, you precious

flat!'

'It's naughty, ain't it, Oliver?' inquired Charley Bates. 'He'll

come to be scragged, won't he?'

'I don't know what that means,' replied Oliver.

'Something in this way, old feller,' said Charly. As he said it,

Master Bates caught up an end of his neckerchief; and, holding it

erect in the air, dropped his head on his shoulder, and jerked a

curious sound through his teeth; thereby indicating, by a lively

pantomimic representation, that scragging and hanging were one

and the same thing.

'That's what it means,' said Charley. 'Look how he stares, Jack!

I never did see such prime company as that 'ere boy; he'll be the

death of me, I know he will.' Master Charley Bates, having

laughed heartily again, resumed his pipe with tears in his eyes.

'You've been brought up bad,' said the Dodger, surveying his

boots with much satisfaction when Oliver had polished them.

'Fagin will make something of you, though, or you'll be the first

he ever had that turned out unprofitable. You'd better begin at

once; for you'll come to the trade long before you think of it;

and you're only losing time, Oliver.'

Master Bates backed this advice with sundry moral admonitions of

his own: which, being exhausted, he and his friend Mr. Dawkins

launched into a glowing description of the numerous pleasures

incidental to the life they led, interspersed with a variety of

hints to Oliver that the best thing he could do, would be to

secure Fagin's favour without more delay, by the means which they

themselves had employed to gain it.

'And always put this in your pipe, Nolly,' said the Dodger, as

the Jew was heard unlocking the door above, 'if you don't take

fogels and tickers--'

'What's the good of talking in that way?' interposed Master

Bates; 'he don't know what you mean.'

'If you don't take pocket-handkechers and watches,' said the

Dodger, reducing his conversation to the level of Oliver's

capacity, 'some other cove will; so that the coves that lose 'em

will be all the worse, and you'll be all the worse, too, and

nobody half a ha'p'orth the better, except the chaps wot gets

them--and you've just as good a right to them as they have.'

'To be sure, to be sure!' said the Jew, who had entered unseen by

Oliver. 'It all lies in a nutshell my dear; in a nutshell, take

the Dodger's word for it. Ha! ha! ha! He understands the

catechism of his trade.'

The old man rubbed his hands gleefully together, as he

corroborated the Dodger's reasoning in these terms; and chuckled

with delight at his pupil's proficiency.

The conversation proceeded no farther at this time, for the Jew

had returned home accompanied by Miss Betsy, and a gentleman whom

Oliver had never seen before, but who was accosted by the Dodger

as Tom Chitling; and who, having lingered on the stairs to

exchange a few gallantries with the lady, now made his

appearance.

Mr. Chitling was older in years than the Dodger: having perhaps

numbered eighteen winters; but there was a degree of deference in

his deportment towards that young gentleman which seemed to

indicate that he felt himself conscious of a slight inferiority

in point of genius and professional aquirements. He had small

twinkling eyes, and a pock-marked face; wore a fur cap, a dark

corduroy jacket, greasy fustian trousers, and an apron. His

wardrobe was, in truth, rather out of repair; but he excused

himself to the company by stating that his 'time' was only out an

hour before; and that, in consequence of having worn the

regimentals for six weeks past, he had not been able to bestow

any attention on his private clothes. Mr. Chitling added, with

strong marks of irritation, that the new way of fumigating

clothes up yonder was infernal unconstitutional, for it burnt

holes in them, and there was no remedy against the County. The

same remark he considered to apply to the regulation mode of

cutting the hair: which he held to be decidedly unlawful. Mr.

Chitling wound up his observations by stating that he had not

touched a drop of anything for forty-two moral long hard-working

days; and that he 'wished he might be busted if he warn't as dry

as a lime-basket.'

'Where do you think the gentleman has come from, Oliver?'

inquired the Jew, with a grin, as the other boys put a bottle of

spirits on the table.

'I--I--don't know, sir,' replied Oliver.

'Who's that?' inquired Tom Chitling, casting a contemptuous look

at Oliver.

'A young friend of mine, my dear,' replied the Jew.

'He's in luck, then,' said the young man, with a meaning look at

Fagin. 'Never mind where I came from, young 'un; you'll find

your way there, soon enough, I'll bet a crown!'

At this sally, the boys laughed. After some more jokes on the

same subject, they exchanged a few short whispers with Fagin; and

withdrew.

After some words apart between the last comer and Fagin, they

drew their chairs towards the fire; and the Jew, telling Oliver

to come and sit by him, led the conversation to the topics most

calculated to interest his hearers. These were, the great

advantages of the trade, the proficiency of the Dodger, the

amiability of Charley Bates, and the liberality of the Jew

himself. At length these subjects displayed signs of being

thoroughly exhausted; and Mr. Chitling did the same: for the

house of correction becomes fatiguing after a week or two. Miss

Betsy accordingly withdrew; and left the party to their repose.

From this day, Oliver was seldom left alone; but was placed in

almost constant communication with the two boys, who played the

old game with the Jew every day: whether for their own

improvement or Oliver's, Mr. Fagin best knew. At other times the

old man would tell them stories of robberies he had committed in

his younger days: mixed up with so much that was droll and

curious, that Oliver could not help laughing heartily, and

showing that he was amused in spite of all his better feelings.

In short, the wily old Jew had the boy in his toils. Having

prepared his mind, by solitude and gloom, to prefer any society

to the companionship of his own sad thoughts in such a dreary

place, he was now slowly instilling into his soul the poison

which he hoped would blacken it, and change its hue for ever.

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH A NOTABLE PLAN IS DISCUSSED AND DETERMINED ON

It was a chill, damp, windy night, when the Jew: buttoning his

great-coat tight round his shrivelled body, and pulling the

collar up over his ears so as completely to obscure the lower

part of his face: emerged from his den. He paused on the step

as the door was locked and chained behind him; and having

listened while the boys made all secure, and until their

retreating footsteps were no longer audible, slunk down the

street as quickly as he could.

The house to which Oliver had been conveyed, was in the

neighborhood of Whitechapel. The Jew stopped for an instant at

the corner of the street; and, glancing suspiciously round,

crossed the road, and struck off in the direction of the

Spitalfields.

The mud lay thick upon the stones, and a black mist hung over the

streets; the rain fell sluggishly down, and everything felt cold

and clammy to the touch. It seemed just the night when it

befitted such a being as the Jew to be abroad. As he glided

stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and

doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile,

engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved:

crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a

meal.

He kept on his course, through many winding and narrow ways,

until he reached Bethnal Green; then, turning suddenly off to the

left, he soon became involved in a maze of the mean and dirty

streets which abound in that close and densely-populated quarter.

The Jew was evidently too familiar with the ground he traversed

to be at all bewildered, either by the darkness of the night, or

the intricacies of the way. He hurried through several alleys

and streets, and at length turned into one, lighted only by a

single lamp at the farther end. At the door of a house in this

street, he knocked; having exchanged a few muttered words with

the person who opened it, he walked upstairs.

A dog growled as he touched the handle of a room-door; and a

man's voice demanded who was there.

'Only me, Bill; only me, my dear,' said the Jew looking in.

'Bring in your body then,' said Sikes. 'Lie down, you stupid

brute! Don't you know the devil when he's got a great-coat on?'

Apparently, the dog had been somewhat deceived by Mr. Fagin's

outer garment; for as the Jew unbuttoned it, and threw it over

the back of a chair, he retired to the corner from which he had

risen: wagging his tail as he went, to show that he was as well

satisfied as it was in his nature to be.

'Well!' said Sikes.

'Well, my dear,' replied the Jew.--'Ah! Nancy.'

The latter recognition was uttered with just enough of

embarrassment to imply a doubt of its reception; for Mr. Fagin

and his young friend had not met, since she had interfered in

behalf of Oliver. All doubts upon the subject, if he had any,

were speedily removed by the young lady's behaviour. She took

her feet off the fender, pushed back her chair, and bade Fagin

draw up his, without saying more about it: for it was a cold

night, and no mistake.

'It is cold, Nancy dear,' said the Jew, as he warmed his skinny

hands over the fire. 'It seems to go right through one,' added

the old man, touching his side.

'It must be a piercer, if it finds its way through your heart,'

said Mr. Sikes. 'Give him something to drink, Nancy. Burn my

body, make haste! It's enough to turn a man ill, to see his lean

old carcase shivering in that way, like a ugly ghost just rose

from the grave.'

Nancy quickly brought a bottle from a cupboard, in which there

were many: which, to judge from the diversity of their

appearance, were filled with several kinds of liquids. Sikes

pouring out a glass of brandy, bade the Jew drink it off.

'Quite enough, quite, thankye, Bill,' replied the Jew, putting

down the glass after just setting his lips to it.

'What! You're afraid of our getting the better of you, are you?'

inquired Sikes, fixing his eyes on the Jew. 'Ugh!'

With a hoarse grunt of contempt, Mr. Sikes seized the glass, and

threw the remainder of its contents into the ashes: as a

preparatory ceremony to filling it again for himself: which he

did at once.

The Jew glanced round the room, as his companion tossed down the

second glassful; not in curiousity, for he had seen it often

before; but in a restless and suspicious manner habitual to him.

It was a meanly furnished apartment, with nothing but the

contents of the closet to induce the belief that its occupier was

anything but a working man; and with no more suspicious articles

displayed to view than two or three heavy bludgeons which stood

in a corner, and a 'life-preserver' that hung over the

chimney-piece.

'There,' said Sikes, smacking his lips. 'Now I'm ready.'

'For business?' inquired the Jew.

'For business,' replied Sikes; 'so say what you've got to say.'

'About the crib at Chertsey, Bill?' said the Jew, drawing his

chair forward, and speaking in a very low voice.

'Yes. Wot about it?' inquired Sikes.

'Ah! you know what I mean, my dear,' said the Jew. 'He knows

what I mean, Nancy; don't he?'

'No, he don't,' sneered Mr. Sikes. 'Or he won't, and that's the

same thing. Speak out, and call things by their right names;

don't sit there, winking and blinking, and talking to me in

hints, as if you warn't the very first that thought about the

robbery. Wot d'ye mean?'

'Hush, Bill, hush!' said the Jew, who had in vain attempted to

stop this burst of indignation; 'somebody will hear us, my dear.

Somebody will hear us.'

'Let 'em hear!' said Sikes; 'I don't care.' But as Mr. Sikes DID

care, on reflection, he dropped his voice as he said the words,

and grew calmer.

'There, there,' said the Jew, coaxingly. 'It was only my

caution, nothing more. Now, my dear, about that crib at

Chertsey; when is it to be done, Bill, eh? When is it to be

done? Such plate, my dear, such plate!' said the Jew: rubbing

his hands, and elevating his eyebrows in a rapture of

anticipation.

'Not at all,' replied Sikes coldly.

'Not to be done at all!' echoed the Jew, leaning back in his

chair.

'No, not at all,' rejoined Sikes. 'At least it can't be a put-up

job, as we expected.'

'Then it hasn't been properly gone about,' said the Jew, turning

pale with anger. 'Don't tell me!'

'But I will tell you,' retorted Sikes. 'Who are you that's not

to be told? I tell you that Toby Crackit has been hanging about

the place for a fortnight, and he can't get one of the servants

in line.'

'Do you mean to tell me, Bill,' said the Jew: softening as the

other grew heated: 'that neither of the two men in the house can

be got over?'

'Yes, I do mean to tell you so,' replied Sikes. 'The old lady

has had 'em these twenty years; and if you were to give 'em five

hundred pound, they wouldn't be in it.'

'But do you mean to say, my dear,' remonstrated the Jew, 'that

the women can't be got over?'

'Not a bit of it,' replied Sikes.

'Not by flash Toby Crackit?' said the Jew incredulously. 'Think

what women are, Bill,'

'No; not even by flash Toby Crackit,' replied Sikes. 'He says

he's worn sham whiskers, and a canary waistcoat, the whole

blessed time he's been loitering down there, and it's all of no

use.'

'He should have tried mustachios and a pair of military trousers,

my dear,' said the Jew.

'So he did,' rejoined Sikes, 'and they warn't of no more use than

the other plant.'

The Jew looked blank at this information. After ruminating for

some minutes with his chin sunk on his breast, he raised his head

and said, with a deep sigh, that if flash Toby Crackit reported

aright, he feared the game was up.

'And yet,' said the old man, dropping his hands on his knees,

'it's a sad thing, my dear, to lose so much when we had set our

hearts upon it.'

'So it is,' said Mr. Sikes. 'Worse luck!'

A long silence ensued; during which the Jew was plunged in deep

thought, with his face wrinkled into an expression of villainy

perfectly demoniacal. Sikes eyed him furtively from time to

time. Nancy, apparently fearful of irritating the housebreaker,

sat with her eyes fixed upon the fire, as if she had been deaf to

all that passed.

'Fagin,' said Sikes, abruptly breaking the stillness that

prevailed; 'is it worth fifty shiners extra, if it's safely done

from the outside?'

'Yes,' said the Jew, as suddenly rousing himself.

'Is it a bargain?' inquired Sikes.

'Yes, my dear, yes,' rejoined the Jew; his eyes glistening, and

every muscle in his face working, with the excitement that the

inquiry had awakened.

'Then,' said Sikes, thrusting aside the Jew's hand, with some

disdain, 'let it come off as soon as you like. Toby and me were

over the garden-wall the night afore last, sounding the panels of

the door and shutters. The crib's barred up at night like a

jail; but there's one part we can crack, safe and softly.'

'Which is that, Bill?' asked the Jew eagerly.

'Why,' whispered Sikes, 'as you cross the lawn--'

'Yes?' said the Jew, bending his head forward, with his eyes

almost starting out of it.

'Umph!' cried Sikes, stopping short, as the girl, scarcely moving

her head, looked suddenly round, and pointed for an instant to

the Jew's face. 'Never mind which part it is. You can't do it

without me, I know; but it's best to be on the safe side when one

deals with you.'

'As you like, my dear, as you like' replied the Jew. 'Is there

no help wanted, but yours and Toby's?'

'None,' said Sikes. 'Cept a centre-bit and a boy. The first

we've both got; the second you must find us.'

'A boy!' exclaimed the Jew. 'Oh! then it's a panel, eh?'

'Never mind wot it is!' replied Sikes. 'I want a boy, and he

musn't be a big 'un. Lord!' said Mr. Sikes, reflectively, 'if

I'd only got that young boy of Ned, the chimbley-sweeper's! He

kept him small on purpose, and let him out by the job. But the

father gets lagged; and then the Juvenile Delinquent Society

comes, and takes the boy away from a trade where he was earning

money, teaches him to read and write, and in time makes a

'prentice of him. And so they go on,' said Mr. Sikes, his wrath

rising with the recollection of his wrongs, 'so they go on; and,

if they'd got money enough (which it's a Providence they

haven't,) we shouldn't have half a dozen boys left in the whole

trade, in a year or two.'

'No more we should,' acquiesced the Jew, who had been considering

during this speech, and had only caught the last sentence.

'Bill!'

'What now?' inquired Sikes.

The Jew nodded his head towards Nancy, who was still gazing at

the fire; and intimated, by a sign, that he would have her told

to leave the room. Sikes shrugged his shoulders impatiently, as

if he thought the precaution unnecessary; but complied,

nevertheless, by requesting Miss Nancy to fetch him a jug of

beer.

'You don't want any beer,' said Nancy, folding her arms, and

retaining her seat very composedly.

'I tell you I do!' replied Sikes.

'Nonsense,' rejoined the girl coolly, 'Go on, Fagin. I know what

he's going to say, Bill; he needn't mind me.'

The Jew still hesitated. Sikes looked from one to the other in

some surprise.

'Why, you don't mind the old girl, do you, Fagin?' he asked at

length. 'You've known her long enough to trust her, or the

Devil's in it. She ain't one to blab. Are you Nancy?'

'\_I\_ should think not!' replied the young lady: drawing her

chair up to the table, and putting her elbows upon it.

'No, no, my dear, I know you're not,' said the Jew; 'but--' and

again the old man paused.

'But wot?' inquired Sikes.

'I didn't know whether she mightn't p'r'aps be out of sorts, you

know, my dear, as she was the other night,' replied the Jew.

At this confession, Miss Nancy burst into a loud laugh; and,

swallowing a glass of brandy, shook her head with an air of

defiance, and burst into sundry exclamations of 'Keep the game

a-going!' 'Never say die!' and the like. These seemed to have

the effect of re-assuring both gentlemen; for the Jew nodded his

head with a satisfied air, and resumed his seat: as did Mr. Sikes

likewise.

'Now, Fagin,' said Nancy with a laugh. 'Tell Bill at once, about

Oliver!'

'Ha! you're a clever one, my dear: the sharpest girl I ever saw!'

said the Jew, patting her on the neck. 'It WAS about Oliver I

was going to speak, sure enough. Ha! ha! ha!'

'What about him?' demanded Sikes.

'He's the boy for you, my dear,' replied the Jew in a hoarse

whisper; laying his finger on the side of his nose, and grinning

frightfully.

'He!' exclaimed. Sikes.

'Have him, Bill!' said Nancy. 'I would, if I was in your place.

He mayn't be so much up, as any of the others; but that's not

what you want, if he's only to open a door for you. Depend upon

it he's a safe one, Bill.'

'I know he is,' rejoined Fagin. 'He's been in good training

these last few weeks, and it's time he began to work for his

bread. Besides, the others are all too big.'

'Well, he is just the size I want,' said Mr. Sikes, ruminating.

'And will do everything you want, Bill, my dear,' interposed the

Jew; 'he can't help himself. That is, if you frighten him

enough.'

'Frighten him!' echoed Sikes. 'It'll be no sham frightening,

mind you. If there's anything queer about him when we once get

into the work; in for a penny, in for a pound. You won't see him

alive again, Fagin. Think of that, before you send him. Mark my

words!' said the robber, poising a crowbar, which he had drawn

from under the bedstead.

'I've thought of it all,' said the Jew with energy. 'I've--I've

had my eye upon him, my dears, close--close. Once let him feel

that he is one of us; once fill his mind with the idea that he

has been a thief; and he's ours! Ours for his life. Oho! It

couldn't have come about better! The old man crossed his arms

upon his breast; and, drawing his head and shoulders into a heap,

literally hugged himself for joy.

'Ours!' said Sikes. 'Yours, you mean.'

'Perhaps I do, my dear,' said the Jew, with a shrill chuckle.

'Mine, if you like, Bill.'

'And wot,' said Sikes, scowling fiercely on his agreeable friend,

'wot makes you take so much pains about one chalk-faced kid, when

you know there are fifty boys snoozing about Common Garden every

night, as you might pick and choose from?'

'Because they're of no use to me, my dear,' replied the Jew, with

some confusion, 'not worth the taking. Their looks convict 'em

when they get into trouble, and I lose 'em all. With this boy,

properly managed, my dears, I could do what I couldn't with

twenty of them. Besides,' said the Jew, recovering his

self-possession, 'he has us now if he could only give us leg-bail

again; and he must be in the same boat with us. Never mind how

he came there; it's quite enough for my power over him that he

was in a robbery; that's all I want. Now, how much better this

is, than being obliged to put the poor leetle boy out of the

way--which would be dangerous, and we should lose by it besides.'

'When is it to be done?' asked Nancy, stopping some turbulent

exclamation on the part of Mr. Sikes, expressive of the disgust

with which he received Fagin's affectation of humanity.

'Ah, to be sure,' said the Jew; 'when is it to be done, Bill?'

'I planned with Toby, the night arter to-morrow,' rejoined Sikes

in a surly voice, 'if he heerd nothing from me to the contrairy.'

'Good,' said the Jew; 'there's no moon.'

'No,' rejoined Sikes.

'It's all arranged about bringing off the swag, is it?' asked the

Jew.

Sikes nodded.

'And about--'

'Oh, ah, it's all planned,' rejoined Sikes, interrupting him.

'Never mind particulars. You'd better bring the boy here

to-morrow night. I shall get off the stone an hour arter

daybreak. Then you hold your tongue, and keep the melting-pot

ready, and that's all you'll have to do.'

After some discussion, in which all three took an active part, it

was decided that Nancy should repair to the Jew's next evening

when the night had set in, and bring Oliver away with her; Fagin

craftily observing, that, if he evinced any disinclination to the

task, he would be more willing to accompany the girl who had so

recently interfered in his behalf, than anybody else. It was

also solemnly arranged that poor Oliver should, for the purposes

of the contemplated expedition, be unreservedly consigned to the

care and custody of Mr. William Sikes; and further, that the said

Sikes should deal with him as he thought fit; and should not be

held responsible by the Jew for any mischance or evil that might

be necessary to visit him: it being understood that, to render

the compact in this respect binding, any representations made by

Mr. Sikes on his return should be required to be confirmed and

corroborated, in all important particulars, by the testimony of

flash Toby Crackit.

These preliminaries adjusted, Mr. Sikes proceeded to drink brandy

at a furious rate, and to flourish the crowbar in an alarming

manner; yelling forth, at the same time, most unmusical snatches

of song, mingled with wild execrations. At length, in a fit of

professional enthusiasm, he insisted upon producing his box of

housebreaking tools: which he had no sooner stumbled in with,

and opened for the purpose of explaining the nature and

properties of the various implements it contained, and the

peculiar beauties of their construction, than he fell over the

box upon the floor, and went to sleep where he fell.

'Good-night, Nancy,' said the Jew, muffling himself up as before.

'Good-night.'

Their eyes met, and the Jew scrutinised her, narrowly. There was

no flinching about the girl. She was as true and earnest in the

matter as Toby Crackit himself could be.

The Jew again bade her good-night, and, bestowing a sly kick upon

the prostrate form of Mr. Sikes while her back was turned, groped

downstairs.

'Always the way!' muttered the Jew to himself as he turned

homeward. 'The worst of these women is, that a very little thing

serves to call up some long-forgotten feeling; and, the best of

them is, that it never lasts. Ha! ha! The man against the

child, for a bag of gold!'

Beguiling the time with these pleasant reflections, Mr. Fagin

wended his way, through mud and mire, to his gloomy abode: where

the Dodger was sitting up, impatiently awaiting his return.

'Is Oliver a-bed? I want to speak to him,' was his first remark

as they descended the stairs.

'Hours ago,' replied the Dodger, throwing open a door. 'Here he

is!'

The boy was lying, fast asleep, on a rude bed upon the floor; so

pale with anxiety, and sadness, and the closeness of his prison,

that he looked like death; not death as it shows in shroud and

coffin, but in the guise it wears when life has just departed;

when a young and gentle spirit has, but an instant, fled to

Heaven, and the gross air of the world has not had time to

breathe upon the changing dust it hallowed.

'Not now,' said the Jew, turning softly away. 'To-morrow.

To-morrow.'

CHAPTER XX

WHEREIN OLVER IS DELIVERED OVER TO MR. WILLIAM SIKES

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 shoes had been removed.

At first, he was pleased with the discovery: hoping that it might

be the forerunner of his release; but such thoughts were quickly

dispelled, on his sitting down to breakfast along 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?'

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 the boy'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 Oliver

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!' replied Oliver, softly.

The Jew walked to the door: looking over his shoulder at the boy

as he went. Suddenly stopping, he called him by his name.

Oliver looked up; the Jew, pointing to the candle, motioned 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 leaned 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 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, he 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 made the blood run cold; of

secret murders that had been committed by the lonely wayside; of

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 (so they said) 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 real and

vivid, 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

this.'

'Has anything happened?' asked Oliver. 'Can I help you? I will

if I can. I will, indeed.'

She rocked herself to and fro; caught her throat; and, uttering a

gurgling sound, gasped for breath.

'Nancy!' cried Oliver, 'What is it?'

The girl beat her hands upon her knees, and her feet upon the

ground; 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 she, 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?' asked 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 occured to

him, he stepped forward: and said, somewhat hastily, that he was

ready.

Neither his brief consideration, nor its purport, was lost on 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. 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 on 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; 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 was as quickly closed, when they had passed out. A

hackney-cabriolet was in waiting; 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 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.

While he hesitated, the opportunity was gone; 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, an uncommonly

hearty welcome, from a person of Mr. Sikes' temperament. Nancy,

appearing much gratified thereby, saluted him cordially.

'Bull's-eye'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 carcase: 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 pupil, Mr. Sikes pulled off Oliver's cap

and threw it into a corner; and then, taking him by the shoulder,

sat himself down by the table, and stood the boy 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.

'Well,' said the robber, grasping Oliver's wrist, and putting the

barrel so close to his temple that they touched; at which moment

the boy could not repress a start; '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 me?'

'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 will 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 before starting.'

In pursuance of this request, Nancy quickly laid the cloth;

disappearing for a few minutes, she presently returned with a pot

of porter and a dish of sheep's heads: which gave occasion to

several pleasant witticisms on the part of Mr. Sikes, founded

upon the singular coincidence of 'jemmies' being a can name,

common to them, and also to an ingenious implement much used in

his profession. Indeed, the worthy gentleman, stimulated perhaps

by the immediate prospect of being on active service, was in

great spirits and good humour; in proof whereof, it may be here

remarked, that he humourously drank all the beer at a draught,

and did not utter, on a rough calculation, more than four-score

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 on 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. 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; having taken some

breakfast, he 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; 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 that same 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, 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 XXI

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: 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 house-tops,

and dreary streets. There appeared to be nobody stirring in that

quarter of the town; the windows of the houses were all closely

shut; and the streets through which they passed, were 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; 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; milk-women with pails; 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; 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 came on 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 amazement.

It was market-morning. The ground was covered, nearly

ankle-deep, with filth and mire; 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 pens as could be crowded into the vacant space, were

filled with sheep; 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 mass; the

whistling of drovers, the barking dogs, the bellowing and

plunging of the oxen, the bleating of sheep, the 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 dim 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 on 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, 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 jerk at his little

companion's wrist; Oliver, quickening his pace into a kind of

trot between a fast walk and a run, kept up with the rapid

strides of the house-breaker as well as he could.

They held 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. Seeing 'Hounslow' written on 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 mile-stones, Oliver wondered, more

and more, where his companion meant to take him. Kensington,

Hammersmith, Chiswick, Kew Bridge, Brentford, were all passed;

and yet they went on as steadily as if they had only just 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 run 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 significant manner.

'Good-bye, 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 until he had fairly gone; and then, telling Oliver

he might look about him if he wanted, once again led him onward

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 stopping for nothing but a little beer, until

they reached a town. Here against the wall of a house, Oliver

saw written up in pretty large letters, 'Hampton.' They lingered

about, in the fields, for some hours. At length they came back

into the town; and, turning into an old public-house with a

defaced sign-board, 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 their company.

They had some cold meat for dinner, and sat 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; then, quite overpowered by

fatigue and the fumes of the tobacco, fell 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 neither. 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; having done so, he 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 for 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

those 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. 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 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, took Oliver by the hand, and 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, until they were close upon the bridge;

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. The house was dark, dismantled: and the

all appearance, uninhabited.

Sikes, with Oliver's hand still in his, softly approached the low

porch, and raised the latch. The door yielded to the pressure,

and they passed in together.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BURGLARY

'Hallo!' cried a loud, hoarse voice, as soon as they 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; 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 sleep 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 wentur. 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 fortin' to him.'

'There--there's enough of that,' interposed Sikes, impatiently;

and stooping over his recumbant 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,

scarecely 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 perwerse 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; 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 on the fire.

Oliver fell into a heavy doze: imagining himself straying along

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 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; 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-bits, 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 stupified by the unwonted exercise,

and the air, and the drink which 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.

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. 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 sank 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 on 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. 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: which belonged 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. Sike'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 gold

pitchfork on 'em: which is the old lady's arms.'

'Keep quiet, can't you?' replied Sikes, with a threatening 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; then by 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 Oiver

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.' 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 upstairs 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 by 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! 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.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHICH CONTAINS THE SUBSTANCE OF A PLEASANT CONVERSATION BETWEEN

MR. BUMBLE AND A LADY; AND SHOWS THAT EVEN A BEADLE MAY BE

SUSCEPTIBLE ON SOME POINTS

The night was bitter cold. The snow lay on the ground, frozen

into a hard thick crust, so that only the heaps that had drifted

into byways and corners were affected by the sharp wind that

howled abroad: which, as if expending increased fury on such

prey as it found, caught it savagely up in clouds, and, whirling

it into a thousand misty eddies, scattered it in air. Bleak,

dark, and piercing cold, it was a night for the well-housed and

fed to draw round the bright fire and thank God they were at

home; and for the homeless, starving wretch to lay him down and

die. Many hunger-worn outcasts close their eyes in our bare

streets, at such times, who, let their crimes have been what they

may, can hardly open them in a more bitter world.

Such was the aspect of out-of-doors affairs, when Mrs. Corney, the

matron of the workhouse to which our readers have been already

introduced as the birthplace of Oliver Twist, sat herself down

before a cheerful fire in her own little room, and glanced, with

no small degree of complacency, at a small round table: on which

stood a tray of corresponding size, furnished with all necessary

materials for the most grateful meal that matrons enjoy. In

fact, Mrs. Corney was about to solace herself with a cup of tea.

As she glanced from the table to the fireplace, where the

smallest of all possible kettles was singing a small song in a

small voice, her inward satisfaction evidently increased,--so

much so, indeed, that Mrs. Corney smiled.

'Well!' said the matron, leaning her elbow on the table, and

looking reflectively at the fire; 'I'm sure we have all on us a

great deal to be grateful for! A great deal, if we did but know

it. Ah!'

Mrs. Corney shook her head mournfully, as if deploring the mental

blindness of those paupers who did not know it; and thrusting a

silver spoon (private property) into the inmost recesses of a

two-ounce tin tea-caddy, proceeded to make the tea.

How slight a thing will disturb the equanimity of our frail

minds! The black teapot, being very small and easily filled, ran

over while Mrs. Corney was moralising; and the water slightly

scalded Mrs. Corney's hand.

'Drat the pot!' said the worthy matron, setting it down very

hastily on the hob; 'a little stupid thing, that only holds a

couple of cups! What use is it of, to anybody! Except,' said

Mrs. Corney, pausing, 'except to a poor desolate creature like

me. Oh dear!'

With these words, the matron dropped into her chair, and, once

more resting her elbow on the table, thought of her solitary

fate. The small teapot, and the single cup, had awakened in her

mind sad recollections of Mr. Corney (who had not been dead more

than five-and-twenty years); and she was overpowered.

'I shall never get another!' said Mrs. Corney, pettishly; 'I

shall never get another--like him.'

Whether this remark bore reference to the husband, or the teapot,

is uncertain. It might have been the latter; for Mrs. Corney

looked at it as she spoke; and took it up afterwards. She had

just tasted her first cup, when she was disturbed by a soft tap

at the room-door.

'Oh, come in with you!' said Mrs. Corney, sharply. 'Some of the

old women dying, I suppose. They always die when I'm at meals.

Don't stand there, letting the cold air in, don't. What's amiss

now, eh?'

'Nothing, ma'am, nothing,' replied a man's voice.

'Dear me!' exclaimed the matron, in a much sweeter tone, 'is that

Mr. Bumble?'

'At your service, ma'am,' said Mr. Bumble, who had been stopping

outside to rub his shoes clean, and to shake the snow off his

coat; and who now made his appearance, bearing the cocked hat in

one hand and a bundle in the other. 'Shall I shut the door,

ma'am?'

The lady modestly hesitated to reply, lest there should be any

impropriety in holding an interview with Mr. Bumble, with closed

doors. Mr. Bumble taking advantage of the hesitation, and being

very cold himself, shut it without permission.

'Hard weather, Mr. Bumble,' said the matron.

'Hard, indeed, ma'am,' replied the beadle. 'Anti-porochial

weather this, ma'am. We have given away, Mrs. Corney, we have

given away a matter of twenty quartern loaves and a cheese and a

half, this very blessed afternoon; and yet them paupers are not

contented.'

'Of course not. When would they be, Mr. Bumble?' said the

matron, sipping her tea.

'When, indeed, ma'am!' rejoined Mr. Bumble. 'Why here's one man

that, in consideration of his wife and large family, has a

quartern loaf and a good pound of cheese, full weight. Is he

grateful, ma'am? Is he grateful? Not a copper farthing's worth

of it! What does he do, ma'am, but ask for a few coals; if it's

only a pocket handkerchief full, he says! Coals! What would he

do with coals? Toast his cheese with 'em and then come back for

more. That's the way with these people, ma'am; give 'em a apron

full of coals to-day, and they'll come back for another, the day

after to-morrow, as brazen as alabaster.'

The matron expressed her entire concurrence in this intelligible

simile; and the beadle went on.

'I never,' said Mr. Bumble, 'see anything like the pitch it's got

to. The day afore yesterday, a man--you have been a married

woman, ma'am, and I may mention it to you--a man, with hardly a

rag upon his back (here Mrs. Corney looked at the floor), goes to

our overseer's door when he has got company coming to dinner; and

says, he must be relieved, Mrs. Corney. As he wouldn't go away,

and shocked the company very much, our overseer sent him out a

pound of potatoes and half a pint of oatmeal. "My heart!" says

the ungrateful villain, "what's the use of \_this\_ to me? You might

as well give me a pair of iron spectacles!" "Very good," says

our overseer, taking 'em away again, "you won't get anything else

here." "Then I'll die in the streets!" says the vagrant. "Oh

no, you won't," says our overseer.'

'Ha! ha! That was very good! So like Mr. Grannett, wasn't it?'

interposed the matron. 'Well, Mr. Bumble?'

'Well, ma'am,' rejoined the beadle, 'he went away; and he \_did\_ die

in the streets. There's a obstinate pauper for you!'

'It beats anything I could have believed,' observed the matron

emphatically. 'But don't you think out-of-door relief a very bad

thing, any way, Mr. Bumble? You're a gentleman of experience,

and ought to know. Come.'

'Mrs. Corney,' said the beadle, smiling as men smile who are

conscious of superior information, 'out-of-door relief, properly

managed: properly managed, ma'am: is the porochial safeguard. The

great principle of out-of-door relief is, to give the paupers

exactly what they don't want; and then they get tired of coming.'

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mrs. Corney. 'Well, that is a good one,

too!'

'Yes. Betwixt you and me, ma'am,' returned Mr. Bumble, 'that's

the great principle; and that's the reason why, if you look at

any cases that get into them owdacious newspapers, you'll always

observe that sick families have been relieved with slices of

cheese. That's the rule now, Mrs. Corney, all over the country.

But, however,' said the beadle, stopping to unpack his bundle,

'these are official secrets, ma'am; not to be spoken of; except,

as I may say, among the porochial officers, such as ourselves.

This is the port wine, ma'am, that the board ordered for the

infirmary; real, fresh, genuine port wine; only out of the cask

this forenoon; clear as a bell, and no sediment!'

Having held the first bottle up to the light, and shaken it well

to test its excellence, Mr. Bumble placed them both on top of a

chest of drawers; folded the handkerchief in which they had been

wrapped; put it carefully in his pocket; and took up his hat, as

if to go.

'You'll have a very cold walk, Mr. Bumble,' said the matron.

'It blows, ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble, turning up his

coat-collar, 'enough to cut one's ears off.'

The matron looked, from the little kettle, to the beadle, who was

moving towards the door; and as the beadle coughed, preparatory

to bidding her good-night, bashfully inquired whether--whether he

wouldn't take a cup of tea?

Mr. Bumble instantaneously turned back his collar again; laid his

hat and stick upon a chair; and drew another chair up to the

table. As he slowly seated himself, he looked at the lady. She

fixed her eyes upon the little teapot. Mr. Bumble coughed again,

and slightly smiled.

Mrs. Corney rose to get another cup and saucer from the closet.

As she sat down, her eyes once again encountered those of the

gallant beadle; she coloured, and applied herself to the task of

making his tea. Again Mr. Bumble coughed--louder this time than

he had coughed yet.

'Sweet? Mr. Bumble?' inquired the matron, taking up the

sugar-basin.

'Very sweet, indeed, ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble. He fixed his

eyes on Mrs. Corney as he said this; and if ever a beadle looked

tender, Mr. Bumble was that beadle at that moment.

The tea was made, and handed in silence. Mr. Bumble, having

spread a handkerchief over his knees to prevent the crumbs from

sullying the splendour of his shorts, began to eat and drink;

varying these amusements, occasionally, by fetching a deep sigh;

which, however, had no injurious effect upon his appetite, but,

on the contrary, rather seemed to facilitate his operations in

the tea and toast department.

'You have a cat, ma'am, I see,' said Mr. Bumble, glancing at one

who, in the centre of her family, was basking before the fire;

'and kittens too, I declare!'

'I am so fond of them, Mr. Bumble, you can't think,' replied the

matron. 'They're \_so\_ happy, \_so\_ frolicsome, and \_so\_ cheerful, that

they are quite companions for me.'

'Very nice animals, ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble, approvingly; 'so

very domestic.'

'Oh, yes!' rejoined the matron with enthusiasm; 'so fond of their

home too, that it's quite a pleasure, I'm sure.'

'Mrs. Corney, ma'am,' said Mr. Bumble, slowly, and marking the

time with his teaspoon, 'I mean to say this, ma'am; that any cat,

or kitten, that could live with you, ma'am, and \_not\_ be fond of

its home, must be a ass, ma'am.'

'Oh, Mr. Bumble!' remonstrated Mrs. Corney.

'It's of no use disguising facts, ma'am,' said Mr. Bumble, slowly

flourishing the teaspoon with a kind of amorous dignity which

made him doubly impressive; 'I would drown it myself, with

pleasure.'

'Then you're a cruel man,' said the matron vivaciously, as she

held out her hand for the beadle's cup; 'and a very hard-hearted

man besides.'

'Hard-hearted, ma'am?' said Mr. Bumble. 'Hard?' Mr. Bumble

resigned his cup without another word; squeezed Mrs. Corney's

little finger as she took it; and inflicting two open-handed

slaps upon his laced waistcoat, gave a mighty sigh, and hitched

his chair a very little morsel farther from the fire.

It was a round table; and as Mrs. Corney and Mr. Bumble had been

sitting opposite each other, with no great space between them,

and fronting the fire, it will be seen that Mr. Bumble, in

receding from the fire, and still keeping at the table, increased

the distance between himself and Mrs. Corney; which proceeding,

some prudent readers will doubtless be disposed to admire, and to

consider an act of great heroism on Mr. Bumble's part: he being

in some sort tempted by time, place, and opportunity, to give

utterance to certain soft nothings, which however well they may

become the lips of the light and thoughtless, do seem

immeasurably beneath the dignity of judges of the land, members

of parliament, ministers of state, lord mayors, and other great

public functionaries, but more particularly beneath the

stateliness and gravity of a beadle: who (as is well known)

should be the sternest and most inflexible among them all.

Whatever were Mr. Bumble's intentions, however (and no doubt they

were of the best): it unfortunately happened, as has been twice

before remarked, that the table was a round one; consequently Mr.

Bumble, moving his chair by little and little, soon began to

diminish the distance between himself and the matron; and,

continuing to travel round the outer edge of the circle, brought

his chair, in time, close to that in which the matron was seated.

Indeed, the two chairs touched; and when they did so, Mr. Bumble

stopped.

Now, if the matron had moved her chair to the right, she would

have been scorched by the fire; and if to the left, she must have

fallen into Mr. Bumble's arms; so (being a discreet matron, and

no doubt foreseeing these consequences at a glance) she remained

where she was, and handed Mr. Bumble another cup of tea.

'Hard-hearted, Mrs. Corney?' said Mr. Bumble, stirring his tea,

and looking up into the matron's face; 'are \_you\_ hard-hearted,

Mrs. Corney?'

'Dear me!' exclaimed the matron, 'what a very curious question

from a single man. What can you want to know for, Mr. Bumble?'

The beadle drank his tea to the last drop; finished a piece of

toast; whisked the crumbs off his knees; wiped his lips; and

deliberately kissed the matron.

'Mr. Bumble!' cried that discreet lady in a whisper; for the

fright was so great, that she had quite lost her voice, 'Mr.

Bumble, I shall scream!' Mr. Bumble made no reply; but in a slow

and dignified manner, put his arm round the matron's waist.

As the lady had stated her intention of screaming, of course she

would have screamed at this additional boldness, but that the

exertion was rendered unnecessary by a hasty knocking at the

door: which was no sooner heard, than Mr. Bumble darted, with

much agility, to the wine bottles, and began dusting them with

great violence: while the matron sharply demanded who was there.

It is worthy of remark, as a curious physical instance of the

efficacy of a sudden surprise in counteracting the effects of

extreme fear, that her voice had quite recovered all its official

asperity.

'If you please, mistress,' said a withered old female pauper,

hideously ugly: putting her head in at the door, 'Old Sally is

a-going fast.'

'Well, what's that to me?' angrily demanded the matron. 'I can't

keep her alive, can I?'

'No, no, mistress,' replied the old woman, 'nobody can; she's far

beyond the reach of help. I've seen a many people die; little

babes and great strong men; and I know when death's a-coming,

well enough. But she's troubled in her mind: and when the fits

are not on her,--and that's not often, for she is dying very

hard,--she says she has got something to tell, which you must

hear. She'll never die quiet till you come, mistress.'

At this intelligence, the worthy Mrs. Corney muttered a variety

of invectives against old women who couldn't even die without

purposely annoying their betters; and, muffling herself in a

thick shawl which she hastily caught up, briefly requested Mr.

Bumble to stay till she came back, lest anything particular

should occur. Bidding the messenger walk fast, and not be all

night hobbling up the stairs, she followed her from the room with

a very ill grace, scolding all the way.

Mr. Bumble's conduct on being left to himself, was rather

inexplicable. He opened the closet, counted the teaspoons,

weighed the sugar-tongs, closely inspected a silver milk-pot to

ascertain that it was of the genuine metal, and, having satisfied

his curiosity on these points, put on his cocked hat corner-wise,

and danced with much gravity four distinct times round the table.

Having gone through this very extraordinary performance, he took

off the cocked hat again, and, spreading himself before the fire

with his back towards it, seemed to be mentally engaged in taking

an exact inventory of the furniture.

CHAPTER XXIV

TREATS ON A VERY POOR SUBJECT. BUT IS A SHORT ONE, AND MAY BE

FOUND OF IMPORTANCE IN THIS HISTORY

It was no unfit messenger of death, who had disturbed the quiet

of the matron's room. Her body was bent by age; her limbs

trembled with palsy; her face, distorted into a mumbling leer,

resembled more the grotesque shaping of some wild pencil, than

the work of Nature's hand.

Alas! How few of Nature's faces are left alone to gladden us

with their beauty! The cares, and sorrows, and hungerings, of

the world, change them as they change hearts; and it is only when

those passions sleep, and have lost their hold for ever, that the

troubled clouds pass off, and leave Heaven's surface clear. It

is a common thing for the countenances of the dead, even in that

fixed and rigid state, to subside into the long-forgotten

expression of sleeping infancy, and settle into the very look of

early life; so calm, so peaceful, do they grow again, that those

who knew them in their happy childhood, kneel by the coffin's

side in awe, and see the Angel even upon earth.

The old crone tottered along the passages, and up the stairs,

muttering some indistinct answers to the chidings of her

companion; being at length compelled to pause for breath, she

gave the light into her hand, and remained behind to follow as

she might: while the more nimble superior made her way to the

room where the sick woman lay.

It was a bare garret-room, with a dim light burning at the

farther end. There was another old woman watching by the bed;

the parish apothecary's apprentice was standing by the fire,

making a toothpick out of a quill.

'Cold night, Mrs. Corney,' said this young gentleman, as the

matron entered.

'Very cold, indeed, sir,' replied the mistress, in her most civil

tones, and dropping a curtsey as she spoke.

'You should get better coals out of your contractors,' said the

apothecary's deputy, breaking a lump on the top of the fire with

the rusty poker; 'these are not at all the sort of thing for a

cold night.'

'They're the board's choosing, sir,' returned the matron. 'The

least they could do, would be to keep us pretty warm: for our

places are hard enough.'

The conversation was here interrupted by a moan from the sick

woman.

'Oh!' said the young mag, turning his face towards the bed, as if

he had previously quite forgotten the patient, 'it's all U.P.

there, Mrs. Corney.'

'It is, is it, sir?' asked the matron.

'If she lasts a couple of hours, I shall be surprised,' said the

apothecary's apprentice, intent upon the toothpick's point.

'It's a break-up of the system altogether. Is she dozing, old

lady?'

The attendant stooped over the bed, to ascertain; and nodded in

the affirmative.

'Then perhaps she'll go off in that way, if you don't make a

row,' said the young man. 'Put the light on the floor. She

won't see it there.'

The attendant did as she was told: shaking her head meanwhile,

to intimate that the woman would not die so easily; having done

so, she resumed her seat by the side of the other nurse, who had

by this time returned. The mistress, with an expression of

impatience, wrapped herself in her shawl, and sat at the foot of

the bed.

The apothecary's apprentice, having completed the manufacture of

the toothpick, planted himself in front of the fire and made good

use of it for ten minutes or so: when apparently growing rather

dull, he wished Mrs. Corney joy of her job, and took himself off

on tiptoe.

When they had sat in silence for some time, the two old women

rose from the bed, and crouching over the fire, held out their

withered hands to catch the heat. The flame threw a ghastly

light on their shrivelled faces, and made their ugliness appear

terrible, as, in this position, they began to converse in a low

voice.

'Did she say any more, Anny dear, while I was gone?' inquired the

messenger.

'Not a word,' replied the other. 'She plucked and tore at her

arms for a little time; but I held her hands, and she soon

dropped off. She hasn't much strength in her, so I easily kept

her quiet. I ain't so weak for an old woman, although I am on

parish allowance; no, no!'

'Did she drink the hot wine the doctor said she was to have?'

demanded the first.

'I tried to get it down,' rejoined the other. 'But her teeth

were tight set, and she clenched the mug so hard that it was as

much as I could do to get it back again. So I drank it; and it

did me good!'

Looking cautiously round, to ascertain that they were not

overheard, the two hags cowered nearer to the fire, and chuckled

heartily.

'I mind the time,' said the first speaker, 'when she would have

done the same, and made rare fun of it afterwards.'

'Ay, that she would,' rejoined the other; 'she had a merry heart.

'A many, many, beautiful corpses she laid out, as nice and neat as

waxwork. My old eyes have seen them--ay, and those old hands

touched them too; for I have helped her, scores of times.'

Stretching forth her trembling fingers as she spoke, the old

creature shook them exultingly before her face, and fumbling in

her pocket, brought out an old time-discoloured tin snuff-box,

from which she shook a few grains into the outstretched palm of

her companion, and a few more into her own. While they were thus

employed, the matron, who had been impatiently watching until the

dying woman should awaken from her stupor, joined them by the

fire, and sharply asked how long she was to wait?

'Not long, mistress,' replied the second woman, looking up into

her face. 'We have none of us long to wait for Death. Patience,

patience! He'll be here soon enough for us all.'

'Hold your tongue, you doting idiot!' said the matron sternly.

'You, Martha, tell me; has she been in this way before?'

'Often,' answered the first woman.

'But will never be again,' added the second one; 'that is, she'll

never wake again but once--and mind, mistress, that won't be for

long!'

'Long or short,' said the matron, snappishly, 'she won't find me

here when she does wake; take care, both of you, how you worry me

again for nothing. It's no part of my duty to see all the old

women in the house die, and I won't--that's more. Mind that, you

impudent old harridans. If you make a fool of me again, I'll

soon cure you, I warrant you!'

She was bouncing away, when a cry from the two women, who had

turned towards the bed, caused her to look round. The patient

had raised herself upright, and was stretching her arms towards

them.

'Who's that?' she cried, in a hollow voice.

'Hush, hush!' said one of the women, stooping over her. 'Lie

down, lie down!'

'I'll never lie down again alive!' said the woman, struggling. 'I

\_will\_ tell her! Come here! Nearer! Let me whisper in your ear.'

She clutched the matron by the arm, and forcing her into a chair

by the bedside, was about to speak, when looking round, she

caught sight of the two old women bending forward in the attitude

of eager listeners.

'Turn them away,' said the woman, drowsily; 'make haste! make

haste!'

The two old crones, chiming in together, began pouring out many

piteous lamentations that the poor dear was too far gone to know

her best friends; and were uttering sundry protestations that

they would never leave her, when the superior pushed them from

the room, closed the door, and returned to the bedside. On being

excluded, the old ladies changed their tone, and cried through

the keyhole that old Sally was drunk; which, indeed, was not

unlikely; since, in addition to a moderate dose of opium

prescribed by the apothecary, she was labouring under the effects

of a final taste of gin-and-water which had been privily

administered, in the openness of their hearts, by the worthy old

ladies themselves.

'Now listen to me,' said the dying woman aloud, as if making a

great effort to revive one latent spark of energy. 'In this very

room--in this very bed--I once nursed a pretty young creetur',

that was brought into the house with her feet cut and bruised

with walking, and all soiled with dust and blood. She gave birth

to a boy, and died. Let me think--what was the year again!'

'Never mind the year,' said the impatient auditor; 'what about

her?'

'Ay,' murmured the sick woman, relapsing into her former drowsy

state, 'what about her?--what about--I know!' she cried, jumping

fiercely up: her face flushed, and her eyes starting from her

head--'I robbed her, so I did! She wasn't cold--I tell you she

wasn't cold, when I stole it!'

'Stole what, for God's sake?' cried the matron, with a gesture as

if she would call for help.

'\_It\_!' replied the woman, laying her hand over the other's mouth.

'The only thing she had. She wanted clothes to keep her warm,

and food to eat; but she had kept it safe, and had it in her

bosom. It was gold, I tell you! Rich gold, that might have

saved her life!'

'Gold!' echoed the matron, bending eagerly over the woman as she

fell back. 'Go on, go on--yes--what of it? Who was the mother?

When was it?'

'She charge me to keep it safe,' replied the woman with a groan,

'and trusted me as the only woman about her. I stole it in my

heart when she first showed it me hanging round her neck; and the

child's death, perhaps, is on me besides! They would have

treated him better, if they had known it all!'

'Known what?' asked the other. 'Speak!'

'The boy grew so like his mother,' said the woman, rambling on,

and not heeding the question, 'that I could never forget it when

I saw his face. Poor girl! poor girl! She was so young, too!

Such a gentle lamb! Wait; there's more to tell. I have not told

you all, have I?'

'No, no,' replied the matron, inclining her head to catch the

words, as they came more faintly from the dying woman. 'Be

quick, or it may be too late!'

'The mother,' said the woman, making a more violent effort than

before; 'the mother, when the pains of death first came upon her,

whispered in my ear that if her baby was born alive, and thrived,

the day might come when it would not feel so much disgraced to

hear its poor young mother named. "And oh, kind Heaven!" she

said, folding her thin hands together, "whether it be boy or

girl, raise up some friends for it in this troubled world, and

take pity upon a lonely desolate child, abandoned to its mercy!"'

'The boy's name?' demanded the matron.

'They \_called\_ him Oliver,' replied the woman, feebly. 'The gold I

stole was--'

'Yes, yes--what?' cried the other.

She was bending eagerly over the woman to hear her reply; but

drew back, instinctively, as she once again rose, slowly and

stiffly, into a sitting posture; then, clutching the coverlid

with both hands, muttered some indistinct sounds in her throat,

and fell lifeless on the bed.

 \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

'Stone dead!' said one of the old women, hurrying in as soon as

the door was opened.

'And nothing to tell, after all,' rejoined the matron, walking

carelessly away.

The two crones, to all appearance, too busily occupied in the

preparations for their dreadful duties to make any reply, were

left alone, hovering about the body.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEREIN THIS HISTORY REVERTS TO MR. FAGIN AND COMPANY

While these things were passing in the country workhouse, Mr.

Fagin sat in the old den--the same from which Oliver had been

removed by the girl--brooding over a dull, smoky fire. He held a

pair of bellows upon his knee, with which he had apparently been

endeavouring to rouse it into more cheerful action; but he had

fallen into deep thought; and with his arms folded on them, and

his chin resting on his thumbs, fixed his eyes, abstractedly, on

the rusty bars.

At a table behind him sat the Artful Dodger, Master Charles

Bates, and Mr. Chitling: all intent upon a game of whist; the

Artful taking dummy against Master Bates and Mr. Chitling. The

countenance of the first-named gentleman, peculiarly intelligent

at all times, acquired great additional interest from his close

observance of the game, and his attentive perusal of Mr.

Chitling's hand; upon which, from time to time, as occasion

served, he bestowed a variety of earnest glances: wisely

regulating his own play by the result of his observations upon

his neighbour's cards. It being a cold night, the Dodger wore

his hat, as, indeed, was often his custom within doors. He also

sustained a clay pipe between his teeth, which he only removed

for a brief space when he deemed it necessary to apply for

refreshment to a quart pot upon the table, which stood ready

filled with gin-and-water for the accommodation of the company.

Master Bates was also attentive to the play; but being of a more

excitable nature than his accomplished friend, it was observable

that he more frequently applied himself to the gin-and-water, and

moreover indulged in many jests and irrelevant remarks, all

highly unbecoming a scientific rubber. Indeed, the Artful,

presuming upon their close attachment, more than once took

occasion to reason gravely with his companion upon these

improprieties; all of which remonstrances, Master Bates received

in extremely good part; merely requesting his friend to be

'blowed,' or to insert his head in a sack, or replying with some

other neatly-turned witticism of a similar kind, the happy

application of which, excited considerable admiration in the mind

of Mr. Chitling. It was remarkable that the latter gentleman and

his partner invariably lost; and that the circumstance, so far

from angering Master Bates, appeared to afford him the highest

amusement, inasmuch as he laughed most uproariously at the end of

every deal, and protested that he had never seen such a jolly

game in all his born days.

'That's two doubles and the rub,' said Mr. Chitling, with a very

long face, as he drew half-a-crown from his waistcoat-pocket. 'I

never see such a feller as you, Jack; you win everything. Even

when we've good cards, Charley and I can't make nothing of 'em.'

Either the master or the manner of this remark, which was made

very ruefully, delighted Charley Bates so much, that his

consequent shout of laughter roused the Jew from his reverie, and

induced him to inquire what was the matter.

'Matter, Fagin!' cried Charley. 'I wish you had watched the

play. Tommy Chitling hasn't won a point; and I went partners

with him against the Artfull and dumb.'

'Ay, ay!' said the Jew, with a grin, which sufficiently

demonstrated that he was at no loss to understand the reason.

'Try 'em again, Tom; try 'em again.'

'No more of it for me, thank 'ee, Fagin,' replied Mr. Chitling;

'I've had enough. That 'ere Dodger has such a run of luck that

there's no standing again' him.'

'Ha! ha! my dear,' replied the Jew, 'you must get up very early

in the morning, to win against the Dodger.'

'Morning!' said Charley Bates; 'you must put your boots on

over-night, and have a telescope at each eye, and a opera-glass

between your shoulders, if you want to come over him.'

Mr. Dawkins received these handsome compliments with much

philosophy, and offered to cut any gentleman in company, for the

first picture-card, at a shilling at a time. Nobody accepting

the challenge, and his pipe being by this time smoked out, he

proceeded to amuse himself by sketching a ground-plan of Newgate

on the table with the piece of chalk which had served him in lieu

of counters; whistling, meantime, with peculiar shrillness.

'How precious dull you are, Tommy!' said the Dodger, stopping

short when there had been a long silence; and addressing Mr.

Chitling. 'What do you think he's thinking of, Fagin?'

'How should I know, my dear?' replied the Jew, looking round as

he plied the bellows. 'About his losses, maybe; or the little

retirement in the country that he's just left, eh? Ha! ha! Is

that it, my dear?'

'Not a bit of it,' replied the Dodger, stopping the subject of

discourse as Mr. Chitling was about to reply. 'What do \_you\_ say,

Charley?'

'\_I\_ should say,' replied Master Bates, with a grin, 'that he was

uncommon sweet upon Betsy. See how he's a-blushing! Oh, my eye!

here's a merry-go-rounder! Tommy Chitling's in love! Oh, Fagin,

Fagin! what a spree!'

Thoroughly overpowered with the notion of Mr. Chitling being the

victim of the tender passion, Master Bates threw himself back in

his chair with such violence, that he lost his balance, and

pitched over upon the floor; where (the accident abating nothing

of his merriment) he lay at full length until his laugh was over,

when he resumed his former position, and began another laugh.

'Never mind him, my dear,' said the Jew, winking at Mr. Dawkins,

and giving Master Bates a reproving tap with the nozzle of the

bellows. 'Betsy's a fine girl. Stick up to her, Tom. Stick up

to her.'

'What I mean to say, Fagin,' replied Mr. Chitling, very red in

the face, 'is, that that isn't anything to anybody here.'

'No more it is,' replied the Jew; 'Charley will talk. Don't mind

him, my dear; don't mind him. Betsy's a fine girl. Do as she

bids you, Tom, and you will make your fortune.'

'So I \_do\_ do as she bids me,' replied Mr. Chitling; 'I shouldn't

have been milled, if it hadn't been for her advice. But it

turned out a good job for you; didn't it, Fagin! And what's six

weeks of it? It must come, some time or another, and why not in

the winter time when you don't want to go out a-walking so much;

eh, Fagin?'

'Ah, to be sure, my dear,' replied the Jew.

'You wouldn't mind it again, Tom, would you,' asked the Dodger,

winking upon Charley and the Jew, 'if Bet was all right?'

'I mean to say that I shouldn't,' replied Tom, angrily. 'There,

now. Ah! Who'll say as much as that, I should like to know; eh,

Fagin?'

'Nobody, my dear,' replied the Jew; 'not a soul, Tom. I don't

know one of 'em that would do it besides you; not one of 'em, my

dear.'

'I might have got clear off, if I'd split upon her; mightn't I,

Fagin?' angrily pursued the poor half-witted dupe. 'A word from

me would have done it; wouldn't it, Fagin?'

'To be sure it would, my dear,' replied the Jew.

'But I didn't blab it; did I, Fagin?' demanded Tom, pouring

question upon question with great volubility.

'No, no, to be sure,' replied the Jew; 'you were too

stout-hearted for that. A deal too stout, my dear!'

'Perhaps I was,' rejoined Tom, looking round; 'and if I was,

what's to laugh at, in that; eh, Fagin?'

The Jew, perceiving that Mr. Chitling was considerably roused,

hastened to assure him that nobody was laughing; and to prove the

gravity of the company, appealed to Master Bates, the principal

offender. But, unfortunately, Charley, in opening his mouth to

reply that he was never more serious in his life, was unable to

prevent the escape of such a violent roar, that the abused Mr.

Chitling, without any preliminary ceremonies, rushed across the

room and aimed a blow at the offender; who, being skilful in

evading pursuit, ducked to avoid it, and chose his time so well

that it lighted on the chest of the merry old gentleman, and

caused him to stagger to the wall, where he stood panting for

breath, while Mr. Chitling looked on in intense dismay.

'Hark!' cried the Dodger at this moment, 'I heard the tinkler.'

Catching up the light, he crept softly upstairs.

The bell was rung again, with some impatience, while the party

were in darkness. After a short pause, the Dodger reappeared,

and whispered Fagin mysteriously.

'What!' cried the Jew, 'alone?'

The Dodger nodded in the affirmative, and, shading the flame of

the candle with his hand, gave Charley Bates a private

intimation, in dumb show, that he had better not be funny just

then. Having performed this friendly office, he fixed his eyes

on the Jew's face, and awaited his directions.

The old man bit his yellow fingers, and meditated for some

seconds; his face working with agitation the while, as if he

dreaded something, and feared to know the worst. At length he

raised his head.

'Where is he?' he asked.

The Dodger pointed to the floor above, and made a gesture, as if

to leave the room.

'Yes,' said the Jew, answering the mute inquiry; 'bring him down.

Hush! Quiet, Charley! Gently, Tom! Scarce, scarce!'

This brief direction to Charley Bates, and his recent antagonist,

was softly and immediately obeyed. There was no sound of their

whereabout, when the Dodger descended the stairs, bearing the

light in his hand, and followed by a man in a coarse smock-frock;

who, after casting a hurried glance round the room, pulled off a

large wrapper which had concealed the lower portion of his face,

and disclosed: all haggard, unwashed, and unshorn: the features

of flash Toby Crackit.

'How are you, Faguey?' said this worthy, nodding to the Jew. 'Pop

that shawl away in my castor, Dodger, so that I may know where to

find it when I cut; that's the time of day! You'll be a fine

young cracksman afore the old file now.'

With these words he pulled up the smock-frock; and, winding it

round his middle, drew a chair to the fire, and placed his feet

upon the hob.

'See there, Faguey,' he said, pointing disconsolately to his top

boots; 'not a drop of Day and Martin since you know when; not a

bubble of blacking, by Jove! But don't look at me in that way,

man. All in good time. I can't talk about business till I've

eat and drank; so produce the sustainance, and let's have a quiet

fill-out for the first time these three days!'

The Jew motioned to the Dodger to place what eatables there were,

upon the table; and, seating himself opposite the housebreaker,

waited his leisure.

To judge from appearances, Toby was by no means in a hurry to

open the conversation. At first, the Jew contented himself with

patiently watching his countenance, as if to gain from its

expression some clue to the intelligence he brought; but in vain.

He looked tired and worn, but there was the same complacent

repose upon his features that they always wore: and through

dirt, and beard, and whisker, there still shone, unimpaired, the

self-satisfied smirk of flash Toby Crackit. Then the Jew, in an

agony of impatience, watched every morsel he put into his mouth;

pacing up and down the room, meanwhile, in irrepressible

excitement. It was all of no use. Toby continued to eat with

the utmost outward indifference, until he could eat no more;

then, ordering the Dodger out, he closed the door, mixed a glass

of spirits and water, and composed himself for talking.

'First and foremost, Faguey,' said Toby.

'Yes, yes!' interposed the Jew, drawing up his chair.

Mr. Crackit stopped to take a draught of spirits and water, and

to declare that the gin was excellent; then placing his feet

against the low mantelpiece, so as to bring his boots to about

the level of his eye, he quietly resumed.

'First and foremost, Faguey,' said the housebreaker, 'how's

Bill?'

'What!' screamed the Jew, starting from his seat.

'Why, you don't mean to say--' began Toby, turning pale.

'Mean!' cried the Jew, stamping furiously on the ground. 'Where

are they? Sikes and the boy! Where are they? Where have they

been? Where are they hiding? Why have they not been here?'

'The crack failed,' said Toby faintly.

'I know it,' replied the Jew, tearing a newspaper from his pocket

and pointing to it. 'What more?'

'They fired and hit the boy. We cut over the fields at the back,

with him between us--straight as the crow flies--through hedge

and ditch. They gave chase. Damme! the whole country was awake,

and the dogs upon us.'

'The boy!'

'Bill had him on his back, and scudded like the wind. We stopped

to take him between us; his head hung down, and he was cold.

They were close upon our heels; every man for himself, and each

from the gallows! We parted company, and left the youngster

lying in a ditch. Alive or dead, that's all I know about him.'

The Jew stopped to hear no more; but uttering a loud yell, and

twining his hands in his hair, rushed from the room, and from the

house.

CHAPTER XXVI

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. Avoiding, as much as was 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, 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 pick-pockets. 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 who go as

strangely as they come. Here, the clothesman, the shoe-vamper,

and the rag-merchant, display their goods, as sign-boards to the

petty thief; here, 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, Mr. Fagin, would cure the hoptalmy!'

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. Pointing in the direction of

Saffron Hill, he 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. 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 drop 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

tiptoe, 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 public-house in which Mr. Sikes and his dog have already

figured. Merely making a sign to a man at the bar, Fagin walked

straight upstairs, 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 from 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

more. 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 toothache, 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 accompanyist played the melody all through, as

loud as he could. When this was over, the chairman gave a

sentiment, after which, the professional gentleman 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 drunkeness in

all its stages, were there, in their strongest aspect; and women:

some with the last lingering tinge of their early freshness

almost fading as you looked: 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 apparently

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?' 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, 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!'

'Ah! 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. Fagin crept softly

upstairs, 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, cooly, 'or perhaps she

is only miserable.'

The old man turned to close the door, as he made this reflection;

the noise thus occasioned, roused the girl. She eyed his crafty

face narrowly, as she inquired to his recital of Toby Crackit's

story. When it was concluded, she sank 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 the 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?'

The girl moaned out some half intelligible reply, that she could

not tell; and seemed, from the 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.'

'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 the 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. '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 the power to, to--'

Panting for breath, the old man stammered for a word; and in that

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

villainy. After a short silence, he ventured to look round at

his companion. He 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; 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, Bill's pretty sure to be safe; for Bill's

worth two of Toby any time.'

'And about what I was saying, my dear?' observed the Jew, keeping

his glistening eye steadily upon her.

'Your 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

confirmed. 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 wholesale perfume of Geneva

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 was 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 having accomplished

his twofold object of imparting to the girl what he had, that

night, heard, and of 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. 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. '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 on 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: remarking, 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, indeed,

muttered 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!'

'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. After a short

absence, he returned with a lighted candle, and the intelligence

that Toby Crackit was asleep in the back room below, and that the

boys were in the front one. Beckoning the man to follow him, he

led the way upstairs.

'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 those words, the Jew, stooping down, placed the candle on an

upper flight of stairs, exactly opposite to the room door. This

done, he 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 sat 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; the door was partially

open; and the candle outside, threw a feeble reflection on the

opposite wall.

They conversed for some time in whispers. Though 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. 'He might have

become of use to me. When there are two parties to a bargain, it

is only reasonable that the interests of both should be

consulted; is it, my good friend?'

'What then?' demanded Monks.

'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 on 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. It showed them only the empty staircase, and

their own white faces. They listened intently: 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. '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 into the passage, and thence into the

cellars below. The green damp hung upon the low walls; the

tracks of the snail and slug glistened in the light of the

candle; but all was still as death.

'What do you think now?' 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 downstairs, 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 XXVII

ATONES FOR THE UNPOLITENESS OF A FORMER CHAPTER; WHICH DESERTED A

LADY, MOST UNCEREMONIOUSLY

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 the

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

historian whose pen traces these words--trusting that he knows

his place, and that he entertains a becoming reverence for those

upon earth to whom high and important 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 beadles, 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 a parochail workhouse, and attending in his official

capacity the parochial church: is, in right and virtue of his

office, possessed of all the excellences and best qualities of

humanity; and that to none of those excellences, can mere

companies' beadles, or court-of-law beadles, or even

chapel-of-ease beadles (save the last, and they in a very lowly

and inferior degree), lay the remotest sustainable claim.

Mr. Bumble had re-counted the teaspoons, 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; as there were no sounds of Mrs. Corney's approach, it

occured to Mr. Bumble that it would be an innocent and virtuous

way of spending the time, if he were further to allay his

curiousity by a cursory glance at the interior of Mrs. Corney's

chest of drawers.

Having listened at the keyhole, 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 newspapers, 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 fireplace; 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, he 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 fireside, 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,' exclaimed 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.

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; 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 allows you coals, don't they, Mrs. Corney?' inquired

the beadle, affectionately 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 an Angel you are!'

The lady was not proof against this burst of feeling. She sank

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

wacancy; that wacancy must be filled up. Oh, Mrs. Corney, what a

prospect this opens! What a opportunity for a jining of hearts

and housekeepings!'

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 around 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 teacupful 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 as any

one of 'em had dared to lift his wulgar 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

seemed 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.

The cloth was laid for supper; the table was covered 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; 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. 'An't yer fond of oysters?'

'Not overmuch,' replied Charlotte. 'I like to see you eat 'em,

Noah dear, better than eating 'em 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. 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 wile, 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-doin' 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 downstairs,

ma'am. Noah, you shut up the shop; 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 porochial 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 inquires after young Oliver Twist, and

ascertain whether he be still lying in the ditch where Toby

Crackit left him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LOOKS AFTER OLIVER, AND PROCEEDS WITH HIS ADVENTURES

'Wolves tear your throats!' muttered Sikes, grinding his teeth.

'I wish I was among some of you; you'd howl the hoarser for it.'

As Sikes growled forth this imprecation, with the most desperate

ferocity that his desperate nature was capable of, he rested the

body of the wounded boy across his bended knee; and turned his

head, for an instant, to look back at his pursuers.

There was little to be made out, in the mist and darkness; but

the loud shouting of men vibrated through the air, and the

barking of the neighbouring dogs, roused by the sound of the

alarm bell, resounded in every direction.

'Stop, you white-livered hound!' cried the robber, shouting after

Toby Crackit, who, making the best use of his long legs, was

already ahead. 'Stop!'

The repetition of the word, brought Toby to a dead stand-still.

For he was not quite satisfied that he was beyond the range of

pistol-shot; and Sikes was in no mood to be played with.

'Bear a hand with the boy,' cried Sikes, beckoning furiously to

his confederate. 'Come back!'

Toby made a show of returning; but ventured, in a low voice,

broken for want of breath, to intimate considerable reluctance as

he came slowly along.

'Quicker!' cried Sikes, laying the boy in a dry ditch at his

feet, and drawing a pistol from his pocket. 'Don't play booty

with me.'

At this moment the noise grew louder. Sikes, again looking

round, could discern that the men who had given chase were

already climbing the gate of the field in which he stood; and

that a couple of dogs were some paces in advance of them.

'It's all up, Bill!' cried Toby; 'drop the kid, and show 'em your

heels.' With this parting advice, Mr. Crackit, preferring the

chance of being shot by his friend, to the certainty of being

taken by his enemies, fairly turned tail, and darted off at full

speed. Sikes clenched his teeth; took one look around; threw

over the prostrate form of Oliver, the cape in which he had been

hurriedly muffled; ran along the front of the hedge, as if to

distract the attention of those behind, from the spot where the

boy lay; paused, for a second, before another hedge which met it

at right angles; and whirling his pistol high into the air,

cleared it at a bound, and was gone.

'Ho, ho, there!' cried a tremulous voice in the rear. 'Pincher!

Neptune! Come here, come here!'

The dogs, who, in common with their masters, seemed to have no

particular relish for the sport in which they were engaged,

readily answered to the command. Three men, who had by this time

advanced some distance into the field, stopped to take counsel

together.

'My advice, or, leastways, I should say, my \_orders\_, is,' said the

fattest man of the party, 'that we 'mediately go home again.'

'I am agreeable to anything which is agreeable to Mr. Giles,'

said a shorter man; who was by no means of a slim figure, and who

was very pale in the face, and very polite: as frightened men

frequently are.

'I shouldn't wish to appear ill-mannered, gentlemen,' said the

third, who had called the dogs back, 'Mr. Giles ought to know.'

'Certainly,' replied the shorter man; 'and whatever Mr. Giles

says, it isn't our place to contradict him. No, no, I know my

sitiwation! Thank my stars, I know my sitiwation.' To tell the

truth, the little man \_did\_ seem to know his situation, and to know

perfectly well that it was by no means a desirable one; for his

teeth chattered in his head as he spoke.

'You are afraid, Brittles,' said Mr. Giles.

'I an't,' said Brittles.

'You are,' said Giles.

'You're a falsehood, Mr. Giles,' said Brittles.

'You're a lie, Brittles,' said Mr. Giles.

Now, these four retorts arose from Mr. Giles's taunt; and Mr.

Giles's taunt had arisen from his indignation at having the

responsibility of going home again, imposed upon himself under

cover of a compliment. The third man brought the dispute to a

close, most philosophically.

'I'll tell you what it is, gentlemen,' said he, 'we're all

afraid.'

'Speak for yourself, sir,' said Mr. Giles, who was the palest of

the party.

'So I do,' replied the man. 'It's natural and proper to be

afraid, under such circumstances. I am.'

'So am I,' said Brittles; 'only there's no call to tell a man he

is, so bounceably.'

These frank admissions softened Mr. Giles, who at once owned that

\_he\_ was afraid; upon which, they all three faced about, and ran

back again with the completest unanimity, until Mr. Giles (who

had the shortest wind of the party, as was encumbered with a

pitchfork) most handsomely insisted on stopping, to make an

apology for his hastiness of speech.

'But it's wonderful,' said Mr. Giles, when he had explained,

'what a man will do, when his blood is up. I should have

committed murder--I know I should--if we'd caught one of them

rascals.'

As the other two were impressed with a similar presentiment; and

as their blood, like his, had all gone down again; some

speculation ensued upon the cause of this sudden change in their

temperament.

'I know what it was,' said Mr. Giles; 'it was the gate.'

'I shouldn't wonder if it was,' exclaimed Brittles, catching at

the idea.

'You may depend upon it,' said Giles, 'that that gate stopped the

flow of the excitement. I felt all mine suddenly going away, as

I was climbing over it.'

By a remarkable coincidence, the other two had been visited with

the same unpleasant sensation at that precise moment. It was

quite obvious, therefore, that it was the gate; especially as

there was no doubt regarding the time at which the change had

taken place, because all three remembered that they had come in

sight of the robbers at the instant of its occurance.

This dialogue was held between the two men who had surprised the

burglars, and a travelling tinker who had been sleeping in an

outhouse, and who had been roused, together with his two mongrel

curs, to join in the pursuit. Mr. Giles acted in the double

capacity of butler and steward to the old lady of the mansion;

Brittles was a lad of all-work: who, having entered her service a

mere child, was treated as a promising young boy still, though he

was something past thirty.

Encouraging each other with such converse as this; but, keeping

very close together, notwithstanding, and looking apprehensively

round, whenever a fresh gust rattled through the boughs; the

three men hurried back to a tree, behind which they had left

their lantern, lest its light should inform the thieves in what

direction to fire. Catching up the light, they made the best of

their way home, at a good round trot; and long after their dusky

forms had ceased to be discernible, the light might have been

seen twinkling and dancing in the distance, like some exhalation

of the damp and gloomy atmosphere through which it was swiftly

borne.

The air grew colder, as day came slowly on; and the mist rolled

along the ground like a dense cloud of smoke. The grass was wet;

the pathways, and low places, were all mire and water; the damp

breath of an unwholesome wind went languidly by, with a hollow

moaning. Still, Oliver lay motionless and insensible on the spot

where Sikes had left him.

Morning drew on apace. The air become more sharp and piercing,

as its first dull hue--the death of night, rather than the birth

of day--glimmered faintly in the sky. The objects which had

looked dim and terrible in the darkness, grew more and more

defined, and gradually resolved into their familiar shapes. The

rain came down, thick and fast, and pattered noisily among the

leafless bushes. But, Oliver felt it not, as it beat against

him; for he still lay stretched, helpless and unconscious, on his

bed of clay.

At length, a low cry of pain broke the stillness that prevailed;

and uttering it, the boy awoke. His left arm, rudely bandaged in

a shawl, hung heavy and useless at his side; the bandage was

saturated with blood. He was so weak, that he could scarcely

raise himself into a sitting posture; when he had done so, he

looked feebly round for help, and groaned with pain. Trembling

in every joint, from cold and exhaustion, he made an effort to

stand upright; but, shuddering from head to foot, fell prostrate

on the ground.

After a short return of the stupor in which he had been so long

plunged, Oliver: urged by a creeping sickness at his heart,

which seemed to warn him that if he lay there, he must surely

die: got upon his feet, and essayed to walk. His head was dizzy,

and he staggered to and fro like a drunken man. But he kept up,

nevertheless, and, with his head drooping languidly on his

breast, went stumbling onward, he knew not whither.

And now, hosts of bewildering and confused ideas came crowding on

his mind. He seemed to be still walking between Sikes and

Crackit, who were angrily disputing--for the very words they

said, sounded in his ears; and when he caught his own attention,

as it were, by making some violent effort to save himself from

falling, he found that he was talking to them. Then, he was alone

with Sikes, plodding on as on the previous day; and as shadowy

people passed them, he felt the robber's grasp upon his wrist.

Suddenly, he started back at the report of firearms; there rose

into the air, loud cries and shouts; lights gleamed before his

eyes; all was noise and tumult, as some unseen hand bore him

hurriedly away. Through all these rapid visions, there ran an

undefined, uneasy consciousness of pain, which wearied and tormented

him incessantly.

Thus he staggered on, creeping, almost mechanically, between the

bars of gates, or through hedge-gaps as they came in his way,

until he reached a road. Here the rain began to fall so heavily,

that it roused him.

He looked about, and saw that at no great distance there was a

house, which perhaps he could reach. Pitying his condition, they

might have compassion on him; and if they did not, it would be

better, he thought, to die near human beings, than in the lonely

open fields. He summoned up all his strength for one last trial,

and bent his faltering steps towards it.

As he drew nearer to this house, a feeling come over him that he

had seen it before. He remembered nothing of its details; but

the shape and aspect of the building seemed familiar to him.

That garden wall! On the grass inside, he had fallen on his

knees last night, and prayed the two men's mercy. It was the

very house they had attempted to rob.

Oliver felt such fear come over him when he recognised the place,

that, for the instant, he forgot the agony of his wound, and

thought only of flight. Flight! He could scarcely stand: and

if he were in full possession of all the best powers of his

slight and youthful frame, whither could he fly? He pushed

against the garden-gate; it was unlocked, and swung open on its

hinges. He tottered across the lawn; climbed the steps; knocked

faintly at the door; and, his whole strength failing him, sunk

down against one of the pillars of the little portico.

It happened that about this time, Mr. Giles, Brittles, and the

tinker, were recruiting themselves, after the fatigues and

terrors of the night, with tea and sundries, in the kitchen. Not

that it was Mr. Giles's habit to admit to too great familiarity

the humbler servants: towards whom it was rather his wont to

deport himself with a lofty affability, which, while it

gratified, could not fail to remind them of his superior position

in society. But, death, fires, and burglary, make all men

equals; so Mr. Giles sat with his legs stretched out before the

kitchen fender, leaning his left arm on the table, while, with

his right, he illustrated a circumstantial and minute account of

the robbery, to which his bearers (but especially the cook and

housemaid, who were of the party) listened with breathless

interest.

'It was about half-past two,' said Mr. Giles, 'or I wouldn't

swear that it mightn't have been a little nearer three, when I

woke up, and, turning round in my bed, as it might be so, (here

Mr. Giles turned round in his chair, and pulled the corner of the

table-cloth over him to imitate bed-clothes,) I fancied I heerd a

noise.'

At this point of the narrative the cook turned pale, and asked

the housemaid to shut the door: who asked Brittles, who asked the

tinker, who pretended not to hear.

'--Heerd a noise,' continued Mr. Giles. 'I says, at first, "This

is illusion"; and was composing myself off to sleep, when I heerd

the noise again, distinct.'

'What sort of a noise?' asked the cook.

'A kind of a busting noise,' replied Mr. Giles, looking round

him.

'More like the noise of powdering a iron bar on a nutmeg-grater,'

suggested Brittles.

'It was, when \_you\_ heerd it, sir,' rejoined Mr. Giles; 'but, at

this time, it had a busting sound. I turned down the clothes';

continued Giles, rolling back the table-cloth, 'sat up in bed;

and listened.'

The cook and housemaid simultaneously ejaculated 'Lor!' and drew

their chairs closer together.

'I heerd it now, quite apparent,' resumed Mr. Giles. '"Somebody,"

I says, "is forcing of a door, or window; what's to be done?

I'll call up that poor lad, Brittles, and save him from being

murdered in his bed; or his throat," I says, "may be cut from his

right ear to his left, without his ever knowing it."'

Here, all eyes were turned upon Brittles, who fixed his upon the

speaker, and stared at him, with his mouth wide open, and his

face expressive of the most unmitigated horror.

'I tossed off the clothes,' said Giles, throwing away the

table-cloth, and looking very hard at the cook and housemaid,

'got softly out of bed; drew on a pair of--'

'Ladies present, Mr. Giles,' murmured the tinker.

'--Of \_shoes\_, sir,' said Giles, turning upon him, and laying great

emphasis on the word; 'seized the loaded pistol that always goes

upstairs with the plate-basket; and walked on tiptoes to his

room. "Brittles," I says, when I had woke him, "don't be

frightened!"'

'So you did,' observed Brittles, in a low voice.

'"We're dead men, I think, Brittles," I says,' continued Giles;

'"but don't be frightened."'

'\_Was\_ he frightened?' asked the cook.

'Not a bit of it,' replied Mr. Giles. 'He was as firm--ah!

pretty near as firm as I was.'

'I should have died at once, I'm sure, if it had been me,'

observed the housemaid.

'You're a woman,' retorted Brittles, plucking up a little.

'Brittles is right,' said Mr. Giles, nodding his head,

approvingly; 'from a woman, nothing else was to be expected. We,

being men, took a dark lantern that was standing on Brittle's

hob, and groped our way downstairs in the pitch dark,--as it

might be so.'

Mr. Giles had risen from his seat, and taken two steps with his

eyes shut, to accompany his description with appropriate action,

when he started violently, in common with the rest of the

company, and hurried back to his chair. The cook and housemaid

screamed.

'It was a knock,' said Mr. Giles, assuming perfect serenity.

'Open the door, somebody.'

Nobody moved.

'It seems a strange sort of a thing, a knock coming at such a

time in the morning,' said Mr. Giles, surveying the pale faces

which surrounded him, and looking very blank himself; 'but the

door must be opened. Do you hear, somebody?'

Mr. Giles, as he spoke, looked at Brittles; but that young man,

being naturally modest, probably considered himself nobody, and

so held that the inquiry could not have any application to him;

at all events, he tendered no reply. Mr. Giles directed an

appealing glance at the tinker; but he had suddenly fallen

asleep. The women were out of the question.

'If Brittles would rather open the door, in the presence of

witnesses,' said Mr. Giles, after a short silence, 'I am ready to

make one.'

'So am I,' said the tinker, waking up, as suddenly as he had

fallen asleep.

Brittles capitulated on these terms; and the party being

somewhat re-assured by the discovery (made on throwing open the

shutters) that it was now broad day, took their way upstairs;

with the dogs in front. The two women, who were afraid to stay

below, brought up the rear. By the advice of Mr. Giles, they all

talked very loud, to warn any evil-disposed person outside, that

they were strong in numbers; and by a master-stoke of policy,

originating in the brain of the same ingenious gentleman, the

dogs' tails were well pinched, in the hall, to make them bark

savagely.

These precautions having been taken, Mr. Giles held on fast by

the tinker's arm (to prevent his running away, as he pleasantly

said), and gave the word of command to open the door. Brittles

obeyed; the group, peeping timorously over each other's

shoulders, beheld no more formidable object than poor little

Oliver Twist, speechless and exhausted, who raised his heavy

eyes, and mutely solicited their compassion.

'A boy!' exclaimed Mr. Giles, valiantly, pushing the tinker into

the background. 'What's the matter with the--eh?--Why--Brittles--look

here--don't you know?'

Brittles, who had got behind the door to open it, no sooner saw

Oliver, than he uttered a loud cry. Mr. Giles, seizing the boy

by one leg and one arm (fortunately not the broken limb) lugged

him straight into the hall, and deposited him at full length on

the floor thereof.

'Here he is!' bawled Giles, calling in a state of great

excitement, up the staircase; 'here's one of the thieves, ma'am!

Here's a thief, miss! Wounded, miss! I shot him, miss; and

Brittles held the light.'

'--In a lantern, miss,' cried Brittles, applying one hand to the

side of his mouth, so that his voice might travel the better.

The two women-servants ran upstairs to carry the intelligence

that Mr. Giles had captured a robber; and the tinker busied

himself in endeavouring to restore Oliver, lest he should die

before he could be hanged. In the midst of all this noise and

commotion, there was heard a sweet female voice, which quelled it

in an instant.

'Giles!' whispered the voice from the stair-head.

'I'm here, miss,' replied Mr. Giles. 'Don't be frightened, miss;

I ain't much injured. He didn't make a very desperate

resistance, miss! I was soon too many for him.'

'Hush!' replied the young lady; 'you frighten my aunt as much as

the thieves did. Is the poor creature much hurt?'

'Wounded desperate, miss,' replied Giles, with indescribable

complacency.

'He looks as if he was a-going, miss,' bawled Brittles, in the

same manner as before. 'Wouldn't you like to come and look at

him, miss, in case he should?'

'Hush, pray; there's a good man!' rejoined the lady. 'Wait

quietly only one instant, while I speak to aunt.'

With a footstep as soft and gentle as the voice, the speaker

tripped away. She soon returned, with the direction that the

wounded person was to be carried, carefully, upstairs to Mr.

Giles's room; and that Brittles was to saddle the pony and betake

himself instantly to Chertsey: from which place, he was to

despatch, with all speed, a constable and doctor.

'But won't you take one look at him, first, miss?' asked Mr.

Giles, with as much pride as if Oliver were some bird of rare

plumage, that he had skilfully brought down. 'Not one little

peep, miss?'

'Not now, for the world,' replied the young lady. 'Poor fellow!

Oh! treat him kindly, Giles for my sake!'

The old servant looked up at the speaker, as she turned away,

with a glance as proud and admiring as if she had been his own

child. Then, bending over Oliver, he helped to carry him

upstairs, with the care and solicitude of a woman.

CHAPTER XXIX

HAS AN INTRODUCTORY ACCOUNT OF THE INMATES OF THE HOUSE, TO WHICH

OLIVER RESORTED

In a handsome room: though its furniture had rather the air of

old-fashioned comfort, than of modern elegance: there sat two

ladies at a well-spread breakfast-table. Mr. Giles, dressed with

scrupulous care in a full suit of black, was in attendance upon

them. He had taken his station some half-way between the

side-board and the breakfast-table; and, with his body drawn up

to its full height, his head thrown back, and inclined the merest

trifle on one side, his left leg advanced, and his right hand

thrust into his waist-coat, while his left hung down by his side,

grasping a waiter, looked like one who laboured under a very

agreeable sense of his own merits and importance.

Of the two ladies, one was well advanced in years; but the

high-backed oaken chair in which she sat, was not more upright

than she. Dressed with the utmost nicety and precision, in a

quaint mixture of by-gone costume, with some slight concessions

to the prevailing taste, which rather served to point the old

style pleasantly than to impair its effect, she sat, in a stately

manner, with her hands folded on the table before her. Her eyes

(and age had dimmed but little of their brightness) were

attentively upon her young companion.

The younger lady was in the lovely bloom and spring-time of

womanhood; at that age, when, if ever angels be for God's good

purposes enthroned in mortal forms, they may be, without impiety,

supposed to abide in such as hers.

She was not past seventeen. Cast in so slight and exquisite a

mould; so mild and gentle; so pure and beautiful; that earth

seemed not her element, nor its rough creatures her fit

companions. The very intelligence that shone in her deep blue

eye, and was stamped upon her noble head, seemed scarcely of her

age, or of the world; and yet the changing expression of

sweetness and good humour, the thousand lights that played about

the face, and left no shadow there; above all, the smile, the

cheerful, happy smile, were made for Home, and fireside peace and

happiness.

She was busily engaged in the little offices of the table.

Chancing to raise her eyes as the elder lady was regarding her,

she playfully put back her hair, which was simply braided on her

forehead; and threw into her beaming look, such an expression of

affection and artless loveliness, that blessed spirits might have

smiled to look upon her.

'And Brittles has been gone upwards of an hour, has he?' asked

the old lady, after a pause.

'An hour and twelve minutes, ma'am,' replied Mr. Giles, referring

to a silver watch, which he drew forth by a black ribbon.

'He is always slow,' remarked the old lady.

'Brittles always was a slow boy, ma'am,' replied the attendant.

And seeing, by the bye, that Brittles had been a slow boy for

upwards of thirty years, there appeared no great probability of

his ever being a fast one.

'He gets worse instead of better, I think,' said the elder lady.

'It is very inexcusable in him if he stops to play with any other

boys,' said the young lady, smiling.

Mr. Giles was apparently considering the propriety of indulging

in a respectful smile himself, when a gig drove up to the

garden-gate: out of which there jumped a fat gentleman, who ran

straight up to the door: and who, getting quickly into the house

by some mysterious process, burst into the room, and nearly

overturned Mr. Giles and the breakfast-table together.

'I never heard of such a thing!' exclaimed the fat gentleman. 'My

dear Mrs. Maylie--bless my soul--in the silence of the night,

too--I \_never\_ heard of such a thing!'

With these expressions of condolence, the fat gentleman shook

hands with both ladies, and drawing up a chair, inquired how they

found themselves.

'You ought to be dead; positively dead with the fright,' said the

fat gentleman. 'Why didn't you send? Bless me, my man should

have come in a minute; and so would I; and my assistant would

have been delighted; or anybody, I'm sure, under such

circumstances. Dear, dear! So unexpected! In the silence of

the night, too!'

The doctor seemed expecially troubled by the fact of the robbery

having been unexpected, and attempted in the night-time; as if it

were the established custom of gentlemen in the housebreaking way

to transact business at noon, and to make an appointment, by

post, a day or two previous.

'And you, Miss Rose,' said the doctor, turning to the young lady,

'I--'

'Oh! very much so, indeed,' said Rose, interrupting him; 'but

there is a poor creature upstairs, whom aunt wishes you to see.'

'Ah! to be sure,' replied the doctor, 'so there is. That was

your handiwork, Giles, I understand.'

Mr. Giles, who had been feverishly putting the tea-cups to

rights, blushed very red, and said that he had had that honour.

'Honour, eh?' said the doctor; 'well, I don't know; perhaps it's

as honourable to hit a thief in a back kitchen, as to hit your

man at twelve paces. Fancy that he fired in the air, and you've

fought a duel, Giles.'

Mr. Giles, who thought this light treatment of the matter an

unjust attempt at diminishing his glory, answered respectfully,

that it was not for the like of him to judge about that; but he

rather thought it was no joke to the opposite party.

'Gad, that's true!' said the doctor. 'Where is he? Show me the

way. I'll look in again, as I come down, Mrs. Maylie. That's

the little window that he got in at, eh? Well, I couldn't have

believed it!'

Talking all the way, he followed Mr. Giles upstairs; and while he

is going upstairs, the reader may be informed, that Mr. Losberne,

a surgeon in the neighbourhood, known through a circuit of ten

miles round as 'the doctor,' had grown fat, more from good-humour

than from good living: and was as kind and hearty, and withal as

eccentric an old bachelor, as will be found in five times that

space, by any explorer alive.

The doctor was absent, much longer than either he or the ladies

had anticipated. A large flat box was fetched out of the gig;

and a bedroom bell was rung very often; and the servants ran up

and down stairs perpetually; from which tokens it was justly

concluded that something important was going on above. At length

he returned; and in reply to an anxious inquiry after his

patient; looked very mysterious, and closed the door, carefully.

'This is a very extraordinary thing, Mrs. Maylie,' said the

doctor, standing with his back to the door, as if to keep it

shut.

'He is not in danger, I hope?' said the old lady.

'Why, that would \_not\_ be an extraordinary thing, under the

circumstances,' replied the doctor; 'though I don't think he is.

Have you seen the thief?'

'No,' rejoined the old lady.

'Nor heard anything about him?'

'No.'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am, interposed Mr. Giles; 'but I was going

to tell you about him when Doctor Losberne came in.'

The fact was, that Mr. Giles had not, at first, been able to

bring his mind to the avowal, that he had only shot a boy. Such

commendations had been bestowed upon his bravery, that he could

not, for the life of him, help postponing the explanation for a

few delicious minutes; during which he had flourished, in the

very zenith of a brief reputation for undaunted courage.

'Rose wished to see the man,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'but I wouldn't

hear of it.'

'Humph!' rejoined the doctor. 'There is nothing very alarming in

his appearance. Have you any objection to see him in my

presence?'

'If it be necessary,' replied the old lady, 'certainly not.'

'Then I think it is necessary,' said the doctor; 'at all events,

I am quite sure that you would deeply regret not having done so,

if you postponed it. He is perfectly quiet and comfortable now.

Allow me--Miss Rose, will you permit me? Not the slightest fear,

I pledge you my honour!'

CHAPTER XXX

RELATES WHAT OLIVER'S NEW VISITORS THOUGHT OF HIM

With many loquacious assurances that they would be agreeably

surprised in the aspect of the criminal, the doctor drew the

young lady's arm through one of his; and offering his disengaged

hand to Mrs. Maylie, led them, with much ceremony and

stateliness, upstairs.

'Now,' said the doctor, in a whisper, as he softly turned the

handle of a bedroom-door, 'let us hear what you think of him. He

has not been shaved very recently, but he don't look at all

ferocious notwithstanding. Stop, though! Let me first see that

he is in visiting order.'

Stepping before them, he looked into the room. Motioning them to

advance, he closed the door when they had entered; and gently

drew back the curtains of the bed. Upon it, in lieu of the

dogged, black-visaged ruffian they had expected to behold, there

lay a mere child: worn with pain and exhaustion, and sunk into a

deep sleep. His wounded arm, bound and splintered up, was

crossed upon his breast; his head reclined upon the other arm,

which was half hidden by his long hair, as it streamed over the

pillow.

The honest gentleman held the curtain in his hand, and looked on,

for a minute or so, in silence. Whilst he was watching the

patient thus, the younger lady glided softly past, and seating

herself in a chair by the bedside, gathered Oliver's hair from

his face. As she stooped over him, her tears fell upon his

forehead.

The boy stirred, and smiled in his sleep, as though these marks

of pity and compassion had awakened some pleasant dream of a love

and affection he had never known. Thus, a strain of gentle

music, or the rippling of water in a silent place, or the odour

of a flower, or the mention of a familiar word, will sometimes

call up sudden dim remembrances of scenes that never were, in

this life; which vanish like a breath; which some brief memory of

a happier existence, long gone by, would seem to have awakened;

which no voluntary exertion of the mind can ever recall.

'What can this mean?' exclaimed the elder lady. 'This poor child

can never have been the pupil of robbers!'

'Vice,' said the surgeon, replacing the curtain, 'takes up her

abode in many temples; and who can say that a fair outside shell

not enshrine her?'

'But at so early an age!' urged Rose.

'My dear young lady,' rejoined the surgeon, mournfully shaking

his head; 'crime, like death, is not confined to the old and

withered alone. The youngest and fairest are too often its

chosen victims.'

'But, can you--oh! can you really believe that this delicate boy

has been the voluntary associate of the worst outcasts of

society?' said Rose.

The surgeon shook his head, in a manner which intimated that he

feared it was very possible; and observing that they might

disturb the patient, led the way into an adjoining apartment.

'But even if he has been wicked,' pursued Rose, 'think how young

he is; think that he may never have known a mother's love, or the

comfort of a home; that ill-usage and blows, or the want of

bread, may have driven him to herd with men who have forced him

to guilt. Aunt, dear aunt, for mercy's sake, think of this,

before you let them drag this sick child to a prison, which in

any case must be the grave of all his chances of amendment. Oh!

as you love me, and know that I have never felt the want of

parents in your goodness and affection, but that I might have

done so, and might have been equally helpless and unprotected

with this poor child, have pity upon him before it is too late!'

'My dear love,' said the elder lady, as she folded the weeping

girl to her bosom, 'do you think I would harm a hair of his

head?'

'Oh, no!' replied Rose, eagerly.

'No, surely,' said the old lady; 'my days are drawing to their

close: and may mercy be shown to me as I show it to others!

What can I do to save him, sir?'

'Let me think, ma'am,' said the doctor; 'let me think.'

Mr. Losberne thrust his hands into his pockets, and took several

turns up and down the room; often stopping, and balancing himself

on his toes, and frowning frightfully. After various

exclamations of 'I've got it now' and 'no, I haven't,' and as

many renewals of the walking and frowning, he at length made a

dead halt, and spoke as follows:

'I think if you give me a full and unlimited commission to bully

Giles, and that little boy, Brittles, I can manage it. Giles is

a faithful fellow and an old servant, I know; but you can make it

up to him in a thousand ways, and reward him for being such a

good shot besides. You don't object to that?'

'Unless there is some other way of preserving the child,' replied

Mrs. Maylie.

'There is no other,' said the doctor. 'No other, take my word

for it.'

'Then my aunt invests you with full power,' said Rose, smiling

through her tears; 'but pray don't be harder upon the poor

fellows than is indispensably necessary.'

'You seem to think,' retorted the doctor, 'that everybody is

disposed to be hard-hearted to-day, except yourself, Miss Rose.

I only hope, for the sake of the rising male sex generally, that

you may be found in as vulnerable and soft-hearted a mood by the

first eligible young fellow who appeals to your compassion; and I

wish I were a young fellow, that I might avail myself, on the

spot, of such a favourable opportunity for doing so, as the

present.'

'You are as great a boy as poor Brittles himself,' returned Rose,

blushing.

'Well,' said the doctor, laughing heartily, 'that is no very

difficult matter. But to return to this boy. The great point of

our agreement is yet to come. He will wake in an hour or so, I

dare say; and although I have told that thick-headed

constable-fellow downstairs that he musn't be moved or spoken to,

on peril of his life, I think we may converse with him without

danger. Now I make this stipulation--that I shall examine him in

your presence, and that, if, from what he says, we judge, and I

can show to the satisfaction of your cool reason, that he is a

real and thorough bad one (which is more than possible), he shall

be left to his fate, without any farther interference on my part,

at all events.'

'Oh no, aunt!' entreated Rose.

'Oh yes, aunt!' said the doctor. 'Is is a bargain?'

'He cannot be hardened in vice,' said Rose; 'It is impossible.'

'Very good,' retorted the doctor; 'then so much the more reason

for acceding to my proposition.'

Finally the treaty was entered into; and the parties thereunto

sat down to wait, with some impatience, until Oliver should

awake.

The patience of the two ladies was destined to undergo a longer

trial than Mr. Losberne had led them to expect; for hour after

hour passed on, and still Oliver slumbered heavily. It was

evening, indeed, before the kind-hearted doctor brought them the

intelligence, that he was at length sufficiently restored to be

spoken to. The boy was very ill, he said, and weak from the loss

of blood; but his mind was so troubled with anxiety to disclose

something, that he deemed it better to give him the opportunity,

than to insist upon his remaining quiet until next morning:

which he should otherwise have done.

The conference was a long one. Oliver told them all his simple

history, and was often compelled to stop, by pain and want of

strength. It was a solemn thing, to hear, in the darkened room,

the feeble voice of the sick child recounting a weary catalogue

of evils and calamities which hard men had brought upon him. Oh!

if when we oppress and grind our fellow-creatures, we bestowed

but one thought on the dark evidences of human error, which, like

dense and heavy clouds, are rising, slowly it is true, but not

less surely, to Heaven, to pour their after-vengeance on our

heads; if we heard but one instant, in imagination, the deep

testimony of dead men's voices, which no power can stifle, and no

pride shut out; where would be the injury and injustice, the

suffering, misery, cruelty, and wrong, that each day's life

brings with it!

Oliver's pillow was smoothed by gentle hands that night; and

loveliness and virtue watched him as he slept. He felt calm and

happy, and could have died without a murmur.

The momentous interview was no sooner concluded, and Oliver

composed to rest again, than the doctor, after wiping his eyes,

and condemning them for being weak all at once, betook himself

downstairs to open upon Mr. Giles. And finding nobody about the

parlours, it occurred to him, that he could perhaps originate the

proceedings with better effect in the kitchen; so into the

kitchen he went.

There were assembled, in that lower house of the domestic

parliament, the women-servants, Mr. Brittles, Mr. Giles, the

tinker (who had received a special invitation to regale himself

for the remainder of the day, in consideration of his services),

and the constable. The latter gentleman had a large staff, a

large head, large features, and large half-boots; and he looked

as if he had been taking a proportionate allowance of ale--as

indeed he had.

The adventures of the previous night were still under discussion;

for Mr. Giles was expatiating upon his presence of mind, when the

doctor entered; Mr. Brittles, with a mug of ale in his hand, was

corroborating everything, before his superior said it.

'Sit still!' said the doctor, waving his hand.

'Thank you, sir, said Mr. Giles. 'Misses wished some ale to be

given out, sir; and as I felt no ways inclined for my own little

room, sir, and was disposed for company, I am taking mine among

'em here.'

Brittles headed a low murmur, by which the ladies and gentlemen

generally were understood to express the gratification they

derived from Mr. Giles's condescension. Mr. Giles looked round

with a patronising air, as much as to say that so long as they

behaved properly, he would never desert them.

'How is the patient to-night, sir?' asked Giles.

'So-so'; returned the doctor. 'I am afraid you have got yourself

into a scrape there, Mr. Giles.'

'I hope you don't mean to say, sir,' said Mr. Giles, trembling,

'that he's going to die. If I thought it, I should never be

happy again. I wouldn't cut a boy off: no, not even Brittles

here; not for all the plate in the county, sir.'

'That's not the point,' said the doctor, mysteriously. 'Mr.

Giles, are you a Protestant?'

'Yes, sir, I hope so,' faltered Mr. Giles, who had turned very

pale.

'And what are \_you\_, boy?' said the doctor, turning sharply upon

Brittles.

'Lord bless me, sir!' replied Brittles, starting violently; 'I'm

the same as Mr. Giles, sir.'

'Then tell me this,' said the doctor, 'both of you, both of you!

Are you going to take upon yourselves to swear, that that boy

upstairs is the boy that was put through the little window last

night? Out with it! Come! We are prepared for you!'

The doctor, who was universally considered one of the

best-tempered creatures on earth, made this demand in such a

dreadful tone of anger, that Giles and Brittles, who were

considerably muddled by ale and excitement, stared at each other

in a state of stupefaction.

'Pay attention to the reply, constable, will you?' said the

doctor, shaking his forefinger with great solemnity of manner,

and tapping the bridge of his nose with it, to bespeak the

exercise of that worthy's utmost acuteness. 'Something may come

of this before long.'

The constable looked as wise as he could, and took up his staff

of office: which had been reclining indolently in the

chimney-corner.

'It's a simple question of identity, you will observe,' said the

doctor.

'That's what it is, sir,' replied the constable, coughing with

great violence; for he had finished his ale in a hurry, and some

of it had gone the wrong way.

'Here's the house broken into,' said the doctor, 'and a couple of

men catch one moment's glimpse of a boy, in the midst of

gunpowder smoke, and in all the distraction of alarm and

darkness. Here's a boy comes to that very same house, next

morning, and because he happens to have his arm tied up, these

men lay violent hands upon him--by doing which, they place his

life in great danger--and swear he is the thief. Now, the

question is, whether these men are justified by the fact; if not,

in what situation do they place themselves?'

The constable nodded profoundly. He said, if that wasn't law, he

would be glad to know what was.

'I ask you again,' thundered the doctor, 'are you, on your solemn

oaths, able to identify that boy?'

Brittles looked doubtfully at Mr. Giles; Mr. Giles looked

doubtfully at Brittles; the constable put his hand behind his

ear, to catch the reply; the two women and the tinker leaned

forward to listen; the doctor glanced keenly round; when a ring

was heard at the gate, and at the same moment, the sound of

wheels.

'It's the runners!' cried Brittles, to all appearance much

relieved.

'The what?' exclaimed the doctor, aghast in his turn.

'The Bow Street officers, sir,' replied Brittles, taking up a

candle; 'me and Mr. Giles sent for 'em this morning.'

'What?' cried the doctor.

'Yes,' replied Brittles; 'I sent a message up by the coachman,

and I only wonder they weren't here before, sir.'

'You did, did you? Then confound your--slow coaches down here;

that's all,' said the doctor, walking away.

CHAPTER XXXI

INVOLVES A CRITICAL POSITION

'Who's that?' inquired Brittles, opening the door a little way,

with the chain up, and peeping out, shading the candle with his

hand.

'Open the door,' replied a man outside; 'it's the officers from

Bow Street, as was sent to to-day.'

Much comforted by this assurance, Brittles opened the door to its

full width, and confronted a portly man in a great-coat; who

walked in, without saying anything more, and wiped his shoes on

the mat, as coolly as if he lived there.

'Just send somebody out to relieve my mate, will you, young man?'

said the officer; 'he's in the gig, a-minding the prad. Have you

got a coach 'us here, that you could put it up in, for five or

ten minutes?'

Brittles replying in the affirmative, and pointing out the

building, the portly man stepped back to the garden-gate, and

helped his companion to put up the gig: while Brittles lighted

them, in a state of great admiration. This done, they returned

to the house, and, being shown into a parlour, took off their

great-coats and hats, and showed like what they were.

The man who had knocked at the door, was a stout personage of

middle height, aged about fifty: with shiny black hair, cropped

pretty close; half-whiskers, a round face, and sharp eyes. The

other was a red-headed, bony man, in top-boots; with a rather

ill-favoured countenance, and a turned-up sinister-looking nose.

'Tell your governor that Blathers and Duff is here, will you?'

said the stouter man, smoothing down his hair, and laying a pair

of handcuffs on the table. 'Oh! Good-evening, master. Can I

have a word or two with you in private, if you please?'

This was addressed to Mr. Losberne, who now made his appearance;

that gentleman, motioning Brittles to retire, brought in the two

ladies, and shut the door.

'This is the lady of the house,' said Mr. Losberne, motioning

towards Mrs. Maylie.

Mr. Blathers made a bow. Being desired to sit down, he put his

hat on the floor, and taking a chair, motioned to Duff to do the

same. The latter gentleman, who did not appear quite so much

accustomed to good society, or quite so much at his ease in

it--one of the two--seated himself, after undergoing several

muscular affections of the limbs, and the head of his stick into

his mouth, with some embarrassment.

'Now, with regard to this here robbery, master,' said Blathers.

'What are the circumstances?'

Mr. Losberne, who appeared desirous of gaining time, recounted

them at great length, and with much circumlocution. Messrs.

Blathers and Duff looked very knowing meanwhile, and occasionally

exchanged a nod.

'I can't say, for certain, till I see the work, of course,' said

Blathers; 'but my opinion at once is,--I don't mind committing

myself to that extent,--that this wasn't done by a yokel; eh,

Duff?'

'Certainly not,' replied Duff.

'And, translating the word yokel for the benefit of the ladies, I

apprehend your meaning to be, that this attempt was not made by a

countryman?' said Mr. Losberne, with a smile.

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

robbery, is it?'

'All,' replied the doctor.

'Now, what is this, about this here boy that the servants are

a-talking on?' said Blathers.

'Nothing at all,' replied the doctor. 'One of the frightened

servants chose to take it into his head, that he had something to

do with this attempt to break into the house; but it's nonsense:

sheer absurdity.'

'Wery easy disposed of, if it is,' remarked Duff.

'What he says is quite correct,' observed Blathers, nodding his

head in a confirmatory way, and playing carelessly with the

handcuffs, as if they were a pair of castanets. 'Who is the boy?

What account does he give of himself? Where did he come from?

He didn't drop out of the clouds, did he, master?'

'Of course not,' replied the doctor, with a nervous glance at the

two ladies. 'I know his whole history: but we can talk about

that presently. You would like, first, to see the place where

the thieves made their attempt, I suppose?'

'Certainly,' rejoined Mr. Blathers. 'We had better inspect the

premises first, and examine the servants afterwards. That's the

usual way of doing business.'

Lights were then procured; and Messrs. Blathers and Duff,

attended by the native constable, Brittles, Giles, and everybody

else in short, went into the little room at the end of the

passage and looked out at the window; and afterwards went round

by way of the lawn, and looked in at the window; and after that,

had a candle handed out to inspect the shutter with; and after

that, a lantern to trace the footsteps with; and after that, a

pitchfork to poke the bushes with. This done, amidst the

breathless interest of all beholders, they came in again; and Mr.

Giles and Brittles were put through a melodramatic representation

of their share in the previous night's adventures: which they

performed some six times over: contradicting each other, in not

more than one important respect, the first time, and in not more

than a dozen the last. This consummation being arrived at,

Blathers and Duff cleared the room, and held a long council

together, compared with which, for secrecy and solemnity, a

consultation of great doctors on the knottiest point in medicine,

would be mere child's play.

Meanwhile, the doctor walked up and down the next room in a very

uneasy state; and Mrs. Maylie and Rose looked on, with anxious

faces.

'Upon my word,' he said, making a halt, after a great number of

very rapid turns, 'I hardly know what to do.'

'Surely,' said Rose, 'the poor child's story, faithfully repeated

to these men, will be sufficient to exonerate him.'

'I doubt it, my dear young lady,' said the doctor, shaking his

head. 'I don't think it would exonerate him, either with them,

or with legal functionaries of a higher grade. What is he, after

all, they would say? A runaway. Judged by mere worldly

considerations and probabilities, his story is a very doubtful

one.'

'You believe it, surely?' interrupted Rose.

'\_I\_ believe it, strange as it is; and perhaps I may be an old

fool for doing so,' rejoined the doctor; 'but I don't think it is

exactly the tale for a practical police-officer, nevertheless.'

'Why not?' demanded Rose.

'Because, my pretty cross-examiner,' replied the doctor:

'because, viewed with their eyes, there are many ugly points

about it; he can only prove the parts that look ill, and none of

those that look well. Confound the fellows, they \_will\_ have the

why and the wherefore, and will take nothing for granted. On his

own showing, you see, he has been the companion of thieves for

some time past; he has been carried to a police-officer, on a

charge of picking a gentleman's pocket; he has been taken away,

forcibly, from that gentleman's house, to a place which he cannot

describe or point out, and of the situation of which he has not

the remotest idea. He is brought down to Chertsey, by men who

seem to have taken a violent fancy to him, whether he will or no;

and is put through a window to rob a house; and then, just at the

very moment when he is going to alarm the inmates, and so do the

very thing that would set him all to rights, there rushes into

the way, a blundering dog of a half-bred butler, and shoots him!

As if on purpose to prevent his doing any good for himself!

Don't you see all this?'

'I see it, of course,' replied Rose, smiling at the doctor's

impetuosity; 'but still I do not see anything in it, to criminate

the poor child.'

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

of your sex! They never see, whether for good or bad, more than

one side of any question; and that is, always, the one which

first presents itself to them.'

Having given vent to this result of experience, the doctor put

his hands into his pockets, and walked up and down the room with

even greater rapidity than before.

'The more I think of it,' said the doctor, 'the more I see that

it will occasion endless trouble and difficulty if we put these

men in possession of the boy's real story. I am certain it will

not be believed; and even if they can do nothing to him in the

end, still the dragging it forward, and giving publicity to all

the doubts that will be cast upon it, must interfere, materially,

with your benevolent plan of rescuing him from misery.'

'Oh! what is to be done?' cried Rose. 'Dear, dear! why did they

send for these people?'

'Why, indeed!' exclaimed Mrs. Maylie. 'I would not have had them

here, for the world.'

'All I know is,' said Mr. Losberne, at last: sitting down with a

kind of desperate calmness, 'that we must try and carry it off

with a bold face. The object is a good one, and that must be our

excuse. The boy has strong symptoms of fever upon him, and is in

no condition to be talked to any more; that's one comfort. We

must make the best of it; and if bad be the best, it is no fault

of ours. Come in!'

'Well, master,' said Blathers, entering the room followed by his

colleague, and making the door fast, before he said any more.

'This warn't a put-up thing.'

'And what the devil's a put-up thing?' demanded the doctor,

impatiently.

'We call it a put-up robbery, ladies,' said Blathers, turning to

them, as if he pitied their ignorance, but had a contempt for the

doctor's, 'when the servants is in it.'

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

'Wery likely not, ma'am,' replied Blathers; 'but they might have

been in it, for all that.'

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

'We find it was a town hand,' said Blathers, continuing his

report; 'for the style of work is first-rate.'

'Wery pretty indeed it is,' remarked Duff, in an undertone.

'There was two of 'em in it,' continued Blathers; 'and they had a

boy with 'em; that's plain from the size of the window. That's

all to be said at present. We'll see this lad that you've got

upstairs at once, if you please.'

'Perhaps they will take something to drink first, Mrs. Maylie?'

said the doctor: his face brightening, as if some new thought had

occurred to him.

'Oh! to be sure!' exclaimed Rose, eagerly. 'You shall have it

immediately, if you will.'

'Why, thank you, miss!' said Blathers, drawing his coat-sleeve

across his mouth; 'it's dry work, this sort of duty. Anythink

that's handy, miss; don't put yourself out of the way, on our

accounts.'

'What shall it be?' asked the doctor, following the young lady to

the sideboard.

'A little drop of spirits, master, if it's all the same,' replied

Blathers. 'It's a cold ride from London, ma'am; and I always

find that spirits comes home warmer to the feelings.'

This interesting communication was addressed to Mrs. Maylie, who

received it very graciously. While it was being conveyed to her,

the doctor slipped out of the room.

'Ah!' said Mr. Blathers: not holding his wine-glass by the stem,

but grasping the bottom between the thumb and forefinger of his

left hand: and placing it in front of his chest; 'I have seen a

good many pieces of business like this, in my time, ladies.'

'That crack down in the back lane at Edmonton, Blathers,' said

Mr. Duff, assisting his colleague's memory.

'That was something in this way, warn't it?' rejoined Mr.

Blathers; 'that was done by Conkey Chickweed, that was.'

'You always gave that to him' replied Duff. 'It was the Family

Pet, I tell you. Conkey hadn't any more to do with it than I

had.'

'Get out!' retorted Mr. Blathers; 'I know better. Do you mind

that time when Conkey was robbed of his money, though? What a

start that was! Better than any novel-book \_I\_ ever see!'

'What was that?' inquired Rose: anxious to encourage any

symptoms of good-humour in the unwelcome visitors.

'It was a robbery, miss, that hardly anybody would have been down

upon,' said Blathers. 'This here Conkey Chickweed--'

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

'Of course the lady knows that, don't she?' demanded Mr.

Blathers. 'Always interrupting, you are, partner! This here

Conkey Chickweed, miss, kept a public-house over Battlebridge

way, and he had a cellar, where a good many young lords went to

see cock-fighting, and badger-drawing, and that; and a wery

intellectual manner the sports was conducted in, for I've seen

'em off'en. He warn't one of the family, at that time; and one

night he was robbed of three hundred and twenty-seven guineas in

a canvas bag, that was stole out of his bedroom in the dead of

night, by a tall man with a black patch over his eye, who had

concealed himself under the bed, and after committing the

robbery, jumped slap out of window: which was only a story high.

He was wery quick about it. But Conkey was quick, too; for he

fired a blunderbuss arter him, and roused the neighbourhood. They

set up a hue-and-cry, directly, and when they came to look about

'em, found that Conkey had hit the robber; for there was traces

of blood, all the way to some palings a good distance off; and

there they lost 'em. However, he had made off with the blunt;

and, consequently, the name of Mr. Chickweed, licensed witler,

appeared in the Gazette among the other bankrupts; and all manner

of benefits and subscriptions, and I don't know what all, was got

up for the poor man, who was in a wery low state of mind about

his loss, and went up and down the streets, for three or four

days, a pulling his hair off in such a desperate manner that many

people was afraid he might be going to make away with himself.

One day he came up to the office, all in a hurry, and had a

private interview with the magistrate, who, after a deal of talk,

rings the bell, and orders Jem Spyers in (Jem was a active

officer), and tells him to go and assist Mr. Chickweed in

apprehending the man as robbed his house. "I see him, Spyers,"

said Chickweed, "pass my house yesterday morning," "Why didn't

you up, and collar him!" says Spyers. "I was so struck all of a

heap, that you might have fractured my skull with a toothpick,"

says the poor man; "but we're sure to have him; for between ten

and eleven o'clock at night he passed again." Spyers no sooner

heard this, than he put some clean linen and a comb, in his

pocket, in case he should have to stop a day or two; and away he

goes, and sets himself down at one of the public-house windows

behind the little red curtain, with his hat on, all ready to bolt

out, at a moment's notice. He was smoking his pipe here, late at

night, when all of a sudden Chickweed roars out, "Here he is!

Stop thief! Murder!" Jem Spyers dashes out; and there he sees

Chickweed, a-tearing down the street full cry. Away goes Spyers;

on goes Chickweed; round turns the people; everybody roars out,

"Thieves!" and Chickweed himself keeps on shouting, all the time,

like mad. Spyers loses sight of him a minute as he turns a

corner; shoots round; sees a little crowd; dives in; "Which is

the man?" "D--me!" says Chickweed, "I've lost him again!" It

was a remarkable occurrence, but he warn't to be seen nowhere, so

they went back to the public-house. Next morning, Spyers took his

old place, and looked out, from behind the curtain, for a tall

man with a black patch over his eye, till his own two eyes ached

again. At last, he couldn't help shutting 'em, to ease 'em a

minute; and the very moment he did so, he hears Chickweed

a-roaring out, "Here he is!" Off he starts once more, with

Chickweed half-way down the street ahead of him; and after twice

as long a run as the yesterday's one, the man's lost again! This

was done, once or twice more, till one-half the neighbours gave

out that Mr. Chickweed had been robbed by the devil, who was

playing tricks with him arterwards; and the other half, that poor

Mr. Chickweed had gone mad with grief.'

'What did Jem Spyers say?' inquired the doctor; who had returned

to the room shortly after the commencement of the story.

'Jem Spyers,' resumed the officer, 'for a long time said nothing

at all, and listened to everything without seeming to, which

showed he understood his business. But, one morning, he walked

into the bar, and taking out his snuffbox, says "Chickweed, I've

found out who done this here robbery." "Have you?" said

Chickweed. "Oh, my dear Spyers, only let me have wengeance, and

I shall die contented! Oh, my dear Spyers, where is the

villain!" "Come!" said Spyers, offering him a pinch of snuff,

"none of that gammon! You did it yourself." So he had; and a

good bit of money he had made by it, too; and nobody would never

have found it out, if he hadn't been so precious anxious to keep

up appearances!' said Mr. Blathers, putting down his wine-glass,

and clinking the handcuffs together.

'Very curious, indeed,' observed the doctor. 'Now, if you

please, you can walk upstairs.'

'If \_you\_ please, sir,' returned Mr. Blathers. Closely following

Mr. Losberne, the two officers ascended to Oliver's bedroom; Mr.

Giles preceding the party, with a lighted candle.

Oliver had been dozing; but looked worse, and was more feverish

than he had appeared yet. Being assisted by the doctor, he

managed to sit up in bed for a minute or so; and looked at the

strangers without at all understanding what was going forward--in

fact, without seeming to recollect where he was, or what had been

passing.

'This,' said Mr. Losberne, speaking softly, but with great

vehemence notwithstanding, 'this is the lad, who, being

accidently wounded by a spring-gun in some boyish trespass on Mr.

What-d' ye-call-him's grounds, at the back here, comes to the

house for assistance this morning, and is immediately laid hold

of and maltreated, by that ingenious gentleman with the candle in

his hand: who has placed his life in considerable danger, as I

can professionally certify.'

Messrs. Blathers and Duff looked at Mr. Giles, as he was thus

recommended to their notice. The bewildered butler gazed from

them towards Oliver, and from Oliver towards Mr. Losberne, with a

most ludicrous mixture of fear and perplexity.

'You don't mean to deny that, I suppose?' said the doctor, laying

Oliver gently down again.

'It was all done for the--for the best, sir,' answered Giles. 'I

am sure I thought it was the boy, or I wouldn't have meddled with

him. I am not of an inhuman disposition, sir.'

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

'The housebreaker's boy, sir!' replied Giles. 'They--they

certainly had a boy.'

'Well? Do you think so now?' inquired Blathers.

'Think what, now?' replied Giles, looking vacantly at his

questioner.

'Think it's the same boy, Stupid-head?' rejoined Blathers,

impatiently.

'I don't know; I really don't know,' said Giles, with a rueful

countenance. 'I couldn't swear to him.'

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

'I don't know what to think,' replied poor Giles. 'I don't think

it is the boy; indeed, I'm almost certain that it isn't. You

know it can't be.'

'Has this man been a-drinking, sir?' inquired Blathers, turning

to the doctor.

'What a precious muddle-headed chap you are!' said Duff,

addressing Mr. Giles, with supreme contempt.

Mr. Losberne had been feeling the patient's pulse during this

short dialogue; but he now rose from the chair by the bedside,

and remarked, that if the officers had any doubts upon the

subject, they would perhaps like to step into the next room, and

have Brittles before them.

Acting upon this suggestion, they adjourned to a neighbouring

apartment, where Mr. Brittles, being called in, involved himself

and his respected superior in such a wonderful maze of fresh

contradictions and impossibilities, as tended to throw no

particular light on anything, but the fact of his own strong

mystification; except, indeed, his declarations that he shouldn't

know the real boy, if he were put before him that instant; that

he had only taken Oliver to be he, because Mr. Giles had said he

was; and that Mr. Giles had, five minutes previously, admitted in

the kitchen, that he began to be very much afraid he had been a

little too hasty.

Among other ingenious surmises, the question was then raised,

whether Mr. Giles had really hit anybody; and upon examination of

the fellow pistol to that which he had fired, it turned out to

have no more destructive loading than gunpowder and brown paper:

a discovery which made a considerable impression on everybody but

the doctor, who had drawn the ball about ten minutes before.

Upon no one, however, did it make a greater impression than on

Mr. Giles himself; who, after labouring, for some hours, under

the fear of having mortally wounded a fellow-creature, eagerly

caught at this new idea, and favoured it to the utmost. Finally,

the officers, without troubling themselves very much about

Oliver, left the Chertsey constable in the house, and took up

their rest for that night in the town; promising to return the

next morning.

With the next morning, there came a rumour, that two men and a

boy were in the cage at Kingston, who had been apprehended over

night under suspicious circumstances; and to Kingston Messrs.

Blathers and Duff journeyed accordingly. The suspicious

circumstances, however, resolving themselves, on investigation,

into the one fact, that they had been discovered sleeping under a

haystack; which, although a great crime, is only punishable by

imprisonment, and is, in the merciful eye of the English law, and

its comprehensive love of all the King's subjects, held to be no

satisfactory proof, in the absence of all other evidence, that

the sleeper, or sleepers, have committed burglary accompanied

with violence, and have therefore rendered themselves liable to

the punishment of death; Messrs. Blathers and Duff came back

again, as wise as they went.

In short, after some more examination, and a great deal more

conversation, a neighbouring magistrate was readily induced to

take the joint bail of Mrs. Maylie and Mr. Losberne for Oliver's

appearance if he should ever be called upon; and Blathers and

Duff, being rewarded with a couple of guineas, returned to town

with divided opinions on the subject of their expedition: the

latter gentleman on a mature consideration of all the

circumstances, inclining to the belief that the burglarious

attempt had originated with the Family Pet; and the former being

equally disposed to concede the full merit of it to the great Mr.

Conkey Chickweed.

Meanwhile, Oliver gradually throve and prospered under the united

care of Mrs. Maylie, Rose, and the kind-hearted Mr. Losberne. If

fervent prayers, gushing from hearts overcharged with gratitude,

be heard in heaven--and if they be not, what prayers are!--the

blessings which the orphan child called down upon them, sunk into

their souls, diffusing peace and happiness.

CHAPTER XXXII

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

Oliver's ailings were neither slight nor few. In addition to the

pain and delay attendant on a broken limb, his exposure to the

wet and cold had brought on fever and ague: which hung about him

for many weeks, and reduced him sadly. But, at length, he began,

by slow degrees, to get better, and to be able to say sometimes,

in a few tearful words, how deeply he felt the goodness of the

two sweet ladies, and how ardently he hoped that when he grew

strong and well again, he could do something to show his

gratitude; only something, which would let them see the love and

duty with which his breast was full; something, however slight,

which would prove to them that their gentle kindness had not been

cast away; but that the poor boy whom their charity had rescued

from misery, or death, was eager to serve them with his whole

heart and soul.

'Poor fellow!' said Rose, when Oliver had been one day feebly

endeavouring to utter the words of thankfulness that rose to his

pale lips; 'you shall have many opportunities of serving us, if

you will. We are going into the country, and my aunt intends

that you shall accompany us. The quiet place, the pure air, and

all the pleasure and beauties of spring, will restore you in a

few days. We will employ you in a hundred ways, when you can

bear the trouble.'

'The trouble!' cried Oliver. 'Oh! dear lady, if I could but work

for you; if I could only give you pleasure by watering your

flowers, or watching your birds, or running up and down the whole

day long, to make you happy; what would I give to do it!'

'You shall give nothing at all,' said Miss Maylie, smiling; 'for,

as I told you before, we shall employ you in a hundred ways; and

if you only take half the trouble to please us, that you promise

now, you will make me very happy indeed.'

'Happy, ma'am!' cried Oliver; 'how kind of you to say so!'

'You will make me happier than I can tell you,' replied the young

lady. 'To think that my dear good aunt should have been the

means of rescuing any one from such sad misery as you have

described to us, would be an unspeakable pleasure to me; but to

know that the object of her goodness and compassion was sincerely

grateful and attached, in consequence, would delight me, more

than you can well imagine. Do you understand me?' she inquired,

watching Oliver's thoughtful face.

'Oh yes, ma'am, yes!' replied Oliver eagerly; 'but I was thinking

that I am ungrateful now.'

'To whom?' inquired the young lady.

'To the kind gentleman, and the dear old nurse, who took so much

care of me before,' rejoined Oliver. 'If they knew how happy I

am, they would be pleased, I am sure.'

'I am sure they would,' rejoined Oliver's benefactress; 'and Mr.

Losberne has already been kind enough to promise that when you

are well enough to bear the journey, he will carry you to see

them.'

'Has he, ma'am?' cried Oliver, his face brightening with

pleasure. 'I don't know what I shall do for joy when I see their

kind faces once again!'

In a short time Oliver was sufficiently recovered to undergo the

fatigue of this expedition. One morning he and Mr. Losberne set

out, accordingly, in a little carriage which belonged to Mrs.

Maylie. When they came to Chertsey Bridge, Oliver turned very

pale, and uttered a loud exclamation.

'What's the matter with the boy?' cried the doctor, as usual, all

in a bustle. 'Do you see anything--hear anything--feel

anything--eh?'

'That, sir,' cried Oliver, pointing out of the carriage window.

'That house!'

'Yes; well, what of it? Stop coachman. Pull up here,' cried the

doctor. 'What of the house, my man; eh?'

'The thieves--the house they took me to!' whispered Oliver.

'The devil it is!' cried the doctor. 'Hallo, there! let me out!'

But, before the coachman could dismount from his box, he had

tumbled out of the coach, by some means or other; and, running

down to the deserted tenement, began kicking at the door like a

madman.

'Halloa?' said a little ugly hump-backed man: opening the door

so suddenly, that the doctor, from the very impetus of his last

kick, nearly fell forward into the passage. 'What's the matter

here?'

'Matter!' exclaimed the other, collaring him, without a moment's

reflection. 'A good deal. Robbery is the matter.'

'There'll be Murder the matter, too,' replied the hump-backed

man, coolly, 'if you don't take your hands off. Do you hear me?'

'I hear you,' said the doctor, giving his captive a hearty shake.

'Where's--confound the fellow, what's his rascally name--Sikes;

that's it. Where's Sikes, you thief?'

The hump-backed man stared, as if in excess of amazement and

indignation; then, twisting himself, dexterously, from the

doctor's grasp, growled forth a volley of horrid oaths, and

retired into the house. Before he could shut the door, however,

the doctor had passed into the parlour, without a word of parley.

He looked anxiously round; not an article of furniture; not a

vestige of anything, animate or inanimate; not even the position

of the cupboards; answered Oliver's description!

'Now!' said the hump-backed man, who had watched him keenly,

'what do you mean by coming into my house, in this violent way?

Do you want to rob me, or to murder me? Which is it?'

'Did you ever know a man come out to do either, in a chariot and

pair, you ridiculous old vampire?' said the irritable doctor.

'What do you want, then?' demanded the hunchback. 'Will you take

yourself off, before I do you a mischief? Curse you!'

'As soon as I think proper,' said Mr. Losberne, looking into the

other parlour; which, like the first, bore no resemblance

whatever to Oliver's account of it. 'I shall find you out, some

day, my friend.'

'Will you?' sneered the ill-favoured cripple. 'If you ever want

me, I'm here. I haven't lived here mad and all alone, for

five-and-twenty years, to be scared by you. You shall pay for

this; you shall pay for this.' And so saying, the mis-shapen

little demon set up a yell, and danced upon the ground, as if

wild with rage.

'Stupid enough, this,' muttered the doctor to himself; 'the boy

must have made a mistake. Here! Put that in your pocket, and

shut yourself up again.' With these words he flung the hunchback

a piece of money, and returned to the carriage.

The man followed to the chariot door, uttering the wildest

imprecations and curses all the way; but as Mr. Losberne turned

to speak to the driver, he looked into the carriage, and eyed

Oliver for an instant with a glance so sharp and fierce and at

the same time so furious and vindictive, that, waking or

sleeping, he could not forget it for months afterwards. He

continued to utter the most fearful imprecations, until the

driver had resumed his seat; and when they were once more on

their way, they could see him some distance behind: beating his

feet upon the ground, and tearing his hair, in transports of real

or pretended rage.

'I am an ass!' said the doctor, after a long silence. 'Did you

know that before, Oliver?'

'No, sir.'

'Then don't forget it another time.'

'An ass,' said the doctor again, after a further silence of some

minutes. 'Even if it had been the right place, and the right

fellows had been there, what could I have done, single-handed?

And if I had had assistance, I see no good that I should have

done, except leading to my own exposure, and an unavoidable

statement of the manner in which I have hushed up this business.

That would have served me right, though. I am always involving

myself in some scrape or other, by acting on impulse. It might

have done me good.'

Now, the fact was that the excellent doctor had never acted upon

anything but impulse all through his life, and it was no bad

compliment to the nature of the impulses which governed him, that

so far from being involved in any peculiar troubles or

misfortunes, he had the warmest respect and esteem of all who

knew him. If the truth must be told, he was a little out of

temper, for a minute or two, at being disappointed in procuring

corroborative evidence of Oliver's story on the very first

occasion on which he had a chance of obtaining any. He soon came

round again, however; and finding that Oliver's replies to his

questions, were still as straightforward and consistent, and

still delivered with as much apparent sincerity and truth, as

they had ever been, he made up his mind to attach full credence

to them, from that time forth.

As Oliver knew the name of the street in which Mr. Brownlow

resided, they were enabled to drive straight thither. When the

coach turned into it, his heart beat so violently, that he could

scarcely draw his breath.

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

'That! That!' replied Oliver, pointing eagerly out of the

window. 'The white house. Oh! make haste! Pray make haste! I

feel as if I should die: it makes me tremble so.'

'Come, come!' said the good doctor, patting him on the shoulder.

'You will see them directly, and they will be overjoyed to find

you safe and well.'

'Oh! I hope so!' cried Oliver. 'They were so good to me; so

very, very good to me.'

The coach rolled on. It stopped. No; that was the wrong house;

the next door. It went on a few paces, and stopped again.

Oliver looked up at the windows, with tears of happy expectation

coursing down his face.

Alas! the white house was empty, and there was a bill in the

window. 'To Let.'

'Knock at the next door,' cried Mr. Losberne, taking Oliver's arm

in his. 'What has become of Mr. Brownlow, who used to live in

the adjoining house, do you know?'

The servant did not know; but would go and inquire. She

presently returned, and said, that Mr. Brownlow had sold off his

goods, and gone to the West Indies, six weeks before. Oliver

clasped his hands, and sank feebly backward.

'Has his housekeeper gone too?' inquired Mr. Losberne, after a

moment's pause.

'Yes, sir'; replied the servant. 'The old gentleman, the

housekeeper, and a gentleman who was a friend of Mr. Brownlow's,

all went together.'

'Then turn towards home again,' said Mr. Losberne to the driver;

'and don't stop to bait the horses, till you get out of this

confounded London!'

'The book-stall keeper, sir?' said Oliver. 'I know the way

there. See him, pray, sir! Do see him!'

'My poor boy, this is disappointment enough for one day,' said

the doctor. 'Quite enough for both of us. If we go to the

book-stall keeper's, we shall certainly find that he is dead, or

has set his house on fire, or run away. No; home again

straight!' And in obedience to the doctor's impulse, home they

went.

This bitter disappointment caused Oliver much sorrow and grief,

even in the midst of his happiness; for he had pleased himself,

many times during his illness, with thinking of all that Mr.

Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin would say to him: and what delight it

would be to tell them how many long days and nights he had passed

in reflecting on what they had done for him, and in bewailing his

cruel separation from them. The hope of eventually clearing

himself with them, too, and explaining how he had been forced

away, had buoyed him up, and sustained him, under many of his

recent trials; and now, the idea that they should have gone so

far, and carried with them the belief that he was an impostor

and a robber--a belief which might remain uncontradicted to his

dying day--was almost more than he could bear.

The circumstance occasioned no alteration, however, in the

behaviour of his benefactors. After another fortnight, when the

fine warm weather had fairly begun, and every tree and flower was

putting forth its young leaves and rich blossoms, they made

preparations for quitting the house at Chertsey, for some months.

Sending the plate, which had so excited Fagin's cupidity, to the

banker's; and leaving Giles and another servant in care of the

house, they departed to a cottage at some distance in the

country, and took Oliver with them.

Who can describe the pleasure and delight, the peace of mind and

soft tranquillity, the sickly boy felt in the balmy air, and

among the green hills and rich woods, of an inland village! Who

can tell how scenes of peace and quietude sink into the minds of

pain-worn dwellers in close and noisy places, and carry their own

freshness, deep into their jaded hearts! Men who have lived in

crowded, pent-up streets, through lives of toil, and who have

never wished for change; men, to whom custom has indeed been

second nature, and who have come almost to love each brick and

stone that formed the narrow boundaries of their daily walks;

even they, with the hand of death upon them, have been known to

yearn at last for one short glimpse of Nature's face; and,

carried far from the scenes of their old pains and pleasures,

have seemed to pass at once into a new state of being. Crawling

forth, from day to day, to some green sunny spot, they have had

such memories wakened up within them by the sight of the sky, and

hill and plain, and glistening water, that a foretaste of heaven

itself has soothed their quick decline, and they have sunk into

their tombs, as peacefully as the sun whose setting they watched

from their lonely chamber window but a few hours before, faded

from their dim and feeble sight! The memories which peaceful

country scenes call up, are not of this world, nor of its

thoughts and hopes. Their gentle influence may teach us how to

weave fresh garlands for the graves of those we loved: may

purify our thoughts, and bear down before it old enmity and

hatred; but beneath all this, there lingers, in the least

reflective mind, a vague and half-formed consciousness of having

held such feelings long before, in some remote and distant time,

which calls up solemn thoughts of distant times to come, and

bends down pride and worldliness beneath it.

It was a lovely spot to which they repaired. Oliver, whose days

had been spent among squalid crowds, and in the midst of noise

and brawling, seemed to enter on a new existence there. The rose

and honeysuckle clung to the cottage walls; the ivy crept round

the trunks of the trees; and the garden-flowers perfumed the air

with delicious odours. Hard by, was a little churchyard; not

crowded with tall unsightly gravestones, but full of humble

mounds, covered with fresh turf and moss: beneath which, the old

people of the village lay at rest. Oliver often wandered here;

and, thinking of the wretched grave in which his mother lay,

would sometimes sit him down and sob unseen; but, when he raised

his eyes to the deep sky overhead, he would cease to think of her

as lying in the ground, and would weep for her, sadly, but

without pain.

It was a happy time. The days were peaceful and serene; the

nights brought with them neither fear nor care; no languishing in

a wretched prison, or associating with wretched men; nothing but

pleasant and happy thoughts. Every morning he went to a

white-headed old gentleman, who lived near the little church:

who taught him to read better, and to write: and who spoke so

kindly, and took such pains, that Oliver could never try enough

to please him. Then, he would walk with Mrs. Maylie and Rose,

and hear them talk of books; or perhaps sit near them, in some

shady place, and listen whilst the young lady read: which he

could have done, until it grew too dark to see the letters.

Then, he had his own lesson for the next day to prepare; and at

this, he would work hard, in a little room which looked into the

garden, till evening came slowly on, when the ladies would walk

out again, and he with them: listening with such pleasure to all

they said: and so happy if they wanted a flower that he could

climb to reach, or had forgotten anything he could run to fetch:

that he could never be quick enough about it. When it became

quite dark, and they returned home, the young lady would sit down

to the piano, and play some pleasant air, or sing, in a low and

gentle voice, some old song which it pleased her aunt to hear.

There would be no candles lighted at such times as these; and

Oliver would sit by one of the windows, listening to the sweet

music, in a perfect rapture.

And when Sunday came, how differently the day was spent, from any

way in which he had ever spent it yet! and how happily too; like

all the other days in that most happy time! There was the little

church, in the morning, with the green leaves fluttering at the

windows: the birds singing without: and the sweet-smelling air

stealing in at the low porch, and filling the homely building

with its fragrance. The poor people were so neat and clean, and

knelt so reverently in prayer, that it seemed a pleasure, not a

tedious duty, their assembling there together; and though the

singing might be rude, it was real, and sounded more musical (to

Oliver's ears at least) than any he had ever heard in church

before. Then, there were the walks as usual, and many calls at

the clean houses of the labouring men; and at night, Oliver read

a chapter or two from the Bible, which he had been studying all

the week, and in the performance of which duty he felt more proud

and pleased, than if he had been the clergyman himself.

In the morning, Oliver would be a-foot by six o'clock, roaming

the fields, and plundering the hedges, far and wide, for nosegays

of wild flowers, with which he would return laden, home; and

which it took great care and consideration to arrange, to the

best advantage, for the embellishment of the breakfast-table.

There was fresh groundsel, too, for Miss Maylie's birds, with

which Oliver, who had been studying the subject under the able

tuition of the village clerk, would decorate the cages, in the

most approved taste. When the birds were made all spruce and

smart for the day, there was usually some little commission of

charity to execute in the village; or, failing that, there was

rare cricket-playing, sometimes, on the green; or, failing that,

there was always something to do in the garden, or about the

plants, to which Oliver (who had studied this science also, under

the same master, who was a gardener by trade,) applied himself

with hearty good-will, until Miss Rose made her appearance: when

there were a thousand commendations to be bestowed on all he had

done.

So three months glided away; three months which, in the life of

the most blessed and favoured of mortals, might have been

unmingled happiness, and which, in Oliver's were true felicity.

With the purest and most amiable generosity on one side; and the

truest, warmest, soul-felt gratitude on the other; it is no

wonder that, by the end of that short time, Oliver Twist had

become completely domesticated with the old lady and her niece,

and that the fervent attachment of his young and sensitive heart,

was repaid by their pride in, and attachment to, himself.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHEREIN THE HAPPINESS OF OLIVER AND HIS FRIENDS, EXPERIENCES A

SUDDEN CHECK

Spring flew swiftly by, and summer came. If the village had been

beautiful at first it was now in the full glow and luxuriance of

its richness. The great trees, which had looked shrunken and

bare in the earlier months, had now burst into strong life and

health; and stretching forth their green arms over the thirsty

ground, converted open and naked spots into choice nooks, where

was a deep and pleasant shade from which to look upon the wide

prospect, steeped in sunshine, which lay stretched beyond. The

earth had donned her mantle of brightest green; and shed her

richest perfumes abroad. It was the prime and vigour of the

year; all things were glad and flourishing.

Still, the same quiet life went on at the little cottage, and the

same cheerful serenity prevailed among its inmates. Oliver had

long since grown stout and healthy; but health or sickness made

no difference in his warm feelings of a great many people. He

was still the same gentle, attached, affectionate creature that

he had been when pain and suffering had wasted his strength, and

when he was dependent for every slight attention, and comfort on

those who tended him.

One beautiful night, when they had taken a longer walk than was

customary with them: for the day had been unusually warm, and

there was a brilliant moon, and a light wind had sprung up, which

was unusually refreshing. Rose had been in high spirits, too,

and they had walked on, in merry conversation, until they had far

exceeded their ordinary bounds. Mrs. Maylie being fatigued, they

returned more slowly home. The young lady merely throwing off

her simple bonnet, sat down to the piano as usual. After running

abstractedly over the keys for a few minutes, she fell into a low

and very solemn air; and as she played it, they heard a sound as

if she were weeping.

'Rose, my dear!' said the elder lady.

Rose made no reply, but played a little quicker, as though the

words had roused her from some painful thoughts.

'Rose, my love!' cried Mrs. Maylie, rising hastily, and bending

over her. 'What is this? In tears! My dear child, what

distresses you?'

'Nothing, aunt; nothing,' replied the young lady. 'I don't know

what it is; I can't describe it; but I feel--'

'Not ill, my love?' interposed Mrs. Maylie.

'No, no! Oh, not ill!' replied Rose: shuddering as though some

deadly chillness were passing over her, while she spoke; 'I shall

be better presently. Close the window, pray!'

Oliver hastened to comply with her request. The young lady,

making an effort to recover her cheerfulness, strove to play some

livelier tune; but her fingers dropped powerless over the keys.

Covering her face with her hands, she sank upon a sofa, and gave

vent to the tears which she was now unable to repress.

'My child!' said the elderly lady, folding her arms about her, 'I

never saw you so before.'

'I would not alarm you if I could avoid it,' rejoined Rose; 'but

indeed I have tried very hard, and cannot help this. I fear I \_am\_

ill, aunt.'

She was, indeed; for, when candles were brought, they saw that in

the very short time which had elapsed since their return home,

the hue of her countenance had changed to a marble whiteness.

Its expression had lost nothing of its beauty; but it was

changed; and there was an anxious haggard look about the gentle

face, which it had never worn before. Another minute, and it was

suffused with a crimson flush: and a heavy wildness came over

the soft blue eye. Again this disappeared, like the shadow

thrown by a passing cloud; and she was once more deadly pale.

Oliver, who watched the old lady anxiously, observed that she was

alarmed by these appearances; and so in truth, was he; but seeing

that she affected to make light of them, he endeavoured to do the

same, and they so far succeeded, that when Rose was persuaded by

her aunt to retire for the night, she was in better spirits; and

appeared even in better health: assuring them that she felt

certain she should rise in the morning, quite well.

'I hope,' said Oliver, when Mrs. Maylie returned, 'that nothing

is the matter? She don't look well to-night, but--'

The old lady motioned to him not to speak; and sitting herself

down in a dark corner of the room, remained silent for some time.

At length, she said, in a trembling voice:

'I hope not, Oliver. I have been very happy with her for some

years: too happy, perhaps. It may be time that I should meet

with some misfortune; but I hope it is not this.'

'What?' inquired Oliver.

'The heavy blow,' said the old lady, 'of losing the dear girl who

has so long been my comfort and happiness.'

'Oh! God forbid!' exclaimed Oliver, hastily.

'Amen to that, my child!' said the old lady, wringing her hands.

'Surely there is no danger of anything so dreadful?' said Oliver.

'Two hours ago, she was quite well.'

'She is very ill now,' rejoined Mrs. Maylies; 'and will be worse,

I am sure. My dear, dear Rose! Oh, what shall I do without

her!'

She gave way to such great grief, that Oliver, suppressing his

own emotion, ventured to remonstrate with her; and to beg,

earnestly, that, for the sake of the dear young lady herself, she

would be more calm.

'And consider, ma'am,' said Oliver, as the tears forced

themselves into his eyes, despite of his efforts to the contrary.

'Oh! consider how young and good she is, and what pleasure and

comfort she gives to all about her. I am sure--certain--quite

certain--that, for your sake, who are so good yourself; and for

her own; and for the sake of all she makes so happy; she will not

die. Heaven will never let her die so young.'

'Hush!' said Mrs. Maylie, laying her hand on Oliver's head. 'You

think like a child, poor boy. But you teach me my duty,

notwithstanding. I had forgotten it for a moment, Oliver, but I

hope I may be pardoned, for I am old, and have seen enough of

illness and death to know the agony of separation from the

objects of our love. I have seen enough, too, to know that it is

not always the youngest and best who are spared to those that

love them; but this should give us comfort in our sorrow; for

Heaven is just; and such things teach us, impressively, that

there is a brighter world than this; and that the passage to it

is speedy. God's will be done! I love her; and He knows how

well!'

Oliver was surprised to see that as Mrs. Maylie said these words,

she checked her lamentations as though by one effort; and drawing

herself up as she spoke, became composed and firm. He was still

more astonished to find that this firmness lasted; and that,

under all the care and watching which ensued, Mrs. Maylie was

every ready and collected: performing all the duties which had

devolved upon her, steadily, and, to all external appearances,

even cheerfully. But he was young, and did not know what strong

minds are capable of, under trying circumstances. How should he,

when their possessors so seldom know themselves?

An anxious night ensued. When morning came, Mrs. Maylie's

predictions were but too well verified. Rose was in the first

stage of a high and dangerous fever.

'We must be active, Oliver, and not give way to useless grief,'

said Mrs. Maylie, laying her finger on her lip, as she looked

steadily into his face; 'this letter must be sent, with all

possible expedition, to Mr. Losberne. It must be carried to the

market-town: which is not more than four miles off, by the

footpath across the field: and thence dispatched, by an express

on horseback, straight to Chertsey. The people at the inn will

undertake to do this: and I can trust to you to see it done, I

know.'

Oliver could make no reply, but looked his anxiety to be gone at

once.

'Here is another letter,' said Mrs. Maylie, pausing to reflect;

'but whether to send it now, or wait until I see how Rose goes

on, I scarcely know. I would not forward it, unless I feared the

worst.'

'Is it for Chertsey, too, ma'am?' inquired Oliver; impatient to

execute his commission, and holding out his trembling hand for

the letter.

'No,' replied the old lady, giving it to him mechanically.

Oliver glanced at it, and saw that it was directed to Harry

Maylie, Esquire, at some great lord's house in the country;

where, he could not make out.

'Shall it go, ma'am?' asked Oliver, looking up, impatiently.

'I think not,' replied Mrs. Maylie, taking it back. 'I will wait

until to-morrow.'

With these words, she gave Oliver her purse, and he started off,

without more delay, at the greatest speed he could muster.

Swiftly he ran across the fields, and down the little lanes which

sometimes divided them: now almost hidden by the high corn on

either side, and now emerging on an open field, where the mowers

and haymakers were busy at their work: nor did he stop once,

save now and then, for a few seconds, to recover breath, until he

came, in a great heat, and covered with dust, on the little

market-place of the market-town.

Here he paused, and looked about for the inn. There were a white

bank, and a red brewery, and a yellow town-hall; and in one

corner there was a large house, with all the wood about it

painted green: before which was the sign of 'The George.' To

this he hastened, as soon as it caught his eye.

He spoke to a postboy who was dozing under the gateway; and who,

after hearing what he wanted, referred him to the ostler; who

after hearing all he had to say again, referred him to the

landlord; who was a tall gentleman in a blue neckcloth, a white

hat, drab breeches, and boots with tops to match, leaning against

a pump by the stable-door, picking his teeth with a silver

toothpick.

This gentleman walked with much deliberation into the bar to make

out the bill: which took a long time making out: and after it

was ready, and paid, a horse had to be saddled, and a man to be

dressed, which took up ten good minutes more. Meanwhile Oliver

was in such a desperate state of impatience and anxiety, that he

felt as if he could have jumped upon the horse himself, and

galloped away, full tear, to the next stage. At length, all was

ready; and the little parcel having been handed up, with many

injunctions and entreaties for its speedy delivery, the man set

spurs to his horse, and rattling over the uneven paving of the

market-place, was out of the town, and galloping along the

turnpike-road, in a couple of minutes.

As it was something to feel certain that assistance was sent for,

and that no time had been lost, Oliver hurried up the inn-yard,

with a somewhat lighter heart. He was turning out of the gateway

when he accidently stumbled against a tall man wrapped in a

cloak, who was at that moment coming out of the inn door.

'Hah!' cried the man, fixing his eyes on Oliver, and suddenly

recoiling. 'What the devil's this?'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Oliver; 'I was in a great hurry to

get home, and didn't see you were coming.'

'Death!' muttered the man to himself, glaring at the boy with his

large dark eyes. 'Who would have thought it! Grind him to ashes!

He'd start up from a stone coffin, to come in my way!'

'I am sorry,' stammered Oliver, confused by the strange man's

wild look. 'I hope I have not hurt you!'

'Rot you!' murmured the man, in a horrible passion; between his

clenched teeth; 'if I had only had the courage to say the word, I

might have been free of you in a night. Curses on your head, and

black death on your heart, you imp! What are you doing here?'

The man shook his fist, as he uttered these words incoherently.

He advanced towards Oliver, as if with the intention of aiming a

blow at him, but fell violently on the ground: writhing and

foaming, in a fit.

Oliver gazed, for a moment, at the struggles of the madman (for

such he supposed him to be); and then darted into the house for

help. Having seen him safely carried into the hotel, he turned

his face homewards, running as fast as he could, to make up for

lost time: and recalling with a great deal of astonishment and

some fear, the extraordinary behaviour of the person from whom he

had just parted.

The circumstance did not dwell in his recollection long, however:

for when he reached the cottage, there was enough to occupy his

mind, and to drive all considerations of self completely from his

memory.

Rose Maylie had rapidly grown worse; before mid-night she was

delirious. A medical practitioner, who resided on the spot, was

in constant attendance upon her; and after first seeing the

patient, he had taken Mrs. Maylie aside, and pronounced her

disorder to be one of a most alarming nature. 'In fact,' he said,

'it would be little short of a miracle, if she recovered.'

How often did Oliver start from his bed that night, and stealing

out, with noiseless footstep, to the staircase, listen for the

slightest sound from the sick chamber! How often did a tremble

shake his frame, and cold drops of terror start upon his brow,

when a sudden trampling of feet caused him to fear that something

too dreadful to think of, had even then occurred! And what had

been the fervency of all the prayers he had ever muttered,

compared with those he poured forth, now, in the agony and

passion of his supplication for the life and health of the gentle

creature, who was tottering on the deep grave's verge!

Oh! the suspense, the fearful, acute suspense, of standing idly

by while the life of one we dearly love, is trembling in the

balance! Oh! the racking thoughts that crowd upon the mind, and

make the heart beat violently, and the breath come thick, by the

force of the images they conjure up before it; the desparate

anxiety \_to be doing something\_ to relieve the pain, or lessen the

danger, which we have no power to alleviate; the sinking of soul

and spirit, which the sad remembrance of our helplessness

produces; what tortures can equal these; what reflections or

endeavours can, in the full tide and fever of the time, allay

them!

Morning came; and the little cottage was lonely and still. People

spoke in whispers; anxious faces appeared at the gate, from time

to time; women and children went away in tears. All the livelong

day, and for hours after it had grown dark, Oliver paced softly

up and down the garden, raising his eyes every instant to the

sick chamber, and shuddering to see the darkened window, looking

as if death lay stretched inside. Late that night, Mr. Losberne

arrived. 'It is hard,' said the good doctor, turning away as he

spoke; 'so young; so much beloved; but there is very little

hope.'

Another morning. The sun shone brightly; as brightly as if it

looked upon no misery or care; and, with every leaf and flower in

full bloom about her; with life, and health, and sounds and

sights of joy, surrounding her on every side: the fair young

creature lay, wasting fast. Oliver crept away to the old

churchyard, and sitting down on one of the green mounds, wept and

prayed for her, in silence.

There was such peace and beauty in the scene; so much of

brightness and mirth in the sunny landscape; such blithesome

music in the songs of the summer birds; such freedom in the rapid

flight of the rook, careering overhead; so much of life and

joyousness in all; that, when the boy raised his aching eyes, and

looked about, the thought instinctively occurred to him, that

this was not a time for death; that Rose could surely never die

when humbler things were all so glad and gay; that graves were

for cold and cheerless winter: not for sunlight and fragrance.

He almost thought that shrouds were for the old and shrunken; and

that they never wrapped the young and graceful form in their

ghastly folds.

A knell from the church bell broke harshly on these youthful

thoughts. Another! Again! It was tolling for the funeral

service. A group of humble mourners entered the gate: wearing

white favours; for the corpse was young. They stood uncovered by

a grave; and there was a mother--a mother once--among the weeping

train. But the sun shone brightly, and the birds sang on.

Oliver turned homeward, thinking on the many kindnesses he had

received from the young lady, and wishing that the time could

come again, that he might never cease showing her how grateful

and attached he was. He had no cause for self-reproach on the

score of neglect, or want of thought, for he had been devoted to

her service; and yet a hundred little occasions rose up before

him, on which he fancied he might have been more zealous, and

more earnest, and wished he had been. We need be careful how we

deal with those about us, when every death carries to some small

circle of survivors, thoughts of so much omitted, and so little

done--of so many things forgotten, and so many more which might

have been repaired! There is no remorse so deep as that which is

unavailing; if we would be spared its tortures, let us remember

this, in time.

When he reached home Mrs. Maylie was sitting in the little

parlour. Oliver's heart sank at sight of her; for she had never

left the bedside of her niece; and he trembled to think what

change could have driven her away. He learnt that she had fallen

into a deep sleep, from which she would waken, either to recovery

and life, or to bid them farewell, and die.

They sat, listening, and afraid to speak, for hours. The

untasted meal was removed, with looks which showed that their

thoughts were elsewhere, they watched the sun as he sank lower

and lower, and, at length, cast over sky and earth those

brilliant hues which herald his departure. Their quick ears

caught the sound of an approaching footstep. They both

involuntarily darted to the door, as Mr. Losberne entered.

'What of Rose?' cried the old lady. 'Tell me at once! I can

bear it; anything but suspense! Oh, tell me! in the name of

Heaven!'

'You must compose yourself,' said the doctor supporting her. 'Be

calm, my dear ma'am, pray.'

'Let me go, in God's name! My dear child! She is dead! She is

dying!'

'No!' cried the doctor, passionately. 'As He is good and

merciful, she will live to bless us all, for years to come.'

The lady fell upon her knees, and tried to fold her hands

together; but the energy which had supported her so long, fled up

to Heaven with her first thanksgiving; and she sank into the

friendly arms which were extended to receive her.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CONTAINS SOME INTRODUCTORY PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO A YOUNG

GENTLEMAN WHO NOW ARRIVES UPON THE SCENE; AND A NEW ADVENTURE

WHICH HAPPENED TO OLIVER

It was almost too much happiness to bear. Oliver felt stunned

and stupefied by the unexpected intelligence; he could not weep,

or speak, or rest. He had scarcely the power of understanding

anything that had passed, until, after a long ramble in the quiet

evening air, a burst of tears came to his relief, and he seemed

to awaken, all at once, to a full sense of the joyful change that

had occurred, and the almost insupportable load of anguish which

had been taken from his breast.

The night was fast closing in, when he returned homeward: laden

with flowers which he had culled, with peculiar care, for the

adornment of the sick chamber. As he walked briskly along the

road, he heard behind him, the noise of some vehicle, approaching

at a furious pace. Looking round, he saw that it was a

post-chaise, driven at great speed; and as the horses were

galloping, and the road was narrow, he stood leaning against a

gate until it should have passed him.

As it dashed on, Oliver caught a glimpse of a man in a white

nightcap, whose face seemed familiar to him, although his view was

so brief that he could not identify the person. In another

second or two, the nightcap was thrust out of the chaise-window,

and a stentorian voice bellowed to the driver to stop: which he

did, as soon as he could pull up his horses. Then, the nightcap

once again appeared: and the same voice called Oliver by his

name.

'Here!' cried the voice. 'Oliver, what's the news? Miss Rose!

Master O-li-ver!'

'Is is you, Giles?' cried Oliver, running up to the chaise-door.

Giles popped out his nightcap again, preparatory to making some

reply, when he was suddenly pulled back by a young gentleman who

occupied the other corner of the chaise, and who eagerly demanded

what was the news.

'In a word!' cried the gentleman, 'Better or worse?'

'Better--much better!' replied Oliver, hastily.

'Thank Heaven!' exclaimed the gentleman. 'You are sure?'

'Quite, sir,' replied Oliver. 'The change took place only a few

hours ago; and Mr. Losberne says, that all danger is at an end.'

The gentleman said not another word, but, opening the

chaise-door, leaped out, and taking Oliver hurriedly by the arm,

led him aside.

'You are quite certain? There is no possibility of any mistake

on your part, my boy, is there?' demanded the gentleman in a

tremulous voice. 'Do not deceive me, by awakening hopes that are

not to be fulfilled.'

'I would not for the world, sir,' replied Oliver. 'Indeed you

may believe me. Mr. Losberne's words were, that she would live

to bless us all for many years to come. I heard him say so.'

The tears stood in Oliver's eyes as he recalled the scene which

was the beginning of so much happiness; and the gentleman turned

his face away, and remained silent, for some minutes. Oliver

thought he heard him sob, more than once; but he feared to

interrupt him by any fresh remark--for he could well guess what

his feelings were--and so stood apart, feigning to be occupied

with his nosegay.

All this time, Mr. Giles, with the white nightcap on, had been

sitting on the steps of the chaise, supporting an elbow on each

knee, and wiping his eyes with a blue cotton pocket-handkerchief

dotted with white spots. That the honest fellow had not been

feigning emotion, was abundantly demonstrated by the very red

eyes with which he regarded the young gentleman, when he turned

round and addressed him.

'I think you had better go on to my mother's in the chaise,

Giles,' said he. 'I would rather walk slowly on, so as to gain a

little time before I see her. You can say I am coming.'

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Harry,' said Giles: giving a final

polish to his ruffled countenance with the handkerchief; 'but if

you would leave the postboy to say that, I should be very much

obliged to you. It wouldn't be proper for the maids to see me in

this state, sir; I should never have any more authority with them

if they did.'

'Well,' rejoined Harry Maylie, smiling, 'you can do as you like.

Let him go on with the luggage, if you wish it, and do you follow

with us. Only first exchange that nightcap for some more

appropriate covering, or we shall be taken for madmen.'

Mr. Giles, reminded of his unbecoming costume, snatched off and

pocketed his nightcap; and substituted a hat, of grave and sober

shape, which he took out of the chaise. This done, the postboy

drove off; Giles, Mr. Maylie, and Oliver, followed at their

leisure.

As they walked along, Oliver glanced from time to time with much

interest and curiosity at the new comer. He seemed about

five-and-twenty years of age, and was of the middle height; his

countenance was frank and handsome; and his demeanor easy and

prepossessing. Notwithstanding the difference between youth and

age, he bore so strong a likeness to the old lady, that Oliver

would have had no great difficulty in imagining their

relationship, if he had not already spoken of her as his mother.

Mrs. Maylie was anxiously waiting to receive her son when he

reached the cottage. The meeting did not take place without

great emotion on both sides.

'Mother!' whispered the young man; 'why did you not write

before?'

'I did,' replied Mrs. Maylie; 'but, on reflection, I determined

to keep back the letter until I had heard Mr. Losberne's

opinion.'

'But why,' said the young man, 'why run the chance of that

occurring which so nearly happened? If Rose had--I cannot utter

that word now--if this illness had terminated differently, how

could you ever have forgiven yourself! How could I ever have

know happiness again!'

'If that \_had\_ been the case, Harry,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'I fear

your happiness would have been effectually blighted, and that

your arrival here, a day sooner or a day later, would have been

of very, very little import.'

'And who can wonder if it be so, mother?' rejoined the young man;

'or why should I say, \_if\_?--It is--it is--you know it, mother--you

must know it!'

'I know that she deserves the best and purest love the heart of

man can offer,' said Mrs. Maylie; 'I know that the devotion and

affection of her nature require no ordinary return, but one that

shall be deep and lasting. If I did not feel this, and know,

besides, that a changed behaviour in one she loved would break

her heart, I should not feel my task so difficult of performance,

or have to encounter so many struggles in my own bosom, when I

take what seems to me to be the strict line of duty.'

'This is unkind, mother,' said Harry. 'Do you still suppose that

I am a boy ignorant of my own mind, and mistaking the impulses of

my own soul?'

'I think, my dear son,' returned Mrs. Maylie, laying her hand

upon his shoulder, 'that youth has many generous impulses which

do not last; and that among them are some, which, being

gratified, become only the more fleeting. Above all, I think'

said the lady, fixing her eyes on her son's face, 'that if an

enthusiastic, ardent, and ambitious man marry a wife on whose

name there is a stain, which, though it originate in no fault of

hers, may be visited by cold and sordid people upon her, and upon

his children also: and, in exact proportion to his success in the

world, be cast in his teeth, and made the subject of sneers

against him: he may, no matter how generous and good his nature,

one day repent of the connection he formed in early life. And

she may have the pain of knowing that he does so.'

'Mother,' said the young man, impatiently, 'he would be a selfish

brute, unworthy alike of the name of man and of the woman you

describe, who acted thus.'

'You think so now, Harry,' replied his mother.

'And ever will!' said the young man. 'The mental agony I have

suffered, during the last two days, wrings from me the avowal to

you of a passion which, as you well know, is not one of

yesterday, nor one I have lightly formed. On Rose, sweet, gentle

girl! my heart is set, as firmly as ever heart of man was set on

woman. I have no thought, no view, no hope in life, beyond her;

and if you oppose me in this great stake, you take my peace and

happiness in your hands, and cast them to the wind. Mother,

think better of this, and of me, and do not disregard the

happiness of which you seem to think so little.'

'Harry,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'it is because I think so much of warm

and sensitive hearts, that I would spare them from being wounded.

But we have said enough, and more than enough, on this matter,

just now.'

'Let it rest with Rose, then,' interposed Harry. 'You will not

press these overstrained opinions of yours, so far, as to throw

any obstacle in my way?'

'I will not,' rejoined Mrs. Maylie; 'but I would have you

consider--'

'I \_have\_ considered!' was the impatient reply; 'Mother, I have

considered, years and years. I have considered, ever since I

have been capable of serious reflection. My feelings remain

unchanged, as they ever will; and why should I suffer the pain of

a delay in giving them vent, which can be productive of no

earthly good? No! Before I leave this place, Rose shall hear

me.'

'She shall,' said Mrs. Maylie.

'There is something in your manner, which would almost imply that

she will hear me coldly, mother,' said the young man.

'Not coldly,' rejoined the old lady; 'far from it.'

'How then?' urged the young man. 'She has formed no other

attachment?'

'No, indeed,' replied his mother; 'you have, or I mistake, too

strong a hold on her affections already. What I would say,'

resumed the old lady, stopping her son as he was about to speak,

'is this. Before you stake your all on this chance; before you

suffer yourself to be carried to the highest point of hope;

reflect for a few moments, my dear child, on Rose's history, and

consider what effect the knowledge of her doubtful birth may have

on her decision: devoted as she is to us, with all the intensity

of her noble mind, and with that perfect sacrifice of self which,

in all matters, great or trifling, has always been her

characteristic.'

'What do you mean?'

'That I leave you to discover,' replied Mrs. Maylie. 'I must go

back to her. God bless you!'

'I shall see you again to-night?' said the young man, eagerly.

'By and by,' replied the lady; 'when I leave Rose.'

'You will tell her I am here?' said Harry.

'Of course,' replied Mrs. Maylie.

'And say how anxious I have been, and how much I have suffered,

and how I long to see her. You will not refuse to do this,

mother?'

'No,' said the old lady; 'I will tell her all.' And pressing her

son's hand, affectionately, she hastened from the room.

Mr. Losberne and Oliver had remained at another end of the

apartment while this hurried conversation was proceeding. The

former now held out his hand to Harry Maylie; and hearty

salutations were exchanged between them. The doctor then

communicated, in reply to multifarious questions from his young

friend, a precise account of his patient's situation; which was

quite as consolatory and full of promise, as Oliver's statement

had encouraged him to hope; and to the whole of which, Mr. Giles,

who affected to be busy about the luggage, listened with greedy

ears.

'Have you shot anything particular, lately, Giles?' inquired the

doctor, when he had concluded.

'Nothing particular, sir,' replied Mr. Giles, colouring up to the

eyes.

'Nor catching any thieves, nor identifying any house-breakers?'

said the doctor.

'None at all, sir,' replied Mr. Giles, with much gravity.

'Well,' said the doctor, 'I am sorry to hear it, because you do

that sort of thing admirably. Pray, how is Brittles?'

'The boy is very well, sir,' said Mr. Giles, recovering his usual

tone of patronage; 'and sends his respectful duty, sir.'

'That's well,' said the doctor. 'Seeing you here, reminds me,

Mr. Giles, that on the day before that on which I was called away

so hurriedly, I executed, at the request of your good mistress, a

small commission in your favour. Just step into this corner a

moment, will you?'

Mr. Giles walked into the corner with much importance, and some

wonder, and was honoured with a short whispering conference with

the doctor, on the termination of which, he made a great many

bows, and retired with steps of unusual stateliness. The subject

matter of this conference was not disclosed in the parlour, but

the kitchen was speedily enlightened concerning it; for Mr. Giles

walked straight thither, and having called for a mug of ale,

announced, with an air of majesty, which was highly effective,

that it had pleased his mistress, in consideration of his gallant

behaviour on the occasion of that attempted robbery, to deposit,

in the local savings-bank, the sum of five-and-twenty pounds, for

his sole use and benefit. At this, the two women-servants lifted

up their hands and eyes, and supposed that Mr. Giles, pulling out

his shirt-frill, replied, 'No, no'; and that if they observed

that he was at all haughty to his inferiors, he would thank them

to tell him so. And then he made a great many other remarks, no

less illustrative of his humility, which were received with equal

favour and applause, and were, withal, as original and as much to

the purpose, as the remarks of great men commonly are.

Above stairs, the remainder of the evening passed cheerfully

away; for the doctor was in high spirits; and however fatigued or

thoughtful Harry Maylie might have been at first, he was not

proof against the worthy gentleman's good humour, which displayed

itself in a great variety of sallies and professional

recollections, and an abundance of small jokes, which struck

Oliver as being the drollest things he had ever heard, and caused

him to laugh proportionately; to the evident satisfaction of the

doctor, who laughed immoderately at himself, and made Harry laugh

almost as heartily, by the very force of sympathy. So, they were

as pleasant a party as, under the circumstances, they could well

have been; and it was late before they retired, with light and

thankful hearts, to take that rest of which, after the doubt and

suspense they had recently undergone, they stood much in need.

Oliver rose next morning, in better heart, and went about his

usual occupations, with more hope and pleasure than he had known

for many days. The birds were once more hung out, to sing, in

their old places; and the sweetest wild flowers that could be

found, were once more gathered to gladden Rose with their beauty.

The melancholy which had seemed to the sad eyes of the anxious

boy to hang, for days past, over every object, beautiful as all

were, was dispelled by magic. The dew seemed to sparkle more

brightly on the green leaves; the air to rustle among them with a

sweeter music; and the sky itself to look more blue and bright.

Such is the influence which the condition of our own thoughts,

exercise, even over the appearance of external objects. Men who

look on nature, and their fellow-men, and cry that all is dark

and gloomy, are in the right; but the sombre colours are

reflections from their own jaundiced eyes and hearts. The real

hues are delicate, and need a clearer vision.

It is worthy of remark, and Oliver did not fail to note it at the

time, that his morning expeditions were no longer made alone.

Harry Maylie, after the very first morning when he met Oliver

coming laden home, was seized with such a passion for flowers,

and displayed such a taste in their arrangement, as left his

young companion far behind. If Oliver were behindhand in these

respects, he knew where the best were to be found; and morning

after morning they scoured the country together, and brought home

the fairest that blossomed. The window of the young lady's

chamber was opened now; for she loved to feel the rich summer air

stream in, and revive her with its freshness; but there always

stood in water, just inside the lattice, one particular little

bunch, which was made up with great care, every morning. Oliver

could not help noticing that the withered flowers were never

thrown away, although the little vase was regularly replenished;

nor, could he help observing, that whenever the doctor came into

the garden, he invariably cast his eyes up to that particular

corner, and nodded his head most expressively, as he set forth on

his morning's walk. Pending these observations, the days were

flying by; and Rose was rapidly recovering.

Nor did Oliver's time hang heavy on his hands, although the young

lady had not yet left her chamber, and there were no evening

walks, save now and then, for a short distance, with Mrs. Maylie.

He applied himself, with redoubled assiduity, to the instructions

of the white-headed old gentleman, and laboured so hard that his

quick progress surprised even himself. It was while he was

engaged in this pursuit, that he was greatly startled and

distressed by a most unexpected occurrence.

The little room in which he was accustomed to sit, when busy at

his books, was on the ground-floor, at the back of the house. It

was quite a cottage-room, with a lattice-window: around which

were clusters of jessamine and honeysuckle, that crept over the

casement, and filled the place with their delicious perfume. It

looked into a garden, whence a wicket-gate opened into a small

paddock; all beyond, was fine meadow-land and wood. There was no

other dwelling near, in that direction; and the prospect it

commanded was very extensive.

One beautiful evening, when the first shades of twilight were

beginning to settle upon the earth, Oliver sat at this window,

intent upon his books. He had been poring over them for some

time; and, as the day had been uncommonly sultry, and he had

exerted himself a great deal, it is no disparagement to the

authors, whoever they may have been, to say, that gradually and

by slow degrees, he fell asleep.

There is a kind of sleep that steals upon us sometimes, which,

while it holds the body prisoner, does not free the mind from a

sense of things about it, and enable it to ramble at its

pleasure. So far as an overpowering heaviness, a prostration of

strength, and an utter inability to control our thoughts or power

of motion, can be called sleep, this is it; and yet, we have a

consciousness of all that is going on about us, and, if we dream

at such a time, words which are really spoken, or sounds which

really exist at the moment, accommodate themselves with

surprising readiness to our visions, until reality and

imagination become so strangely blended that it is afterwards

almost matter of impossibility to separate the two. Nor is this,

the most striking phenomenon incidental to such a state. It is

an undoubted fact, that although our senses of touch and sight be

for the time dead, yet our sleeping thoughts, and the visionary

scenes that pass before us, will be influenced and materially

influenced, by the \_mere silent presence\_ of some external object;

which may not have been near us when we closed our eyes: and of

whose vicinity we have had no waking consciousness.

Oliver knew, perfectly well, that he was in his own little room;

that his books were lying on the table before him; that the sweet

air was stirring among the creeping plants outside. And yet he

was asleep. Suddenly, the scene changed; the air became close

and confined; and he thought, with a glow of terror, that he was

in the Jew's house again. There sat the hideous old man, in his

accustomed corner, pointing at him, and whispering to another

man, with his face averted, who sat beside him.

'Hush, my dear!' he thought he heard the Jew say; 'it is he, sure

enough. Come away.'

'He!' the other man seemed to answer; 'could I mistake him, think

you? If a crowd of ghosts were to put themselves into his exact

shape, and he stood amongst them, there is something that would

tell me how to point him out. If you buried him fifty feet deep,

and took me across his grave, I fancy I should know, if there

wasn't a mark above it, that he lay buried there?'

The man seemed to say this, with such dreadful hatred, that

Oliver awoke with the fear, and started up.

Good Heaven! what was that, which sent the blood tingling to his

heart, and deprived him of his voice, and of power to move!

There--there--at the window--close before him--so close, that he

could have almost touched him before he started back: with his

eyes peering into the room, and meeting his: there stood the

Jew! And beside him, white with rage or fear, or both, were the

scowling features of the man who had accosted him in the

inn-yard.

It was but an instant, a glance, a flash, before his eyes; and

they were gone. But they had recognised him, and he them; and

their look was as firmly impressed upon his memory, as if it had

been deeply carved in stone, and set before him from his birth.

He stood transfixed for a moment; then, leaping from the window

into the garden, called loudly for help.

CHAPTER XXXV

CONTAINING THE UNSATISFACTORY RESULT OF OLIVER'S ADVENTURE; AND A

CONVERSATION OF SOME IMPORTANCE BETWEEN HARRY MAYLIE AND ROSE

When the inmates of the house, attracted by Oliver's cries,

hurried to the spot from which they proceeded, they found him,

pale and agitated, pointing in the direction of the meadows

behind the house, and scarcely able to articulate the words, 'The

Jew! the Jew!'

Mr. Giles was at a loss to comprehend what this outcry meant; but

Harry Maylie, whose perceptions were something quicker, and who

had heard Oliver's history from his mother, understood it at

once.

'What direction did he take?' he asked, catching up a heavy stick

which was standing in a corner.

'That,' replied Oliver, pointing out the course the man had

taken; 'I missed them in an instant.'

'Then, they are in the ditch!' said Harry. 'Follow! And keep as

near me, as you can.' So saying, he sprang over the hedge, and

darted off with a speed which rendered it matter of exceeding

difficulty for the others to keep near him.

Giles followed as well as he could; and Oliver followed too; and

in the course of a minute or two, Mr. Losberne, who had been out

walking, and just then returned, tumbled over the hedge after

them, and picking himself up with more agility than he could have

been supposed to possess, struck into the same course at no

contemptible speed, shouting all the while, most prodigiously, to

know what was the matter.

On they all went; nor stopped they once to breathe, until the

leader, striking off into an angle of the field indicated by

Oliver, began to search, narrowly, the ditch and hedge adjoining;

which afforded time for the remainder of the party to come up;

and for Oliver to communicate to Mr. Losberne the circumstances

that had led to so vigorous a pursuit.

The search was all in vain. There were not even the traces of

recent footsteps, to be seen. They stood now, on the summit of a

little hill, commanding the open fields in every direction for

three or four miles. There was the village in the hollow on the

left; but, in order to gain that, after pursuing the track Oliver

had pointed out, the men must have made a circuit of open ground,

which it was impossible they could have accomplished in so short

a time. A thick wood skirted the meadow-land in another

direction; but they could not have gained that covert for the

same reason.

'It must have been a dream, Oliver,' said Harry Maylie.

'Oh no, indeed, sir,' replied Oliver, shuddering at the very

recollection of the old wretch's countenance; 'I saw him too

plainly for that. I saw them both, as plainly as I see you now.'

'Who was the other?' inquired Harry and Mr. Losberne, together.

'The very same man I told you of, who came so suddenly upon me at

the inn,' said Oliver. 'We had our eyes fixed full upon each

other; and I could swear to him.'

'They took this way?' demanded Harry: 'are you sure?'

'As I am that the men were at the window,' replied Oliver,

pointing down, as he spoke, to the hedge which divided the

cottage-garden from the meadow. 'The tall man leaped over, just

there; and the Jew, running a few paces to the right, crept

through that gap.'

The two gentlemen watched Oliver's earnest face, as he spoke, and

looking from him to each other, seemed to feel satisfied of the

accuracy of what he said. Still, in no direction were there any

appearances of the trampling of men in hurried flight. The grass

was long; but it was trodden down nowhere, save where their own

feet had crushed it. The sides and brinks of the ditches were of

damp clay; but in no one place could they discern the print of

men's shoes, or the slightest mark which would indicate that any

feet had pressed the ground for hours before.

'This is strange!' said Harry.

'Strange?' echoed the doctor. 'Blathers and Duff, themselves,

could make nothing of it.'

Notwithstanding the evidently useless nature of their search,

they did not desist until the coming on of night rendered its

further prosecution hopeless; and even then, they gave it up with

reluctance. Giles was dispatched to the different ale-houses in

the village, furnished with the best description Oliver could

give of the appearance and dress of the strangers. Of these, the

Jew was, at all events, sufficiently remarkable to be remembered,

supposing he had been seen drinking, or loitering about; but

Giles returned without any intelligence, calculated to dispel or

lessen the mystery.

On the next day, fresh search was made, and the inquiries

renewed; but with no better success. On the day following,

Oliver and Mr. Maylie repaired to the market-town, in the hope of

seeing or hearing something of the men there; but this effort was

equally fruitless. After a few days, the affair began to be

forgotten, as most affairs are, when wonder, having no fresh food

to support it, dies away of itself.

Meanwhile, Rose was rapidly recovering. She had left her room:

was able to go out; and mixing once more with the family, carried

joy into the hearts of all.

But, although this happy change had a visible effect on the

little circle; and although cheerful voices and merry laughter

were once more heard in the cottage; there was at times, an

unwonted restraint upon some there: even upon Rose herself:

which Oliver could not fail to remark. Mrs. Maylie and her son

were often closeted together for a long time; and more than once

Rose appeared with traces of tears upon her face. After Mr.

Losberne had fixed a day for his departure to Chertsey, these

symptoms increased; and it became evident that something was in

progress which affected the peace of the young lady, and of

somebody else besides.

At length, one morning, when Rose was alone in the

breakfast-parlour, Harry Maylie entered; and, with some

hesitation, begged permission to speak with her for a few

moments.

'A few--a very few--will suffice, Rose,' said the young man,

drawing his chair towards her. 'What I shall have to say, has

already presented itself to your mind; the most cherished hopes

of my heart are not unknown to you, though from my lips you have

not heard them stated.'

Rose had been very pale from the moment of his entrance; but that

might have been the effect of her recent illness. She merely

bowed; and bending over some plants that stood near, waited in

silence for him to proceed.

'I--I--ought to have left here, before,' said Harry.

'You should, indeed,' replied Rose. 'Forgive me for saying so,

but I wish you had.'

'I was brought here, by the most dreadful and agonising of all

apprehensions,' said the young man; 'the fear of losing the one

dear being on whom my every wish and hope are fixed. You had

been dying; trembling between earth and heaven. We know that

when the young, the beautiful, and good, are visited with

sickness, their pure spirits insensibly turn towards their bright

home of lasting rest; we know, Heaven help us! that the best and

fairest of our kind, too often fade in blooming.'

There were tears in the eyes of the gentle girl, as these words

were spoken; and when one fell upon the flower over which she

bent, and glistened brightly in its cup, making it more

beautiful, it seemed as though the outpouring of her fresh young

heart, claimed kindred naturally, with the loveliest things in

nature.

'A creature,' continued the young man, passionately, 'a creature

as fair and innocent of guile as one of God's own angels,

fluttered between life and death. Oh! who could hope, when the

distant world to which she was akin, half opened to her view,

that she would return to the sorrow and calamity of this! Rose,

Rose, to know that you were passing away like some soft shadow,

which a light from above, casts upon the earth; to have no hope

that you would be spared to those who linger here; hardly to know

a reason why you should be; to feel that you belonged to that

bright sphere whither so many of the fairest and the best have

winged their early flight; and yet to pray, amid all these

consolations, that you might be restored to those who loved

you--these were distractions almost too great to bear. They were

mine, by day and night; and with them, came such a rushing

torrent of fears, and apprehensions, and selfish regrets, lest

you should die, and never know how devotedly I loved you, as

almost bore down sense and reason in its course. You recovered.

Day by day, and almost hour by hour, some drop of health came

back, and mingling with the spent and feeble stream of life which

circulated languidly within you, swelled it again to a high and

rushing tide. I have watched you change almost from death, to

life, with eyes that turned blind with their eagerness and deep

affection. Do not tell me that you wish I had lost this; for it

has softened my heart to all mankind.'

'I did not mean that,' said Rose, weeping; 'I only wish you had

left here, that you might have turned to high and noble pursuits

again; to pursuits well worthy of you.'

'There is no pursuit more worthy of me: more worthy of the

highest nature that exists: than the struggle to win such a

heart as yours,' said the young man, taking her hand. 'Rose, my

own dear Rose! For years--for years--I have loved you; hoping to

win my way to fame, and then come proudly home and tell you it

had been pursued only for you to share; thinking, in my

daydreams, how I would remind you, in that happy moment, of the

many silent tokens I had given of a boy's attachment, and claim

your hand, as in redemption of some old mute contract that had

been sealed between us! That time has not arrived; but here,

with not fame won, and no young vision realised, I offer you the

heart so long your own, and stake my all upon the words with

which you greet the offer.'

'Your behaviour has ever been kind and noble.' said Rose,

mastering the emotions by which she was agitated. 'As you

believe that I am not insensible or ungrateful, so hear my

answer.'

'It is, that I may endeavour to deserve you; it is, dear Rose?'

'It is,' replied Rose, 'that you must endeavour to forget me; not

as your old and dearly-attached companion, for that would wound

me deeply; but, as the object of your love. Look into the world;

think how many hearts you would be proud to gain, are there.

Confide some other passion to me, if you will; I will be the

truest, warmest, and most faithful friend you have.'

There was a pause, during which, Rose, who had covered her face

with one hand, gave free vent to her tears. Harry still retained

the other.

'And your reasons, Rose,' he said, at length, in a low voice;

'your reasons for this decision?'

'You have a right to know them,' rejoined Rose. 'You can say

nothing to alter my resolution. It is a duty that I must

perform. I owe it, alike to others, and to myself.'

'To yourself?'

'Yes, Harry. I owe it to myself, that I, a friendless,

portionless, girl, with a blight upon my name, should not give

your friends reason to suspect that I had sordidly yielded to

your first passion, and fastened myself, a clog, on all your

hopes and projects. I owe it to you and yours, to prevent you

from opposing, in the warmth of your generous nature, this great

obstacle to your progress in the world.'

'If your inclinations chime with your sense of duty--' Harry

began.

'They do not,' replied Rose, colouring deeply.

'Then you return my love?' said Harry. 'Say but that, dear Rose;

say but that; and soften the bitterness of this hard

disappointment!'

'If I could have done so, without doing heavy wrong to him I

loved,' rejoined Rose, 'I could have--'

'Have received this declaration very differently?' said Harry.

'Do not conceal that from me, at least, Rose.'

'I could,' said Rose. 'Stay!' she added, disengaging her hand,

'why should we prolong this painful interview? Most painful to

me, and yet productive of lasting happiness, notwithstanding; for

it \_will\_ be happiness to know that I once held the high place in

your regard which I now occupy, and every triumph you achieve in

life will animate me with new fortitude and firmness. Farewell,

Harry! As we have met to-day, we meet no more; but in other

relations than those in which this conversation have placed us,

we may be long and happily entwined; and may every blessing that

the prayers of a true and earnest heart can call down from the

source of all truth and sincerity, cheer and prosper you!'

'Another word, Rose,' said Harry. 'Your reason in your own

words. From your own lips, let me hear it!'

'The prospect before you,' answered Rose, firmly, 'is a brilliant

one. All the honours to which great talents and powerful

connections can help men in public life, are in store for you.

But those connections are proud; and I will neither mingle with

such as may hold in scorn the mother who gave me life; nor bring

disgrace or failure on the son of her who has so well supplied

that mother's place. In a word,' said the young lady, turning

away, as her temporary firmness forsook her, 'there is a stain

upon my name, which the world visits on innocent heads. I will

carry it into no blood but my own; and the reproach shall rest

alone on me.'

'One word more, Rose. Dearest Rose! one more!' cried Harry,

throwing himself before her. 'If I had been less--less

fortunate, the world would call it--if some obscure and peaceful

life had been my destiny--if I had been poor, sick,

helpless--would you have turned from me then? Or has my probable

advancement to riches and honour, given this scruple birth?'

'Do not press me to reply,' answered Rose. 'The question does

not arise, and never will. It is unfair, almost unkind, to urge

it.'

'If your answer be what I almost dare to hope it is,' retorted

Harry, 'it will shed a gleam of happiness upon my lonely way, and

light the path before me. It is not an idle thing to do so much,

by the utterance of a few brief words, for one who loves you

beyond all else. Oh, Rose: in the name of my ardent and enduring

attachment; in the name of all I have suffered for you, and all

you doom me to undergo; answer me this one question!'

'Then, if your lot had been differently cast,' rejoined Rose; 'if

you had been even a little, but not so far, above me; if I could

have been a help and comfort to you in any humble scene of peace

and retirement, and not a blot and drawback in ambitious and

distinguished crowds; I should have been spared this trial. I

have every reason to be happy, very happy, now; but then, Harry,

I own I should have been happier.'

Busy recollections of old hopes, cherished as a girl, long ago,

crowded into the mind of Rose, while making this avowal; but they

brought tears with them, as old hopes will when they come back

withered; and they relieved her.

'I cannot help this weakness, and it makes my purpose stronger,'

said Rose, extending her hand. 'I must leave you now, indeed.'

'I ask one promise,' said Harry. 'Once, and only once more,--say

within a year, but it may be much sooner,--I may speak to you

again on this subject, for the last time.'

'Not to press me to alter my right determination,' replied Rose,

with a melancholy smile; 'it will be useless.'

'No,' said Harry; 'to hear you repeat it, if you will--finally

repeat it! I will lay at your feet, whatever of station of

fortune I may possess; and if you still adhere to your present

resolution, will not seek, by word or act, to change it.'

'Then let it be so,' rejoined Rose; 'it is but one pang the more,

and by that time I may be enabled to bear it better.'

She extended her hand again. But the young man caught her to his

bosom; and imprinting one kiss on her beautiful forehead, hurried

from the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IS A VERY SHORT ONE, AND MAY APPEAR OF NO GREAT IMPORTANCE IN ITS

PLACE, BUT IT SHOULD BE READ NOTWITHSTANDING, AS A SEQUEL TO THE

LAST, AND A KEY TO ONE THAT WILL FOLLOW WHEN ITS TIME ARRIVES

'And so you are resolved to be my travelling companion this

morning; eh?' said the doctor, as Harry Maylie joined him and

Oliver at the breakfast-table. 'Why, you are not in the same

mind or intention two half-hours together!'

'You will tell me a different tale one of these days,' said

Harry, colouring without any perceptible reason.

'I hope I may have good cause to do so,' replied Mr. Losberne;

'though I confess I don't think I shall. But yesterday morning

you had made up your mind, in a great hurry, to stay here, and to

accompany your mother, like a dutiful son, to the sea-side.

Before noon, you announce that you are going to do me the honour

of accompanying me as far as I go, on your road to London. And

at night, you urge me, with great mystery, to start before the

ladies are stirring; the consequence of which is, that young

Oliver here is pinned down to his breakfast when he ought to be

ranging the meadows after botanical phenomena of all kinds. Too

bad, isn't it, Oliver?'

'I should have been very sorry not to have been at home when you

and Mr. Maylie went away, sir,' rejoined Oliver.

'That's a fine fellow,' said the doctor; 'you shall come and see

me when you return. But, to speak seriously, Harry; has any

communication from the great nobs produced this sudden anxiety on

your part to be gone?'

'The great nobs,' replied Harry, 'under which designation, I

presume, you include my most stately uncle, have not communicated

with me at all, since I have been here; nor, at this time of the

year, is it likely that anything would occur to render necessary

my immediate attendance among them.'

'Well,' said the doctor, 'you are a queer fellow. But of course

they will get you into parliament at the election before

Christmas, and these sudden shiftings and changes are no bad

preparation for political life. There's something in that. Good

training is always desirable, whether the race be for place, cup,

or sweepstakes.'

Harry Maylie looked as if he could have followed up this short

dialogue by one or two remarks that would have staggered the

doctor not a little; but he contented himself with saying, 'We

shall see,' and pursued the subject no farther. The post-chaise

drove up to the door shortly afterwards; and Giles coming in for

the luggage, the good doctor bustled out, to see it packed.

'Oliver,' said Harry Maylie, in a low voice, 'let me speak a word

with you.'

Oliver walked into the window-recess to which Mr. Maylie beckoned

him; much surprised at the mixture of sadness and boisterous

spirits, which his whole behaviour displayed.

'You can write well now?' said Harry, laying his hand upon his

arm.

'I hope so, sir,' replied Oliver.

'I shall not be at home again, perhaps for some time; I wish you

would write to me--say once a fort-night: every alternate

Monday: to the General Post Office in London. Will you?'

'Oh! certainly, sir; I shall be proud to do it,' exclaimed

Oliver, greatly delighted with the commission.

'I should like to know how--how my mother and Miss Maylie are,'

said the young man; 'and you can fill up a sheet by telling me

what walks you take, and what you talk about, and whether

she--they, I mean--seem happy and quite well. You understand me?'

'Oh! quite, sir, quite,' replied Oliver.

'I would rather you did not mention it to them,' said Harry,

hurrying over his words; 'because it might make my mother anxious

to write to me oftener, and it is a trouble and worry to her.

Let it be a secret between you and me; and mind you tell me

everything! I depend upon you.'

Oliver, quite elated and honoured by a sense of his importance,

faithfully promised to be secret and explicit in his

communications. Mr. Maylie took leave of him, with many

assurances of his regard and protection.

The doctor was in the chaise; Giles (who, it had been arranged,

should be left behind) held the door open in his hand; and the

women-servants were in the garden, looking on. Harry cast one

slight glance at the latticed window, and jumped into the

carriage.

'Drive on!' he cried, 'hard, fast, full gallop! Nothing short of

flying will keep pace with me, to-day.'

'Halloa!' cried the doctor, letting down the front glass in a

great hurry, and shouting to the postillion; 'something very

short of flying will keep pace with \_me\_. Do you hear?'

Jingling and clattering, till distance rendered its noise

inaudible, and its rapid progress only perceptible to the eye,

the vehicle wound its way along the road, almost hidden in a

cloud of dust: now wholly disappearing, and now becoming visible

again, as intervening objects, or the intricacies of the way,

permitted. It was not until even the dusty cloud was no longer

to be seen, that the gazers dispersed.

And there was one looker-on, who remained with eyes fixed upon

the spot where the carriage had disappeared, long after it was

many miles away; for, behind the white curtain which had shrouded

her from view when Harry raised his eyes towards the window, sat

Rose herself.

'He seems in high spirits and happy,' she said, at length. 'I

feared for a time he might be otherwise. I was mistaken. I am

very, very glad.'

Tears are signs of gladness as well as grief; but those which

coursed down Rose's face, as she sat pensively at the window,

still gazing in the same direction, seemed to tell more of sorrow

than of joy.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IN WHICH THE READER MAY PERCEIVE A CONTRAST, NOT UNCOMMON IN

MATRIMONIAL CASES

Mr. Bumble sat in the workhouse parlour, with his eyes moodily

fixed on the cheerless grate, whence, as it was summer time, no

brighter gleam proceeded, than the reflection of certain sickly

rays of the sun, which were sent back from its cold and shining

surface. A paper fly-cage dangled from the ceiling, to which he

occasionally raised his eyes in gloomy thought; and, as the

heedless insects hovered round the gaudy net-work, Mr. Bumble

would heave a deep sigh, while a more gloomy shadow overspread

his countenance. Mr. Bumble was meditating; it might be that the

insects brought to mind, some painful passage in his own past

life.

Nor was Mr. Bumble's gloom the only thing calculated to awaken a

pleasing melancholy in the bosom of a spectator. There were not

wanting other appearances, and those closely connected with his

own person, which announced that a great change had taken place

in the position of his affairs. The laced coat, and the cocked

hat; where were they? He still wore knee-breeches, and dark

cotton stockings on his nether limbs; but they were not \_the\_

breeches. The coat was wide-skirted; and in that respect like

\_the\_ coat, but, oh how different! The mighty cocked hat was

replaced by a modest round one. Mr. Bumble was no longer a

beadle.

There are some promotions in life, which, independent of the more

substantial rewards they offer, require peculiar value and

dignity from the coats and waistcoats connected with them. A

field-marshal has his uniform; a bishop his silk apron; a

counsellor his silk gown; a beadle his cocked hat. Strip the

bishop of his apron, or the beadle of his hat and lace; what are

they? Men. Mere men. Dignity, and even holiness too,

sometimes, are more questions of coat and waistcoat than some

people imagine.

Mr. Bumble had married Mrs. Corney, and was master of the

workhouse. Another beadle had come into power. On him the

cocked hat, gold-laced coat, and staff, had all three descended.

'And to-morrow two months it was done!' said Mr. Bumble, with a

sigh. 'It seems a age.'

Mr. Bumble might have meant that he had concentrated a whole

existence of happiness into the short space of eight weeks; but

the sigh--there was a vast deal of meaning in the sigh.

'I sold myself,' said Mr. Bumble, pursuing the same train of

relection, 'for six teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a

milk-pot; with a small quantity of second-hand furniture, and

twenty pound in money. I went very reasonable. Cheap, dirt

cheap!'

'Cheap!' cried a shrill voice in Mr. Bumble's ear: 'you would

have been dear at any price; and dear enough I paid for you, Lord

above knows that!'

Mr. Bumble turned, and encountered the face of his interesting

consort, who, imperfectly comprehending the few words she had

overheard of his complaint, had hazarded the foregoing remark at

a venture.

'Mrs. Bumble, ma'am!' said Mr. Bumble, with a sentimental

sternness.

'Well!' cried the lady.

'Have the goodness to look at me,' said Mr. Bumble, fixing his

eyes upon her. (If she stands such a eye as that,' said Mr.

Bumble to himself, 'she can stand anything. It is a eye I never

knew to fail with paupers. If it fails with her, my power is

gone.')

Whether an exceedingly small expansion of eye be sufficient to

quell paupers, who, being lightly fed, are in no very high

condition; or whether the late Mrs. Corney was particularly proof

against eagle glances; are matters of opinion. The matter of

fact, is, that the matron was in no way overpowered by Mr.

Bumble's scowl, but, on the contrary, treated it with great

disdain, and even raised a laugh thereat, which sounded as

though it were genuine.

On hearing this most unexpected sound, Mr. Bumble looked, first

incredulous, and afterwards amazed. He then relapsed into his

former state; nor did he rouse himself until his attention was

again awakened by the voice of his partner.

'Are you going to sit snoring there, all day?' inquired Mrs.

Bumble.

'I am going to sit here, as long as I think proper, ma'am,'

rejoined Mr. Bumble; 'and although I was \_not\_ snoring, I shall

snore, gape, sneeze, laugh, or cry, as the humour strikes me;

such being my prerogative.'

'\_Your\_ prerogative!' sneered Mrs. Bumble, with ineffable contempt.

'I said the word, ma'am,' said Mr. Bumble. 'The prerogative of a

man is to command.'

'And what's the prerogative of a woman, in the name of Goodness?'

cried the relict of Mr. Corney deceased.

'To obey, ma'am,' thundered Mr. Bumble. 'Your late unfortunate

husband should have taught it you; and then, perhaps, he might

have been alive now. I wish he was, poor man!'

Mrs. Bumble, seeing at a glance, that the decisive moment had now

arrived, and that a blow struck for the mastership on one side or

other, must necessarily be final and conclusive, no sooner heard

this allusion to the dead and gone, than she dropped into a

chair, and with a loud scream that Mr. Bumble was a hard-hearted

brute, fell into a paroxysm of tears.

But, tears were not the things to find their way to Mr. Bumble's

soul; his heart was waterproof. Like washable beaver hats that

improve with rain, his nerves were rendered stouter and more

vigorous, by showers of tears, which, being tokens of weakness,

and so far tacit admissions of his own power, pleased and exalted

him. He eyed his good lady with looks of great satisfaction, and

begged, in an encouraging manner, that she should cry her

hardest: the exercise being looked upon, by the faculty, as

strongly conducive to health.

'It opens the lungs, washes the countenance, exercises the eyes,

and softens down the temper,' said Mr. Bumble. 'So cry away.'

As he discharged himself of this pleasantry, Mr. Bumble took his

hat from a peg, and putting it on, rather rakishly, on one side,

as a man might, who felt he had asserted his superiority in a

becoming manner, thrust his hands into his pockets, and sauntered

towards the door, with much ease and waggishness depicted in his

whole appearance.

Now, Mrs. Corney that was, had tried the tears, because they were

less troublesome than a manual assault; but, she was quite

prepared to make trial of the latter mode of proceeding, as Mr.

Bumble was not long in discovering.

The first proof he experienced of the fact, was conveyed in a

hollow sound, immediately succeeded by the sudden flying off of

his hat to the opposite end of the room. This preliminary

proceeding laying bare his head, the expert lady, clasping him

tightly round the throat with one hand, inflicted a shower of

blows (dealt with singular vigour and dexterity) upon it with the

other. This done, she created a little variety by scratching his

face, and tearing his hair; and, having, by this time, inflicted

as much punishment as she deemed necessary for the offence, she

pushed him over a chair, which was luckily well situated for the

purpose: and defied him to talk about his prerogative again, if

he dared.

'Get up!' said Mrs. Bumble, in a voice of command. 'And take

yourself away from here, unless you want me to do something

desperate.'

Mr. Bumble rose with a very rueful countenance: wondering much

what something desperate might be. Picking up his hat, he looked

towards the door.

'Are you going?' demanded Mrs. Bumble.

'Certainly, my dear, certainly,' rejoined Mr. Bumble, making a

quicker motion towards the door. 'I didn't intend to--I'm going,

my dear! You are so very violent, that really I--'

At this instant, Mrs. Bumble stepped hastily forward to replace

the carpet, which had been kicked up in the scuffle. Mr. Bumble

immediately darted out of the room, without bestowing another

thought on his unfinished sentence: leaving the late Mrs. Corney

in full possession of the field.

Mr. Bumble was fairly taken by surprise, and fairly beaten. He

had a decided propensity for bullying: derived no inconsiderable

pleasure from the exercise of petty cruelty; and, consequently,

was (it is needless to say) a coward. This is by no means a

disparagement to his character; for many official personages, who

are held in high respect and admiration, are the victims of

similar infirmities. The remark is made, indeed, rather in his

favour than otherwise, and with a view of impressing the reader

with a just sense of his qualifications for office.

But, the measure of his degradation was not yet full. After

making a tour of the house, and thinking, for the first time,

that the poor-laws really were too hard on people; and that men

who ran away from their wives, leaving them chargeable to the

parish, ought, in justice to be visited with no punishment at

all, but rather rewarded as meritorious individuals who had

suffered much; Mr. Bumble came to a room where some of the female

paupers were usually employed in washing the parish linen: when

the sound of voices in conversation, now proceeded.

'Hem!' said Mr. Bumble, summoning up all his native dignity.

'These women at least shall continue to respect the prerogative.

Hallo! hallo there! What do you mean by this noise, you

hussies?'

With these words, Mr. Bumble opened the door, and walked in with

a very fierce and angry manner: which was at once exchanged for

a most humiliated and cowering air, as his eyes unexpectedly

rested on the form of his lady wife.

'My dear,' said Mr. Bumble, 'I didn't know you were here.'

'Didn't know I was here!' repeated Mrs. Bumble. 'What do \_you\_ do

here?'

'I thought they were talking rather too much to be doing their

work properly, my dear,' replied Mr. Bumble: glancing

distractedly at a couple of old women at the wash-tub, who were

comparing notes of admiration at the workhouse-master's humility.

'\_You\_ thought they were talking too much?' said Mrs. Bumble. 'What

business is it of yours?'

'Why, my dear--' urged Mr. Bumble submissively.

'What business is it of yours?' demanded Mrs. Bumble, again.

'It's very true, you're matron here, my dear,' submitted Mr.

Bumble; 'but I thought you mightn't be in the way just then.'

'I'll tell you what, Mr. Bumble,' returned his lady. 'We don't

want any of your interference. You're a great deal too fond of

poking your nose into things that don't concern you, making

everybody in the house laugh, the moment your back is turned, and

making yourself look like a fool every hour in the day. Be off;

come!'

Mr. Bumble, seeing with excruciating feelings, the delight of the

two old paupers, who were tittering together most rapturously,

hesitated for an instant. Mrs. Bumble, whose patience brooked no

delay, caught up a bowl of soap-suds, and motioning him towards

the door, ordered him instantly to depart, on pain of receiving

the contents upon his portly person.

What could Mr. Bumble do? He looked dejectedly round, and slunk

away; and, as he reached the door, the titterings of the paupers

broke into a shrill chuckle of irrepressible delight. It wanted

but this. He was degraded in their eyes; he had lost caste and

station before the very paupers; he had fallen from all the

height and pomp of beadleship, to the lowest depth of the most

snubbed hen-peckery.

'All in two months!' said Mr. Bumble, filled with dismal

thoughts. 'Two months! No more than two months ago, I was not

only my own master, but everybody else's, so far as the porochial

workhouse was concerned, and now!--'

It was too much. Mr. Bumble boxed the ears of the boy who opened

the gate for him (for he had reached the portal in his reverie);

and walked, distractedly, into the street.

He walked up one street, and down another, until exercise had

abated the first passion of his grief; and then the revulsion of

feeling made him thirsty. He passed a great many public-houses;

but, at length paused before one in a by-way, whose parlour, as

he gathered from a hasty peep over the blinds, was deserted, save

by one solitary customer. It began to rain, heavily, at the

moment. This determined him. Mr. Bumble stepped in; and

ordering something to drink, as he passed the bar, entered the

apartment into which he had looked from the street.

The man who was seated there, was tall and dark, and wore a large

cloak. He had the air of a stranger; and seemed, by a certain

haggardness in his look, as well as by the dusty soils on his

dress, to have travelled some distance. He eyed Bumble askance,

as he entered, but scarcely deigned to nod his head in

acknowledgment of his salutation.

Mr. Bumble had quite dignity enough for two; supposing even that

the stranger had been more familiar: so he drank his

gin-and-water in silence, and read the paper with great show of

pomp and circumstance.

It so happened, however: as it will happen very often, when men

fall into company under such circumstances: that Mr. Bumble

felt, every now and then, a powerful inducement, which he could

not resist, to steal a look at the stranger: and that whenever

he did so, he withdrew his eyes, in some confusion, to find that

the stranger was at that moment stealing a look at him. Mr.

Bumble's awkwardness was enhanced by the very remarkable

expression of the stranger's eye, which was keen and bright, but

shadowed by a scowl of distrust and suspicion, unlike anything he

had ever observed before, and repulsive to behold.

When they had encountered each other's glance several times in

this way, the stranger, in a harsh, deep voice, broke silence.

'Were you looking for me,' he said, 'when you peered in at the

window?'

'Not that I am aware of, unless you're Mr. --' Here Mr. Bumble

stopped short; for he was curious to know the stranger's name,

and thought in his impatience, he might supply the blank.

'I see you were not,' said the stranger; an expression of quiet

sarcasm playing about his mouth; 'or you have known my name. You

don't know it. I would recommend you not to ask for it.'

'I meant no harm, young man,' observed Mr. Bumble, majestically.

'And have done none,' said the stranger.

Another silence succeeded this short dialogue: which was again

broken by the stranger.

'I have seen you before, I think?' said he. 'You were

differently dressed at that time, and I only passed you in the

street, but I should know you again. You were beadle here, once;

were you not?'

'I was,' said Mr. Bumble, in some surprise; 'porochial beadle.'

'Just so,' rejoined the other, nodding his head. 'It was in that

character I saw you. What are you now?'

'Master of the workhouse,' rejoined Mr. Bumble, slowly and

impressively, to check any undue familiarity the stranger might

otherwise assume. 'Master of the workhouse, young man!'

'You have the same eye to your own interest, that you always had,

I doubt not?' resumed the stranger, looking keenly into Mr.

Bumble's eyes, as he raised them in astonishment at the question.

'Don't scruple to answer freely, man. I know you pretty well,

you see.'

'I suppose, a married man,' replied Mr. Bumble, shading his eyes

with his hand, and surveying the stranger, from head to foot, in

evident perplexity, 'is not more averse to turning an honest

penny when he can, than a single one. Porochial officers are not

so well paid that they can afford to refuse any little extra fee,

when it comes to them in a civil and proper manner.'

The stranger smiled, and nodded his head again: as much to say,

he had not mistaken his man; then rang the bell.

'Fill this glass again,' he said, handing Mr. Bumble's empty

tumbler to the landlord. 'Let it be strong and hot. You like it

so, I suppose?'

'Not too strong,' replied Mr. Bumble, with a delicate cough.

'You understand what that means, landlord!' said the stranger,

drily.

The host smiled, disappeared, and shortly afterwards returned

with a steaming jorum: of which, the first gulp brought the water

into Mr. Bumble's eyes.

'Now listen to me,' said the stranger, after closing the door and

window. 'I came down to this place, to-day, to find you out;

and, by one of those chances which the devil throws in the way of

his friends sometimes, you walked into the very room I was

sitting in, while you were uppermost in my mind. I want some

information from you. I don't ask you to give it for nothing,

slight as it is. Put up that, to begin with.'

As he spoke, he pushed a couple of sovereigns across the table to

his companion, carefully, as though unwilling that the chinking

of money should be heard without. When Mr. Bumble had

scrupulously examined the coins, to see that they were genuine,

and had put them up, with much satisfaction, in his

waistcoat-pocket, he went on:

'Carry your memory back--let me see--twelve years, last winter.'

'It's a long time,' said Mr. Bumble. 'Very good. I've done it.'

'The scene, the workhouse.'

'Good!'

'And the time, night.'

'Yes.'

'And the place, the crazy hole, wherever it was, in which

miserable drabs brought forth the life and health so often denied

to themselves--gave birth to puling children for the parish to

rear; and hid their shame, rot 'em in the grave!'

'The lying-in room, I suppose?' said Mr. Bumble, not quite

following the stranger's excited description.

'Yes,' said the stranger. 'A boy was born there.'

'A many boys,' observed Mr. Bumble, shaking his head,

despondingly.

'A murrain on the young devils!' cried the stranger; 'I speak of

one; a meek-looking, pale-faced boy, who was apprenticed down

here, to a coffin-maker--I wish he had made his coffin, and

screwed his body in it--and who afterwards ran away to London, as

it was supposed.

'Why, you mean Oliver! Young Twist!' said Mr. Bumble; 'I

remember him, of course. There wasn't a obstinater young

rascal--'

'It's not of him I want to hear; I've heard enough of him,' said

the stranger, stopping Mr. Bumble in the outset of a tirade on

the subject of poor Oliver's vices. 'It's of a woman; the hag

that nursed his mother. Where is she?'

'Where is she?' said Mr. Bumble, whom the gin-and-water had

rendered facetious. 'It would be hard to tell. There's no

midwifery there, whichever place she's gone to; so I suppose

she's out of employment, anyway.'

'What do you mean?' demanded the stranger, sternly.

'That she died last winter,' rejoined Mr. Bumble.

The man looked fixedly at him when he had given this information,

and although he did not withdraw his eyes for some time

afterwards, his gaze gradually became vacant and abstracted, and

he seemed lost in thought. For some time, he appeared doubtful

whether he ought to be relieved or disappointed by the

intelligence; but at length he breathed more freely; and

withdrawing his eyes, observed that it was no great matter.

With that he rose, as if to depart.

But Mr. Bumble was cunning enough; and he at once saw that an

opportunity was opened, for the lucrative disposal of some secret

in the possession of his better half. He well remembered the

night of old Sally's death, which the occurrences of that day had

given him good reason to recollect, as the occasion on which he

had proposed to Mrs. Corney; and although that lady had never

confided to him the disclosure of which she had been the solitary

witness, he had heard enough to know that it related to something

that had occurred in the old woman's attendance, as workhouse

nurse, upon the young mother of Oliver Twist. Hastily calling

this circumstance to mind, he informed the stranger, with an air

of mystery, that one woman had been closeted with the old

harridan shortly before she died; and that she could, as he had

reason to believe, throw some light on the subject of his

inquiry.

'How can I find her?' said the stranger, thrown off his guard;

and plainly showing that all his fears (whatever they were) were

aroused afresh by the intelligence.

'Only through me,' rejoined Mr. Bumble.

'When?' cried the stranger, hastily.

'To-morrow,' rejoined Bumble.

'At nine in the evening,' said the stranger, producing a scrap of

paper, and writing down upon it, an obscure address by the

water-side, in characters that betrayed his agitation; 'at nine

in the evening, bring her to me there. I needn't tell you to be

secret. It's your interest.'

With these words, he led the way to the door, after stopping to

pay for the liquor that had been drunk. Shortly remarking that

their roads were different, he departed, without more ceremony

than an emphatic repetition of the hour of appointment for the

following night.

On glancing at the address, the parochial functionary observed

that it contained no name. The stranger had not gone far, so he

made after him to ask it.

'What do you want?' cried the man, turning quickly round, as

Bumble touched him on the arm. 'Following me?'

'Only to ask a question,' said the other, pointing to the scrap

of paper. 'What name am I to ask for?'

'Monks!' rejoined the man; and strode hastily, away.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT PASSED BETWEEN MR. AND MRS. BUMBLE,

AND MR. MONKS, AT THEIR NOCTURNAL INTERVIEW

It was a dull, close, overcast summer evening. The clouds, which

had been threatening all day, spread out in a dense and sluggish

mass of vapour, already yielded large drops of rain, and seemed

to presage a violent thunder-storm, when Mr. and Mrs. Bumble,

turning out of the main street of the town, directed their course

towards a scattered little colony of ruinous houses, distant from

it some mile and a-half, or thereabouts, and erected on a low

unwholesome swamp, bordering upon the river.

They were both wrapped in old and shabby outer garments, which

might, perhaps, serve the double purpose of protecting their

persons from the rain, and sheltering them from observation. The

husband carried a lantern, from which, however, no light yet

shone; and trudged on, a few paces in front, as though--the way

being dirty--to give his wife the benefit of treading in his

heavy footprints. They went on, in profound silence; every now

and then, Mr. Bumble relaxed his pace, and turned his head as if

to make sure that his helpmate was following; then, discovering

that she was close at his heels, he mended his rate of walking,

and proceeded, at a considerable increase of speed, towards their

place of destination.

This was far from being a place of doubtful character; for it had

long been known as the residence of none but low ruffians, who,

under various pretences of living by their labour, subsisted

chiefly on plunder and crime. It was a collection of mere

hovels: some, hastily built with loose bricks: others, of old

worm-eaten ship-timber: jumbled together without any attempt at

order or arrangement, and planted, for the most part, within a

few feet of the river's bank. A few leaky boats drawn up on the

mud, and made fast to the dwarf wall which skirted it: and here

and there an oar or coil of rope: appeared, at first, to

indicate that the inhabitants of these miserable cottages pursued

some avocation on the river; but a glance at the shattered and

useless condition of the articles thus displayed, would have led

a passer-by, without much difficulty, to the conjecture that they

were disposed there, rather for the preservation of appearances,

than with any view to their being actually employed.

In the heart of this cluster of huts; and skirting the river,

which its upper stories overhung; stood a large building,

formerly used as a manufactory of some kind. It had, in its day,

probably furnished employment to the inhabitants of the

surrounding tenements. But it had long since gone to ruin. The

rat, the worm, and the action of the damp, had weakened and

rotted the piles on which it stood; and a considerable portion of

the building had already sunk down into the water; while the

remainder, tottering and bending over the dark stream, seemed to

wait a favourable opportunity of following its old companion, and

involving itself in the same fate.

It was before this ruinous building that the worthy couple

paused, as the first peal of distant thunder reverberated in the

air, and the rain commenced pouring violently down.

'The place should be somewhere here,' said Bumble, consulting a

scrap of paper he held in his hand.

'Halloa there!' cried a voice from above.

Following the sound, Mr. Bumble raised his head and descried a

man looking out of a door, breast-high, on the second story.

'Stand still, a minute,' cried the voice; 'I'll be with you

directly.' With which the head disappeared, and the door closed.

'Is that the man?' asked Mr. Bumble's good lady.

Mr. Bumble nodded in the affirmative.

'Then, mind what I told you,' said the matron: 'and be careful to

say as little as you can, or you'll betray us at once.'

Mr. Bumble, who had eyed the building with very rueful looks, was

apparently about to express some doubts relative to the

advisability of proceeding any further with the enterprise just

then, when he was prevented by the appearance of Monks: who

opened a small door, near which they stood, and beckoned them

inwards.

'Come in!' he cried impatiently, stamping his foot upon the

ground. 'Don't keep me here!'

The woman, who had hesitated at first, walked boldly in, without

any other invitation. Mr. Bumble, who was ashamed or afraid to

lag behind, followed: obviously very ill at ease and with

scarcely any of that remarkable dignity which was usually his

chief characteristic.

'What the devil made you stand lingering there, in the wet?' said

Monks, turning round, and addressing Bumble, after he had bolted

the door behind them.

'We--we were only cooling ourselves,' stammered Bumble, looking

apprehensively about him.

'Cooling yourselves!' retorted Monks. 'Not all the rain that

ever fell, or ever will fall, will put as much of hell's fire

out, as a man can carry about with him. You won't cool yourself

so easily; don't think it!'

With this agreeable speech, Monks turned short upon the matron,

and bent his gaze upon her, till even she, who was not easily

cowed, was fain to withdraw her eyes, and turn them towards

the ground.

'This is the woman, is it?' demanded Monks.

'Hem! That is the woman,' replied Mr. Bumble, mindful of his

wife's caution.

'You think women never can keep secrets, I suppose?' said the

matron, interposing, and returning, as she spoke, the searching

look of Monks.

'I know they will always keep \_one\_ till it's found out,' said

Monks.

'And what may that be?' asked the matron.

'The loss of their own good name,' replied Monks. 'So, by the

same rule, if a woman's a party to a secret that might hang or

transport her, I'm not afraid of her telling it to anybody; not

I! Do you understand, mistress?'

'No,' rejoined the matron, slightly colouring as she spoke.

'Of course you don't!' said Monks. 'How should you?'

Bestowing something half-way between a smile and a frown upon his

two companions, and again beckoning them to follow him, the man

hastened across the apartment, which was of considerable extent,

but low in the roof. He was preparing to ascend a steep

staircase, or rather ladder, leading to another floor of

warehouses above: when a bright flash of lightning streamed down

the aperture, and a peal of thunder followed, which shook the

crazy building to its centre.

'Hear it!' he cried, shrinking back. 'Hear it! Rolling and

crashing on as if it echoed through a thousand caverns where the

devils were hiding from it. I hate the sound!'

He remained silent for a few moments; and then, removing his

hands suddenly from his face, showed, to the unspeakable

discomposure of Mr. Bumble, that it was much distorted and

discoloured.

'These fits come over me, now and then,' said Monks, observing

his alarm; 'and thunder sometimes brings them on. Don't mind me

now; it's all over for this once.'

Thus speaking, he led the way up the ladder; and hastily closing

the window-shutter of the room into which it led, lowered a

lantern which hung at the end of a rope and pulley passed through

one of the heavy beams in the ceiling: and which cast a dim

light upon an old table and three chairs that were placed beneath

it.

'Now,' said Monks, when they had all three seated themselves,

'the sooner we come to our business, the better for all. The

woman know what it is, does she?'

The question was addressed to Bumble; but his wife anticipated

the reply, by intimating that she was perfectly acquainted with

it.

'He is right in saying that you were with this hag the night she

died; and that she told you something--'

'About the mother of the boy you named,' replied the matron

interrupting him. 'Yes.'

'The first question is, of what nature was her communication?'

said Monks.

'That's the second,' observed the woman with much deliberation.

'The first is, what may the communication be worth?'

'Who the devil can tell that, without knowing of what kind it

is?' asked Monks.

'Nobody better than you, I am persuaded,' answered Mrs. Bumble:

who did not want for spirit, as her yoke-fellow could abundantly

testify.

'Humph!' said Monks significantly, and with a look of eager

inquiry; 'there may be money's worth to get, eh?'

'Perhaps there may,' was the composed reply.

'Something that was taken from her,' said Monks. 'Something that

she wore. Something that--'

'You had better bid,' interrupted Mrs. Bumble. 'I have heard

enough, already, to assure me that you are the man I ought to

talk to.'

Mr. Bumble, who had not yet been admitted by his better half into

any greater share of the secret than he had originally possessed,

listened to this dialogue with outstretched neck and distended

eyes: which he directed towards his wife and Monks, by turns, in

undisguised astonishment; increased, if possible, when the latter

sternly demanded, what sum was required for the disclosure.

'What's it worth to you?' asked the woman, as collectedly as

before.

'It may be nothing; it may be twenty pounds,' replied Monks.

'Speak out, and let me know which.'

'Add five pounds to the sum you have named; give me

five-and-twenty pounds in gold,' said the woman; 'and I'll tell

you all I know. Not before.'

'Five-and-twenty pounds!' exclaimed Monks, drawing back.

'I spoke as plainly as I could,' replied Mrs. Bumble. 'It's not

a large sum, either.'

'Not a large sum for a paltry secret, that may be nothing when

it's told!' cried Monks impatiently; 'and which has been lying

dead for twelve years past or more!'

'Such matters keep well, and, like good wine, often double their

value in course of time,' answered the matron, still preserving

the resolute indifference she had assumed. 'As to lying dead,

there are those who will lie dead for twelve thousand years to

come, or twelve million, for anything you or I know, who will

tell strange tales at last!'

'What if I pay it for nothing?' asked Monks, hesitating.

'You can easily take it away again,' replied the matron. 'I am

but a woman; alone here; and unprotected.'

'Not alone, my dear, nor unprotected, neither,' submitted Mr.

Bumble, in a voice tremulous with fear: '\_I\_ am here, my dear.

And besides,' said Mr. Bumble, his teeth chattering as he spoke,

'Mr. Monks is too much of a gentleman to attempt any violence on

porochial persons. Mr. Monks is aware that I am not a young man,

my dear, and also that I am a little run to seed, as I may say;

bu he has heerd: I say I have no doubt Mr. Monks has heerd, my

dear: that I am a very determined officer, with very uncommon

strength, if I'm once roused. I only want a little rousing;

that's all.'

As Mr. Bumble spoke, he made a melancholy feint of grasping his

lantern with fierce determination; and plainly showed, by the

alarmed expression of every feature, that he \_did\_ want a little

rousing, and not a little, prior to making any very warlike

demonstration: unless, indeed, against paupers, or other person

or persons trained down for the purpose.

'You are a fool,' said Mrs. Bumble, in reply; 'and had better

hold your tongue.'

'He had better have cut it out, before he came, if he can't speak

in a lower tone,' said Monks, grimly. 'So! He's your husband,

eh?'

'He my husband!' tittered the matron, parrying the question.

'I thought as much, when you came in,' rejoined Monks, marking

the angry glance which the lady darted at her spouse as she

spoke. 'So much the better; I have less hesitation in dealing

with two people, when I find that there's only one will between

them. I'm in earnest. See here!'

He thrust his hand into a side-pocket; and producing a canvas

bag, told out twenty-five sovereigns on the table, and pushed

them over to the woman.

'Now,' he said, 'gather them up; and when this cursed peal of

thunder, which I feel is coming up to break over the house-top,

is gone, let's hear your story.'

The thunder, which seemed in fact much nearer, and to shiver and

break almost over their heads, having subsided, Monks, raising

his face from the table, bent forward to listen to what the woman

should say. The faces of the three nearly touched, as the two

men leant over the small table in their eagerness to hear, and

the woman also leant forward to render her whisper audible. The

sickly rays of the suspended lantern falling directly upon them,

aggravated the paleness and anxiety of their countenances: which,

encircled by the deepest gloom and darkness, looked ghastly in

the extreme.

'When this woman, that we called old Sally, died,' the matron

began, 'she and I were alone.'

'Was there no one by?' asked Monks, in the same hollow whisper;

'No sick wretch or idiot in some other bed? No one who could

hear, and might, by possibility, understand?'

'Not a soul,' replied the woman; 'we were alone. \_I\_ stood alone

beside the body when death came over it.'

'Good,' said Monks, regarding her attentively. 'Go on.'

'She spoke of a young creature,' resumed the matron, 'who had

brought a child into the world some years before; not merely in

the same room, but in the same bed, in which she then lay dying.'

'Ay?' said Monks, with quivering lip, and glancing over his

shoulder, 'Blood! How things come about!'

'The child was the one you named to him last night,' said the

matron, nodding carelessly towards her husband; 'the mother this

nurse had robbed.'

'In life?' asked Monks.

'In death,' replied the woman, with something like a shudder.

'She stole from the corpse, when it had hardly turned to one,

that which the dead mother had prayed her, with her last breath,

to keep for the infant's sake.'

'She sold it,' cried Monks, with desperate eagerness; 'did she

sell it? Where? When? To whom? How long before?'

'As she told me, with great difficulty, that she had done this,'

said the matron, 'she fell back and died.'

'Without saying more?' cried Monks, in a voice which, from its

very suppression, seemed only the more furious. 'It's a lie!

I'll not be played with. She said more. I'll tear the life out

of you both, but I'll know what it was.'

'She didn't utter another word,' said the woman, to all

appearance unmoved (as Mr. Bumble was very far from being) by the

strange man's violence; 'but she clutched my gown, violently,

with one hand, which was partly closed; and when I saw that she

was dead, and so removed the hand by force, I found it clasped a

scrap of dirty paper.'

'Which contained--' interposed Monks, stretching forward.

'Nothing,' replied the woman; 'it was a pawnbroker's duplicate.'

'For what?' demanded Monks.

'In good time I'll tell you.' said the woman. 'I judge that she

had kept the trinket, for some time, in the hope of turning it to

better account; and then had pawned it; and had saved or scraped

together money to pay the pawnbroker's interest year by year, and

prevent its running out; so that if anything came of it, it could

still be redeemed. Nothing had come of it; and, as I tell you,

she died with the scrap of paper, all worn and tattered, in her

hand. The time was out in two days; I thought something might

one day come of it too; and so redeemed the pledge.'

'Where is it now?' asked Monks quickly.

'\_There\_,' replied the woman. And, as if glad to be relieved of

it, she hastily threw upon the table a small kid bag scarcely

large enough for a French watch, which Monks pouncing upon, tore

open with trembling hands. It contained a little gold locket:

in which were two locks of hair, and a plain gold wedding-ring.

'It has the word "Agnes" engraved on the inside,' said the woman.

'There is a blank left for the surname; and then follows the

date; which is within a year before the child was born. I found

out that.'

'And this is all?' said Monks, after a close and eager scrutiny

of the contents of the little packet.

'All,' replied the woman.

Mr. Bumble drew a long breath, as if he were glad to find that

the story was over, and no mention made of taking the

five-and-twenty pounds back again; and now he took courage to

wipe the perspiration which had been trickling over his nose,

unchecked, during the whole of the previous dialogue.

'I know nothing of the story, beyond what I can guess at,' said

his wife addressing Monks, after a short silence; 'and I want to

know nothing; for it's safer not. But I may ask you two

questions, may I?'

'You may ask,' said Monks, with some show of surprise; 'but

whether I answer or not is another question.'

'--Which makes three,' observed Mr. Bumble, essaying a stroke of

facetiousness.

'Is that what you expected to get from me?' demanded the matron.

'It is,' replied Monks. 'The other question?'

'What do you propose to do with it? Can it be used against me?'

'Never,' rejoined Monks; 'nor against me either. See here! But

don't move a step forward, or your life is not worth a bulrush.'

With these words, he suddenly wheeled the table aside, and

pulling an iron ring in the boarding, threw back a large

trap-door which opened close at Mr. Bumble's feet, and caused

that gentleman to retire several paces backward, with great

precipitation.

'Look down,' said Monks, lowering the lantern into the gulf.

'Don't fear me. I could have let you down, quietly enough, when

you were seated over it, if that had been my game.'

Thus encouraged, the matron drew near to the brink; and even Mr.

Bumble himself, impelled by curiousity, ventured to do the same.

The turbid water, swollen by the heavy rain, was rushing rapidly

on below; and all other sounds were lost in the noise of its

plashing and eddying against the green and slimy piles. There

had once been a water-mill beneath; the tide foaming and chafing

round the few rotten stakes, and fragments of machinery that yet

remained, seemed to dart onward, with a new impulse, when freed

from the obstacles which had unavailingly attempted to stem its

headlong course.

'If you flung a man's body down there, where would it be

to-morrow morning?' said Monks, swinging the lantern to and fro

in the dark well.

'Twelve miles down the river, and cut to pieces besides,' replied

Bumble, recoiling at the thought.

Monks drew the little packet from his breast, where he had

hurriedly thrust it; and tying it to a leaden weight, which had

formed a part of some pulley, and was lying on the floor, dropped

it into the stream. It fell straight, and true as a die; clove

the water with a scarcely audible splash; and was gone.

The three looking into each other's faces, seemed to breathe more

freely.

'There!' said Monks, closing the trap-door, which fell heavily

back into its former position. 'If the sea ever gives up its

dead, as books say it will, it will keep its gold and silver to

itself, and that trash among it. We have nothing more to say,

and may break up our pleasant party.'

'By all means,' observed Mr. Bumble, with great alacrity.

'You'll keep a quiet tongue in your head, will you?' said Monks,

with a threatening look. 'I am not afraid of your wife.'

'You may depend upon me, young man,' answered Mr. Bumble, bowing

himself gradually towards the ladder, with excessive politeness.

'On everybody's account, young man; on my own, you know, Mr.

Monks.'

'I am glad, for your sake, to hear it,' remarked Monks. 'Light

your lantern! And get away from here as fast as you can.'

It was fortunate that the conversation terminated at this point,

or Mr. Bumble, who had bowed himself to within six inches of the

ladder, would infallibly have pitched headlong into the room

below. He lighted his lantern from that which Monks had detached

from the rope, and now carried in his hand; and making no effort

to prolong the discourse, descended in silence, followed by his

wife. Monks brought up the rear, after pausing on the steps to

satisfy himself that there were no other sounds to be heard than

the beating of the rain without, and the rushing of the water.

They traversed the lower room, slowly, and with caution; for

Monks started at every shadow; and Mr. Bumble, holding his

lantern a foot above the ground, walked not only with remarkable

care, but with a marvellously light step for a gentleman of his

figure: looking nervously about him for hidden trap-doors. The

gate at which they had entered, was softly unfastened and opened

by Monks; merely exchanging a nod with their mysterious

acquaintance, the married couple emerged into the wet and

darkness outside.

They were no sooner gone, than Monks, who appeared to entertain

an invincible repugnance to being left alone, called to a boy who

had been hidden somewhere below. Bidding him go first, and bear

the light, he returned to the chamber he had just quitted.

CHAPTER XXXIX

INTRODUCES SOME RESPECTABLE CHARACTERS WITH WHOM THE READER IS

ALREADY ACQUAINTED, AND SHOWS HOW MONKS AND THE JEW LAID THEIR

WORTHY HEADS TOGETHER

On the evening following that upon which the three worthies

mentioned in the last chapter, disposed of their little matter of

business as therein narrated, Mr. William Sikes, awakening from a

nap, drowsily growled forth an inquiry what time of night it was.

The room in which Mr. Sikes propounded this question, was not one

of those he had tenanted, previous to the Chertsey expedition,

although it was in the same quarter of the town, and was situated

at no great distance from his former lodgings. It was not, in

appearance, so desirable a habitation as his old quarters: being

a mean and badly-furnished apartment, of very limited size;

lighted only by one small window in the shelving roof, and

abutting on a close and dirty lane. Nor were there wanting other

indications of the good gentleman's having gone down in the world

of late: for a great scarcity of furniture, and total absence of

comfort, together with the disappearance of all such small

moveables as spare clothes and linen, bespoke a state of extreme

poverty; while the meagre and attenuated condition of Mr. Sikes

himself would have fully confirmed these symptoms, if they had

stood in any need of corroboration.

The housebreaker was lying on the bed, wrapped in his white

great-coat, by way of dressing-gown, and displaying a set of

features in no degree improved by the cadaverous hue of illness,

and the addition of a soiled nightcap, and a stiff, black beard

of a week's growth. The dog sat at the bedside: now eyeing his

master with a wistful look, and now pricking his ears, and

uttering a low growl as some noise in the street, or in the lower

part of the house, attracted his attention. Seated by the

window, busily engaged in patching an old waistcoat which formed

a portion of the robber's ordinary dress, was a female: so pale

and reduced with watching and privation, that there would have

been considerable difficulty in recognising her as the same Nancy

who has already figured in this tale, but for the voice in which

she replied to Mr. Sikes's question.

'Not long gone seven,' said the girl. 'How do you feel to-night,

Bill?'

'As weak as water,' replied Mr. Sikes, with an imprecation on his

eyes and limbs. 'Here; lend us a hand, and let me get off this

thundering bed anyhow.'

Illness had not improved Mr. Sikes's temper; for, as the girl

raised him up and led him to a chair, he muttered various curses

on her awkwardness, and struck her.

'Whining are you?' said Sikes. 'Come! Don't stand snivelling

there. If you can't do anything better than that, cut off

altogether. D'ye hear me?'

'I hear you,' replied the girl, turning her face aside, and

forcing a laugh. 'What fancy have you got in your head now?'

'Oh! you've thought better of it, have you?' growled Sikes,

marking the tear which trembled in her eye. 'All the better for

you, you have.'

'Why, you don't mean to say, you'd be hard upon me to-night,

Bill,' said the girl, laying her hand upon his shoulder.

'No!' cried Mr. Sikes. 'Why not?'

'Such a number of nights,' said the girl, with a touch of woman's

tenderness, which communicated something like sweetness of tone,

even to her voice: 'such a number of nights as I've been patient

with you, nursing and caring for you, as if you had been a child:

and this the first that I've seen you like yourself; you wouldn't

have served me as you did just now, if you'd thought of that,

would you? Come, come; say you wouldn't.'

'Well, then,' rejoined Mr. Sikes, 'I wouldn't. Why, damme, now,

the girls's whining again!'

'It's nothing,' said the girl, throwing herself into a chair.

'Don't you seem to mind me. It'll soon be over.'

'What'll be over?' demanded Mr. Sikes in a savage voice. 'What

foolery are you up to, now, again? Get up and bustle about, and

don't come over me with your woman's nonsense.'

At any other time, this remonstrance, and the tone in which it

was delivered, would have had the desired effect; but the girl

being really weak and exhausted, dropped her head over the back

of the chair, and fainted, before Mr. Sikes could get out a few

of the appropriate oaths with which, on similar occasions, he was

accustomed to garnish his threats. Not knowing, very well, what

to do, in this uncommon emergency; for Miss Nancy's hysterics

were usually of that violent kind which the patient fights and

struggles out of, without much assistance; Mr. Sikes tried a

little blasphemy: and finding that mode of treatment wholly

ineffectual, called for assistance.

'What's the matter here, my dear?' said Fagin, looking in.

'Lend a hand to the girl, can't you?' replied Sikes impatiently.

'Don't stand chattering and grinning at me!'

With an exclamation of surprise, Fagin hastened to the girl's

assistance, while Mr. John Dawkins (otherwise the Artful Dodger),

who had followed his venerable friend into the room, hastily

deposited on the floor a bundle with which he was laden; and

snatching a bottle from the grasp of Master Charles Bates who

came close at his heels, uncorked it in a twinkling with his

teeth, and poured a portion of its contents down the patient's

throat: previously taking a taste, himself, to prevent mistakes.

'Give her a whiff of fresh air with the bellows, Charley,' said

Mr. Dawkins; 'and you slap her hands, Fagin, while Bill undoes

the petticuts.'

These united restoratives, administered with great energy:

especially that department consigned to Master Bates, who

appeared to consider his share in the proceedings, a piece of

unexampled pleasantry: were not long in producing the desired

effect. The girl gradually recovered her senses; and, staggering

to a chair by the bedside, hid her face upon the pillow: leaving

Mr. Sikes to confront the new comers, in some astonishment at

their unlooked-for appearance.

'Why, what evil wind has blowed you here?' he asked Fagin.

'No evil wind at all, my dear, for evil winds blow nobody any

good; and I've brought something good with me, that you'll be

glad to see. Dodger, my dear, open the bundle; and give Bill the

little trifles that we spent all our money on, this morning.'

In compliance with Mr. Fagin's request, the Artful untied this

bundle, which was of large size, and formed of an old

table-cloth; and handed the articles it contained, one by one, to

Charley Bates: who placed them on the table, with various

encomiums on their rarity and excellence.

'Sitch a rabbit pie, Bill,' exclaimed that young gentleman,

disclosing to view a huge pasty; 'sitch delicate creeturs, with

sitch tender limbs, Bill, that the wery bones melt in your mouth,

and there's no occasion to pick 'em; half a pound of seven and

six-penny green, so precious strong that if you mix it with

biling water, it'll go nigh to blow the lid of the tea-pot off; a

pound and a half of moist sugar that the niggers didn't work at

all at, afore they got it up to sitch a pitch of goodness,--oh

no! Two half-quartern brans; pound of best fresh; piece of

double Glo'ster; and, to wind up all, some of the richest sort

you ever lushed!'

Uttering this last panegyric, Master Bates produced, from one of

his extensive pockets, a full-sized wine-bottle, carefully

corked; while Mr. Dawkins, at the same instant, poured out a

wine-glassful of raw spirits from the bottle he carried: which

the invalid tossed down his throat without a moment's hesitation.

'Ah!' said Fagin, rubbing his hands with great satisfaction.

'You'll do, Bill; you'll do now.'

'Do!' exclaimed Mr. Sikes; 'I might have been done for, twenty

times over, afore you'd have done anything to help me. What do

you mean by leaving a man in this state, three weeks and more,

you false-hearted wagabond?'

'Only hear him, boys!' said Fagin, shrugging his shoulders. 'And

us come to bring him all these beau-ti-ful things.'

'The things is well enough in their way,' observed Mr. Sikes: a

little soothed as he glanced over the table; 'but what have you

got to say for yourself, why you should leave me here, down in

the mouth, health, blunt, and everything else; and take no more

notice of me, all this mortal time, than if I was that 'ere

dog.--Drive him down, Charley!'

'I never see such a jolly dog as that,' cried Master Bates, doing

as he was desired. 'Smelling the grub like a old lady a going to

market! He'd make his fortun' on the stage that dog would, and

rewive the drayma besides.'

'Hold your din,' cried Sikes, as the dog retreated under the bed:

still growling angrily. 'What have you got to say for yourself,

you withered old fence, eh?'

'I was away from London, a week and more, my dear, on a plant,'

replied the Jew.

'And what about the other fortnight?' demanded Sikes. 'What

about the other fortnight that you've left me lying here, like a

sick rat in his hole?'

'I couldn't help it, Bill. I can't go into a long explanation

before company; but I couldn't help it, upon my honour.'

'Upon your what?' growled Sikes, with excessive disgust. 'Here!

Cut me off a piece of that pie, one of you boys, to take the

taste of that out of my mouth, or it'll choke me dead.'

'Don't be out of temper, my dear,' urged Fagin, submissively. 'I

have never forgot you, Bill; never once.'

'No! I'll pound it that you han't,' replied Sikes, with a bitter

grin. 'You've been scheming and plotting away, every hour that I

have laid shivering and burning here; and Bill was to do this;

and Bill was to do that; and Bill was to do it all, dirt cheap,

as soon as he got well: and was quite poor enough for your work.

If it hadn't been for the girl, I might have died.'

'There now, Bill,' remonstrated Fagin, eagerly catching at the

word. 'If it hadn't been for the girl! Who but poor ould Fagin

was the means of your having such a handy girl about you?'

'He says true enough there!' said Nancy, coming hastily forward.

'Let him be; let him be.'

Nancy's appearance gave a new turn to the conversation; for the

boys, receiving a sly wink from the wary old Jew, began to ply

her with liquor: of which, however, she took very sparingly;

while Fagin, assuming an unusual flow of spirits, gradually

brought Mr. Sikes into a better temper, by affecting to regard

his threats as a little pleasant banter; and, moreover, by

laughing very heartily at one or two rough jokes, which, after

repeated applications to the spirit-bottle, he condescended to

make.

'It's all very well,' said Mr. Sikes; 'but I must have some blunt

from you to-night.'

'I haven't a piece of coin about me,' replied the Jew.

'Then you've got lots at home,' retorted Sikes; 'and I must have

some from there.'

'Lots!' cried Fagin, holding up is hands. 'I haven't so much as

would--'

'I don't know how much you've got, and I dare say you hardly know

yourself, as it would take a pretty long time to count it,' said

Sikes; 'but I must have some to-night; and that's flat.'

'Well, well,' said Fagin, with a sigh, 'I'll send the Artful

round presently.'

'You won't do nothing of the kind,' rejoined Mr. Sikes. 'The

Artful's a deal too artful, and would forget to come, or lose his

way, or get dodged by traps and so be perwented, or anything for

an excuse, if you put him up to it. Nancy shall go to the ken

and fetch it, to make all sure; and I'll lie down and have a

snooze while she's gone.'

After a great deal of haggling and squabbling, Fagin beat down

the amount of the required advance from five pounds to three

pounds four and sixpence: protesting with many solemn

asseverations that that would only leave him eighteen-pence to

keep house with; Mr. Sikes sullenly remarking that if he couldn't

get any more he must accompany him home; with the Dodger and

Master Bates put the eatables in the cupboard. The Jew then,

taking leave of his affectionate friend, returned homeward,

attended by Nancy and the boys: Mr. Sikes, meanwhile, flinging

himself on the bed, and composing himself to sleep away the time

until the young lady's return.

In due course, they arrived at Fagin's abode, where they found

Toby Crackit and Mr. Chitling intent upon their fifteenth game at

cribbage, which it is scarcely necessary to say the latter

gentleman lost, and with it, his fifteenth and last sixpence:

much to the amusement of his young friends. Mr. Crackit,

apparently somewhat ashamed at being found relaxing himself with

a gentleman so much his inferior in station and mental

endowments, yawned, and inquiring after Sikes, took up his hat to

go.

'Has nobody been, Toby?' asked Fagin.

'Not a living leg,' answered Mr. Crackit, pulling up his collar;

'it's been as dull as swipes. You ought to stand something

handsome, Fagin, to recompense me for keeping house so long.

Damme, I'm as flat as a juryman; and should have gone to sleep,

as fast as Newgate, if I hadn't had the good natur' to amuse this

youngster. Horrid dull, I'm blessed if I an't!'

With these and other ejaculations of the same kind, Mr. Toby

Crackit swept up his winnings, and crammed them into his

waistcoat pocket with a haughty air, as though such small pieces

of silver were wholly beneath the consideration of a man of his

figure; this done, he swaggered out of the room, with so much

elegance and gentility, that Mr. Chitling, bestowing numerous

admiring glances on his legs and boots till they were out of

sight, assured the company that he considered his acquaintance

cheap at fifteen sixpences an interview, and that he didn't value

his losses the snap of his little finger.

'Wot a rum chap you are, Tom!' said Master Bates, highly amused

by this declaration.

'Not a bit of it,' replied Mr. Chitling. 'Am I, Fagin?'

'A very clever fellow, my dear,' said Fagin, patting him on the

shoulder, and winking to his other pupils.

'And Mr. Crackit is a heavy swell; an't he, Fagin?' asked Tom.

'No doubt at all of that, my dear.'

'And it is a creditable thing to have his acquaintance; an't it,

Fagin?' pursued Tom.

'Very much so, indeed, my dear. They're only jealous, Tom,

because he won't give it to them.'

'Ah!' cried Tom, triumphantly, 'that's where it is! He has

cleaned me out. But I can go and earn some more, when I like;

can't I, Fagin?'

'To be sure you can, and the sooner you go the better, Tom; so

make up your loss at once, and don't lose any more time. Dodger!

Charley! It's time you were on the lay. Come! It's near ten,

and nothing done yet.'

In obedience to this hint, the boys, nodding to Nancy, took up

their hats, and left the room; the Dodger and his vivacious

friend indulging, as they went, in many witticisms at the expense

of Mr. Chitling; in whose conduct, it is but justice to say,

there was nothing very conspicuous or peculiar: inasmuch as

there are a great number of spirited young bloods upon town, who

pay a much higher price than Mr. Chitling for being seen in good

society: and a great number of fine gentlemen (composing the

good society aforesaid) who established their reputation upon

very much the same footing as flash Toby Crackit.

'Now,' said Fagin, when they had left the room, 'I'll go and get

you that cash, Nancy. This is only the key of a little cupboard

where I keep a few odd things the boys get, my dear. I never

lock up my money, for I've got none to lock up, my dear--ha! ha!

ha!--none to lock up. It's a poor trade, Nancy, and no thanks;

but I'm fond of seeing the young people about me; and I bear it

all, I bear it all. Hush!' he said, hastily concealing the key

in his breast; 'who's that? Listen!'

The girl, who was sitting at the table with her arms folded,

appeared in no way interested in the arrival: or to care whether

the person, whoever he was, came or went: until the murmur of a

man's voice reached her ears. The instant she caught the sound,

she tore off her bonnet and shawl, with the rapidity of

lightning, and thrust them under the table. The Jew, turning

round immediately afterwards, she muttered a complaint of the

heat: in a tone of languor that contrasted, very remarkably,

with the extreme haste and violence of this action: which,

however, had been unobserved by Fagin, who had his back towards

her at the time.

'Bah!' he whispered, as though nettled by the interruption; 'it's

the man I expected before; he's coming downstairs. Not a word

about the money while he's here, Nance. He won't stop long. Not

ten minutes, my dear.'

Laying his skinny forefinger upon his lip, the Jew carried a

candle to the door, as a man's step was heard upon the stairs

without. He reached it, at the same moment as the visitor, who,

coming hastily into the room, was close upon the girl before he

observed her.

It was Monks.

'Only one of my young people,' said Fagin, observing that Monks

drew back, on beholding a stranger. 'Don't move, Nancy.'

The girl drew closer to the table, and glancing at Monks with an

air of careless levity, withdrew her eyes; but as he turned

towards Fagin, she stole another look; so keen and searching, and

full of purpose, that if there had been any bystander to observe

the change, he could hardly have believed the two looks to have

proceeded from the same person.

'Any news?' inquired Fagin.

'Great.'

'And--and--good?' asked Fagin, hesitating as though he feared to

vex the other man by being too sanguine.

'Not bad, any way,' replied Monks with a smile. 'I have been

prompt enough this time. Let me have a word with you.'

The girl drew closer to the table, and made no offer to leave the

room, although she could see that Monks was pointing to her. The

Jew: perhaps fearing she might say something aloud about the

money, if he endeavoured to get rid of her: pointed upward, and

took Monks out of the room.

'Not that infernal hole we were in before,' she could hear the

man say as they went upstairs. Fagin laughed; and making some

reply which did not reach her, seemed, by the creaking of the

boards, to lead his companion to the second story.

Before the sound of their footsteps had ceased to echo through

the house, the girl had slipped off her shoes; and drawing her

gown loosely over her head, and muffling her arms in it, stood at

the door, listening with breathless interest. The moment the

noise ceased, she glided from the room; ascended the stairs with

incredible softness and silence; and was lost in the gloom above.

The room remained deserted for a quarter of an hour or more; the

girl glided back with the same unearthly tread; and, immediately

afterwards, the two men were heard descending. Monks went at

once into the street; and the Jew crawled upstairs again for the

money. When he returned, the girl was adjusting her shawl and

bonnet, as if preparing to be gone.

'Why, Nance!' exclaimed the Jew, starting back as he put down

the candle, 'how pale you are!'

'Pale!' echoed the girl, shading her eyes with her hands, as if

to look steadily at him.

'Quite horrible. What have you been doing to yourself?'

'Nothing that I know of, except sitting in this close place for I

don't know how long and all,' replied the girl carelessly.

'Come! Let me get back; that's a dear.'

With a sigh for every piece of money, Fagin told the amount into

her hand. They parted without more conversation, merely

interchanging a 'good-night.'

When the girl got into the open street, she sat down upon a

doorstep; and seemed, for a few moments, wholly bewildered and

unable to pursue her way. Suddenly she arose; and hurrying on,

in a direction quite opposite to that in which Sikes was awaiting

her returned, quickened her pace, until it gradually resolved

into a violent run. After completely exhausting herself, she

stopped to take breath: and, as if suddenly recollecting

herself, and deploring her inability to do something she was bent

upon, wrung her hands, and burst into tears.

It might be that her tears relieved her, or that she felt the

full hopelessness of her condition; but she turned back; and

hurrying with nearly as great rapidity in the contrary direction;

partly to recover lost time, and partly to keep pace with the

violent current of her own thoughts: soon reached the dwelling

where she had left the housebreaker.

If she betrayed any agitation, when she presented herself to Mr.

Sikes, he did not observe it; for merely inquiring if she had

brought the money, and receiving a reply in the affirmative, he

uttered a growl of satisfaction, and replacing his head upon the

pillow, resumed the slumbers which her arrival had interrupted.

It was fortunate for her that the possession of money occasioned

him so much employment next day in the way of eating and

drinking; and withal had so beneficial an effect in smoothing

down the asperities of his temper; that he had neither time nor

inclination to be very critical upon her behaviour and

deportment. That she had all the abstracted and nervous manner

of one who is on the eve of some bold and hazardous step, which

it has required no common struggle to resolve upon, would have

been obvious to the lynx-eyed Fagin, who would most probably have

taken the alarm at once; but Mr. Sikes lacking the niceties of

discrimination, and being troubled with no more subtle misgivings

than those which resolve themselves into a dogged roughness of

behaviour towards everybody; and being, furthermore, in an

unusually amiable condition, as has been already observed; saw

nothing unusual in her demeanor, and indeed, troubled himself so

little about her, that, had her agitation been far more

perceptible than it was, it would have been very unlikely to have

awakened his suspicions.

As that day closed in, the girl's excitement increased; and, when

night came on, and she sat by, watching until the housebreaker

should drink himself asleep, there was an unusual paleness in her

cheek, and a fire in her eye, that even Sikes observed with

astonishment.

Mr. Sikes being weak from the fever, was lying in bed, taking hot

water with his gin to render it less inflammatory; and had pushed

his glass towards Nancy to be replenished for the third or fourth

time, when these symptoms first struck him.

'Why, burn my body!' said the man, raising himself on his hands

as he stared the girl in the face. 'You look like a corpse come

to life again. What's the matter?'

'Matter!' replied the girl. 'Nothing. What do you look at me so

hard for?'

'What foolery is this?' demanded Sikes, grasping her by the arm,

and shaking her roughly. 'What is it? What do you mean? What

are you thinking of?'

'Of many things, Bill,' replied the girl, shivering, and as she

did so, pressing her hands upon her eyes. 'But, Lord! What odds

in that?'

The tone of forced gaiety in which the last words were spoken,

seemed to produce a deeper impression on Sikes than the wild and

rigid look which had preceded them.

'I tell you wot it is,' said Sikes; 'if you haven't caught the

fever, and got it comin' on, now, there's something more than

usual in the wind, and something dangerous too. You're not

a-going to--. No, damme! you wouldn't do that!'

'Do what?' asked the girl.

'There ain't,' said Sikes, fixing his eyes upon her, and

muttering the words to himself; 'there ain't a stauncher-hearted

gal going, or I'd have cut her throat three months ago. She's

got the fever coming on; that's it.'

Fortifying himself with this assurance, Sikes drained the glass

to the bottom, and then, with many grumbling oaths, called for

his physic. The girl jumped up, with great alacrity; poured it

quickly out, but with her back towards him; and held the vessel

to his lips, while he drank off the contents.

'Now,' said the robber, 'come and sit aside of me, and put on

your own face; or I'll alter it so, that you won't know it agin

when you do want it.'

The girl obeyed. Sikes, locking her hand in his, fell back upon

the pillow: turning his eyes upon her face. They closed; opened

again; closed once more; again opened. He shifted his position

restlessly; and, after dozing again, and again, for two or three

minutes, and as often springing up with a look of terror, and

gazing vacantly about him, was suddenly stricken, as it were,

while in the very attitude of rising, into a deep and heavy

sleep. The grasp of his hand relaxed; the upraised arm fell

languidly by his side; and he lay like one in a profound trance.

'The laudanum has taken effect at last,' murmured the girl, as

she rose from the bedside. 'I may be too late, even now.'

She hastily dressed herself in her bonnet and shawl: looking

fearfully round, from time to time, as if, despite the sleeping

draught, she expected every moment to feel the pressure of

Sikes's heavy hand upon her shoulder; then, stooping softly over

the bed, she kissed the robber's lips; and then opening and

closing the room-door with noiseless touch, hurried from the

house.

A watchman was crying half-past nine, down a dark passage through

which she had to pass, in gaining the main thoroughfare.

'Has it long gone the half-hour?' asked the girl.

'It'll strike the hour in another quarter,' said the man:

raising his lantern to her face.

'And I cannot get there in less than an hour or more,' muttered

Nancy: brushing swiftly past him, and gliding rapidly down the

street.

Many of the shops were already closing in the back lanes and

avenues through which she tracked her way, in making from

Spitalfields towards the West-End of London. The clock struck

ten, increasing her impatience. She tore along the narrow

pavement: elbowing the passengers from side to side; and darting

almost under the horses' heads, crossed crowded streets, where

clusters of persons were eagerly watching their opportunity to do

the like.

'The woman is mad!' said the people, turning to look after her as

she rushed away.

When she reached the more wealthy quarter of the town, the

streets were comparatively deserted; and here her headlong

progress excited a still greater curiosity in the stragglers whom

she hurried past. Some quickened their pace behind, as though to

see whither she was hastening at such an unusual rate; and a few

made head upon her, and looked back, surprised at her

undiminished speed; but they fell off one by one; and when she

neared her place of destination, she was alone.

It was a family hotel in a quiet but handsome street near Hyde

Park. As the brilliant light of the lamp which burnt before its

door, guided her to the spot, the clock struck eleven. She had

loitered for a few paces as though irresolute, and making up her

mind to advance; but the sound determined her, and she stepped

into the hall. The porter's seat was vacant. She looked round

with an air of incertitude, and advanced towards the stairs.

'Now, young woman!' said a smartly-dressed female, looking out

from a door behind her, 'who do you want here?'

'A lady who is stopping in this house,' answered the girl.

'A lady!' was the reply, accompanied with a scornful look. 'What

lady?'

'Miss Maylie,' said Nancy.

The young woman, who had by this time, noted her appearance,

replied only by a look of virtuous disdain; and summoned a man to

answer her. To him, Nancy repeated her request.

'What name am I to say?' asked the waiter.

'It's of no use saying any,' replied Nancy.

'Nor business?' said the man.

'No, nor that neither,' rejoined the girl. 'I must see the

lady.'

'Come!' said the man, pushing her towards the door. 'None of

this. Take yourself off.'

'I shall be carried out if I go!' said the girl violently; 'and I

can make that a job that two of you won't like to do. Isn't

there anybody here,' she said, looking round, 'that will see a

simple message carried for a poor wretch like me?'

This appeal produced an effect on a good-tempered-faced man-cook,

who with some of the other servants was looking on, and who

stepped forward to interfere.

'Take it up for her, Joe; can't you?' said this person.

'What's the good?' replied the man. 'You don't suppose the young

lady will see such as her; do you?'

This allusion to Nancy's doubtful character, raised a vast

quantity of chaste wrath in the bosoms of four housemaids, who

remarked, with great fervour, that the creature was a disgrace to

her sex; and strongly advocated her being thrown, ruthlessly,

into the kennel.

'Do what you like with me,' said the girl, turning to the men

again; 'but do what I ask you first, and I ask you to give this

message for God Almighty's sake.'

The soft-hearted cook added his intercession, and the result was

that the man who had first appeared undertook its delivery.

'What's it to be?' said the man, with one foot on the stairs.

'That a young woman earnestly asks to speak to Miss Maylie

alone,' said Nancy; 'and that if the lady will only hear the

first word she has to say, she will know whether to hear her

business, or to have her turned out of doors as an impostor.'

'I say,' said the man, 'you're coming it strong!'

'You give the message,' said the girl firmly; 'and let me hear

the answer.'

The man ran upstairs. Nancy remained, pale and almost

breathless, listening with quivering lip to the very audible

expressions of scorn, of which the chaste housemaids were very

prolific; and of which they became still more so, when the man

returned, and said the young woman was to walk upstairs.

'It's no good being proper in this world,' said the first

housemaid.

'Brass can do better than the gold what has stood the fire,' said

the second.

The third contented herself with wondering 'what ladies was made

of'; and the fourth took the first in a quartette of 'Shameful!'

with which the Dianas concluded.

Regardless of all this: for she had weightier matters at heart:

Nancy followed the man, with trembling limbs, to a small

ante-chamber, lighted by a lamp from the ceiling. Here he left

her, and retired.

CHAPTER XL

A STRANGE INTERVIEW, WHICH IS A SEQUEL TO THE LAST CHAMBER

The girl's life had been squandered in the streets, and among the

most noisome of the stews and dens of London, but there was

something of the woman's original nature left in her still; and

when she heard a light step approaching the door opposite to that

by which she had entered, and thought of the wide contrast which

the small room would in another moment contain, she felt burdened

with the sense of her own deep shame, and shrunk as though she

could scarcely bear the presence of her with whom she had sought

this interview.

But struggling with these better feelings was pride,--the vice of

the lowest and most debased creatures no less than of the high

and self-assured. The miserable companion of thieves and

ruffians, the fallen outcast of low haunts, the associate of the

scourings of the jails and hulks, living within the shadow of the

gallows itself,--even this degraded being felt too proud to

betray a feeble gleam of the womanly feeling which she thought a

weakness, but which alone connected her with that humanity, of

which her wasting life had obliterated so many, many traces when

a very child.

She raised her eyes sufficiently to observe that the figure which

presented itself was that of a slight and beautiful girl; then,

bending them on the ground, she tossed her head with affected

carelessness as she said:

'It's a hard matter to get to see you, lady. If I had taken

offence, and gone away, as many would have done, you'd have been

sorry for it one day, and not without reason either.'

'I am very sorry if any one has behaved harshly to you,' replied

Rose. 'Do not think of that. Tell me why you wished to see me.

I am the person you inquired for.'

The kind tone of this answer, the sweet voice, the gentle manner,

the absence of any accent of haughtiness or displeasure, took the

girl completely by surprise, and she burst into tears.

'Oh, lady, lady!' she said, clasping her hands passionately

before her face, 'if there was more like you, there would be

fewer like me,--there would--there would!'

'Sit down,' said Rose, earnestly. 'If you are in poverty or

affliction I shall be truly glad to relieve you if I can,--I

shall indeed. Sit down.'

'Let me stand, lady,' said the girl, still weeping, 'and do not

speak to me so kindly till you know me better. It is growing

late. Is--is--that door shut?'

'Yes,' said Rose, recoiling a few steps, as if to be nearer

assistance in case she should require it. 'Why?'

'Because,' said the girl, 'I am about to put my life and the

lives of others in your hands. I am the girl that dragged little

Oliver back to old Fagin's on the night he went out from the

house in Pentonville.'

'You!' said Rose Maylie.

'I, lady!' replied the girl. 'I am the infamous creature you

have heard of, that lives among the thieves, and that never from

the first moment I can recollect my eyes and senses opening on

London streets have known any better life, or kinder words than

they have given me, so help me God! Do not mind shrinking openly

from me, lady. I am younger than you would think, to look at me,

but I am well used to it. The poorest women fall back, as I make

my way along the crowded pavement.'

'What dreadful things are these!' said Rose, involuntarily

falling from her strange companion.

'Thank Heaven upon your knees, dear lady,' cried the girl, 'that

you had friends to care for and keep you in your childhood, and

that you were never in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and

drunkenness, and--and--something worse than all--as I have been

from my cradle. I may use the word, for the alley and the gutter

were mine, as they will be my deathbed.'

'I pity you!' said Rose, in a broken voice. 'It wrings my heart

to hear you!'

'Heaven bless you for your goodness!' rejoined the girl. 'If you

knew what I am sometimes, you would pity me, indeed. But I have

stolen away from those who would surely murder me, if they knew I

had been here, to tell you what I have overheard. Do you know a

man named Monks?'

'No,' said Rose.

'He knows you,' replied the girl; 'and knew you were here, for it

was by hearing him tell the place that I found you out.'

'I never heard the name,' said Rose.

'Then he goes by some other amongst us,' rejoined the girl,

'which I more than thought before. Some time ago, and soon after

Oliver was put into your house on the night of the robbery,

I--suspecting this man--listened to a conversation held between

him and Fagin in the dark. I found out, from what I heard, that

Monks--the man I asked you about, you know--'

'Yes,' said Rose, 'I understand.'

'--That Monks,' pursued the girl, 'had seen him accidently with

two of our boys on the day we first lost him, and had known him

directly to be the same child that he was watching for, though I

couldn't make out why. A bargain was struck with Fagin, that if

Oliver was got back he should have a certain sum; and he was to

have more for making him a thief, which this Monks wanted for

some purpose of his own.'

'For what purpose?' asked Rose.

'He caught sight of my shadow on the wall as I listened, in the

hope of finding out,' said the girl; 'and there are not many

people besides me that could have got out of their way in time to

escape discovery. But I did; and I saw him no more till last

night.'

'And what occurred then?'

'I'll tell you, lady. Last night he came again. Again they went

upstairs, and I, wrapping myself up so that my shadow would not

betray me, again listened at the door. The first words I heard

Monks say were these: "So the only proofs of the boy's identity

lie at the bottom of the river, and the old hag that received

them from the mother is rotting in her coffin." They laughed,

and talked of his success in doing this; and Monks, talking on

about the boy, and getting very wild, said that though he had got

the young devil's money safely now, he'd rather have had it the

other way; for, what a game it would have been to have brought

down the boast of the father's will, by driving him through every

jail in town, and then hauling him up for some capital felony

which Fagin could easily manage, after having made a good profit

of him besides.'

'What is all this!' said Rose.

'The truth, lady, though it comes from my lips,' replied the

girl. 'Then, he said, with oaths common enough in my ears, but

strange to yours, that if he could gratify his hatred by taking

the boy's life without bringing his own neck in danger, he would;

but, as he couldn't, he'd be upon the watch to meet him at every

turn in life; and if he took advantage of his birth and history,

he might harm him yet. "In short, Fagin," he says, "Jew as you

are, you never laid such snares as I'll contrive for my young

brother, Oliver."'

'His brother!' exclaimed Rose.

'Those were his words,' said Nancy, glancing uneasily round, as

she had scarcely ceased to do, since she began to speak, for a

vision of Sikes haunted her perpetually. 'And more. When he

spoke of you and the other lady, and said it seemed contrived by

Heaven, or the devil, against him, that Oliver should come into

your hands, he laughed, and said there was some comfort in that

too, for how many thousands and hundreds of thousands of pounds

would you not give, if you had them, to know who your two-legged

spaniel was.'

'You do not mean,' said Rose, turning very pale, 'to tell me that

this was said in earnest?'

'He spoke in hard and angry earnest, if a man ever did,' replied

the girl, shaking her head. 'He is an earnest man when his

hatred is up. I know many who do worse things; but I'd rather

listen to them all a dozen times, than to that Monks once. It is

growing late, and I have to reach home without suspicion of

having been on such an errand as this. I must get back quickly.'

'But what can I do?' said Rose. 'To what use can I turn this

communication without you? Back! Why do you wish to return to

companions you paint in such terrible colors? If you repeat this

information to a gentleman whom I can summon in an instant from

the next room, you can be consigned to some place of safety

without half an hour's delay.'

'I wish to go back,' said the girl. 'I must go back,

because--how can I tell such things to an innocent lady like

you?--because among the men I have told you of, there is one:

the most desperate among them all; that I can't leave: no, not

even to be saved from the life I am leading now.'

'Your having interfered in this dear boy's behalf before,' said

Rose; 'your coming here, at so great a risk, to tell me what you

have heard; your manner, which convinces me of the truth of what

you say; your evident contrition, and sense of shame; all lead me

to believe that you might yet be reclaimed. Oh!' said the

earnest girl, folding her hands as the tears coursed down her

face, 'do not turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of one of your

own sex; the first--the first, I do believe, who ever appealed to

you in the voice of pity and compassion. Do hear my words, and

let me save you yet, for better things.'

'Lady,' cried the girl, sinking on her knees, 'dear, sweet, angel

lady, you \_are\_ the first that ever blessed me with such words as

these, and if I had heard them years ago, they might have turned

me from a life of sin and sorrow; but it is too late, it is too

late!'

'It is never too late,' said Rose, 'for penitence and atonement.'

'It is,' cried the girl, writhing in agony of her mind; 'I cannot

leave him now! I could not be his death.'

'Why should you be?' asked Rose.

'Nothing could save him,' cried the girl. 'If I told others what

I have told you, and led to their being taken, he would be sure

to die. He is the boldest, and has been so cruel!'

'Is it possible,' cried Rose, 'that for such a man as this, you

can resign every future hope, and the certainty of immediate

rescue? It is madness.'

'I don't know what it is,' answered the girl; 'I only know that

it is so, and not with me alone, but with hundreds of others as

bad and wretched as myself. I must go back. Whether it is God's

wrath for the wrong I have done, I do not know; but I am drawn

back to him through every suffering and ill usage; and I should

be, I believe, if I knew that I was to die by his hand at last.'

'What am I to do?' said Rose. 'I should not let you depart from

me thus.'

'You should, lady, and I know you will,' rejoined the girl,

rising. 'You will not stop my going because I have trusted in

your goodness, and forced no promise from you, as I might have

done.'

'Of what use, then, is the communication you have made?' said

Rose. 'This mystery must be investigated, or how will its

disclosure to me, benefit Oliver, whom you are anxious to serve?'

'You must have some kind gentleman about you that will hear it as

a secret, and advise you what to do,' rejoined the girl.

'But where can I find you again when it is necessary?' asked

Rose. 'I do not seek to know where these dreadful people live,

but where will you be walking or passing at any settled period

from this time?'

'Will you promise me that you will have my secret strictly kept,

and come alone, or with the only other person that knows it; and

that I shall not be watched or followed?' asked the girl.

'I promise you solemnly,' answered Rose.

'Every Sunday night, from eleven until the clock strikes twelve,'

said the girl without hesitation, 'I will walk on London Bridge

if I am alive.'

'Stay another moment,' interposed Rose, as the girl moved

hurriedly towards the door. 'Think once again on your own

condition, and the opportunity you have of escaping from it. You

have a claim on me: not only as the voluntary bearer of this

intelligence, but as a woman lost almost beyond redemption. Will

you return to this gang of robbers, and to this man, when a word

can save you? What fascination is it that can take you back, and

make you cling to wickedness and misery? Oh! is there no chord

in your heart that I can touch! Is there nothing left, to which

I can appeal against this terrible infatuation!'

'When ladies as young, and good, and beautiful as you are,'

replied the girl steadily, 'give away your hearts, love will

carry you all lengths--even such as you, who have home, friends,

other admirers, everything, to fill them. When such as I, who

have no certain roof but the coffinlid, and no friend in sickness

or death but the hospital nurse, set our rotten hearts on any

man, and let him fill the place that has been a blank through all

our wretched lives, who can hope to cure us? Pity us, lady--pity

us for having only one feeling of the woman left, and for having

that turned, by a heavy judgment, from a comfort and a pride,

into a new means of violence and suffering.'

'You will,' said Rose, after a pause, 'take some money from me,

which may enable you to live without dishonesty--at all events

until we meet again?'

'Not a penny,' replied the girl, waving her hand.

'Do not close your heart against all my efforts to help you,'

said Rose, stepping gently forward. 'I wish to serve you

indeed.'

'You would serve me best, lady,' replied the girl, wringing her

hands, 'if you could take my life at once; for I have felt more

grief to think of what I am, to-night, than I ever did before,

and it would be something not to die in the hell in which I have

lived. God bless you, sweet lady, and send as much happiness on

your head as I have brought shame on mine!'

Thus speaking, and sobbing aloud, the unhappy creature turned

away; while Rose Maylie, overpowered by this extraordinary

interview, which had more the semblance of a rapid dream than an

actual occurrence, sank into a chair, and endeavoured to collect

her wandering thoughts.

CHAPTER XLI

CONTAINING FRESH DISCOVERIES, AND SHOWING THAT SUPRISES, LIKE

MISFORTUNES, SELDOM COME ALONE

Her situation was, indeed, one of no common trial and difficulty.

While she felt the most eager and burning desire to penetrate the

mystery in which Oliver's history was enveloped, she could not

but hold sacred the confidence which the miserable woman with

whom she had just conversed, had reposed in her, as a young and

guileless girl. Her words and manner had touched Rose Maylie's

heart; and, mingled with her love for her young charge, and

scarcely less intense in its truth and fervour, was her fond wish

to win the outcast back to repentance and hope.

They purposed remaining in London only three days, prior to

departing for some weeks to a distant part of the coast. It was

now midnight of the first day. What course of action could she

determine upon, which could be adopted in eight-and-forty hours?

Or how could she postpone the journey without exciting suspicion?

Mr. Losberne was with them, and would be for the next two days;

but Rose was too well acquainted with the excellent gentleman's

impetuosity, and foresaw too clearly the wrath with which, in the

first explosion of his indignation, he would regard the

instrument of Oliver's recapture, to trust him with the secret,

when her representations in the girl's behalf could be seconded

by no experienced person. These were all reasons for the

greatest caution and most circumspect behaviour in communicating

it to Mrs. Maylie, whose first impulse would infallibly be to

hold a conference with the worthy doctor on the subject. As to

resorting to any legal adviser, even if she had known how to do

so, it was scarcely to be thought of, for the same reason. Once

the thought occurred to her of seeking assistance from Harry; but

this awakened the recollection of their last parting, and it

seemed unworthy of her to call him back, when--the tears rose to

her eyes as she pursued this train of reflection--he might have

by this time learnt to forget her, and to be happier away.

Disturbed by these different reflections; inclining now to one

course and then to another, and again recoiling from all, as each

successive consideration presented itself to her mind; Rose

passed a sleepless and anxious night. After more communing with

herself next day, she arrived at the desperate conclusion of

consulting Harry.

'If it be painful to him,' she thought, 'to come back here, how

painful it will be to me! But perhaps he will not come; he may

write, or he may come himself, and studiously abstain from

meeting me--he did when he went away. I hardly thought he would;

but it was better for us both.' And here Rose dropped the pen,

and turned away, as though the very paper which was to be her

messenger should not see her weep.

She had taken up the same pen, and laid it down again fifty

times, and had considered and reconsidered the first line of her

letter without writing the first word, when Oliver, who had been

walking in the streets, with Mr. Giles for a body-guard, entered

the room in such breathless haste and violent agitation, as

seemed to betoken some new cause of alarm.

'What makes you look so flurried?' asked Rose, advancing to meet

him.

'I hardly know how; I feel as if I should be choked,' replied the

boy. 'Oh dear! To think that I should see him at last, and you

should be able to know that I have told you the truth!'

'I never thought you had told us anything but the truth,' said

Rose, soothing him. 'But what is this?--of whom do you speak?'

'I have seen the gentleman,' replied Oliver, scarcely able to

articulate, 'the gentleman who was so good to me--Mr. Brownlow,

that we have so often talked about.'

'Where?' asked Rose.

'Getting out of a coach,' replied Oliver, shedding tears of

delight, 'and going into a house. I didn't speak to him--I

couldn't speak to him, for he didn't see me, and I trembled so,

that I was not able to go up to him. But Giles asked, for me,

whether he lived there, and they said he did. Look here,' said

Oliver, opening a scrap of paper, 'here it is; here's where he

lives--I'm going there directly! Oh, dear me, dear me! What

shall I do when I come to see him and hear him speak again!'

With her attention not a little distracted by these and a great

many other incoherent exclamations of joy, Rose read the address,

which was Craven Street, in the Strand. She very soon determined

upon turning the discovery to account.

'Quick!' she said. 'Tell them to fetch a hackney-coach, and be

ready to go with me. I will take you there directly, without a

minute's loss of time. I will only tell my aunt that we are

going out for an hour, and be ready as soon as you are.'

Oliver needed no prompting to despatch, and in little more than

five minutes they were on their way to Craven Street. When they

arrived there, Rose left Oliver in the coach, under pretence of

preparing the old gentleman to receive him; and sending up her

card by the servant, requested to see Mr. Brownlow on very

pressing business. The servant soon returned, to beg that she

would walk upstairs; and following him into an upper room, Miss

Maylie was presented to an elderly gentleman of benevolent

appearance, in a bottle-green coat. At no great distance from

whom, was seated another old gentleman, in nankeen breeches and

gaiters; who did not look particularly benevolent, and who was

sitting with his hands clasped on the top of a thick stick, and

his chin propped thereupon.

'Dear me,' said the gentleman, in the bottle-green coat, hastily

rising with great politeness, 'I beg your pardon, young lady--I

imagined it was some importunate person who--I beg you will

excuse me. Be seated, pray.'

'Mr. Brownlow, I believe, sir?' said Rose, glancing from the

other gentleman to the one who had spoken.

'That is my name,' said the old gentleman. 'This is my friend,

Mr. Grimwig. Grimwig, will you leave us for a few minutes?'

'I believe,' interposed Miss Maylie, 'that at this period of our

interview, I need not give that gentleman the trouble of going

away. If I am correctly informed, he is cognizant of the

business on which I wish to speak to you.'

Mr. Brownlow inclined his head. Mr. Grimwig, who had made one

very stiff bow, and risen from his chair, made another very stiff

bow, and dropped into it again.

'I shall surprise you very much, I have no doubt,' said Rose,

naturally embarrassed; 'but you once showed great benevolence and

goodness to a very dear young friend of mine, and I am sure you

will take an interest in hearing of him again.'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Brownlow.

'Oliver Twist you knew him as,' replied Rose.

The words no sooner escaped her lips, than Mr. Grimwig, who had

been affecting to dip into a large book that lay on the table,

upset it with a great crash, and falling back in his chair,

discharged from his features every expression but one of

unmitigated wonder, and indulged in a prolonged and vacant stare;

then, as if ashamed of having betrayed so much emotion, he jerked

himself, as it were, by a convulsion into his former attitude,

and looking out straight before him emitted a long deep whistle,

which seemed, at last, not to be discharged on empty air, but to

die away in the innermost recesses of his stomach.

Mr. Browlow was no less surprised, although his astonishment was

not expressed in the same eccentric manner. He drew his chair

nearer to Miss Maylie's, and said,

'Do me the favour, my dear young lady, to leave entirely out of

the question that goodness and benevolence of which you speak,

and of which nobody else knows anything; and if you have it in

your power to produce any evidence which will alter the

unfavourable opinion I was once induced to entertain of that poor

child, in Heaven's name put me in possession of it.'

'A bad one! I'll eat my head if he is not a bad one,' growled

Mr. Grimwig, speaking by some ventriloquial power, without moving

a muscle of his face.

'He is a child of a noble nature and a warm heart,' said Rose,

colouring; 'and that Power which has thought fit to try him

beyond his years, has planted in his breast affections and

feelings which would do honour to many who have numbered his days

six times over.'

'I'm only sixty-one,' said Mr. Grimwig, with the same rigid face.

'And, as the devil's in it if this Oliver is not twelve years old

at least, I don't see the application of that remark.'

'Do not heed my friend, Miss Maylie,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'he does

not mean what he says.'

'Yes, he does,' growled Mr. Grimwig.

'No, he does not,' said Mr. Brownlow, obviously rising in wrath

as he spoke.

'He'll eat his head, if he doesn't,' growled Mr. Grimwig.

'He would deserve to have it knocked off, if he does,' said Mr.

Brownlow.

'And he'd uncommonly like to see any man offer to do it,'

responded Mr. Grimwig, knocking his stick upon the floor.

Having gone thus far, the two old gentlemen severally took snuff,

and afterwards shook hands, according to their invariable custom.

'Now, Miss Maylie,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'to return to the subject

in which your humanity is so much interested. Will you let me

know what intelligence you have of this poor child: allowing me

to promise that I exhausted every means in my power of

discovering him, and that since I have been absent from this

country, my first impression that he had imposed upon me, and had

been persuaded by his former associates to rob me, has been

considerably shaken.'

Rose, who had had time to collect her thoughts, at once related,

in a few natural words, all that had befallen Oliver since he

left Mr. Brownlow's house; reserving Nancy's information for that

gentleman's private ear, and concluding with the assurance that

his only sorrow, for some months past, had been not being able to

meet with his former benefactor and friend.

'Thank God!' said the old gentleman. 'This is great happiness to

me, great happiness. But you have not told me where he is now,

Miss Maylie. You must pardon my finding fault with you,--but why

not have brought him?'

'He is waiting in a coach at the door,' replied Rose.

'At this door!' cried the old gentleman. With which he hurried

out of the room, down the stairs, up the coachsteps, and into the

coach, without another word.

When the room-door closed behind him, Mr. Grimwig lifted up his

head, and converting one of the hind legs of his chair into a

pivot, described three distinct circles with the assistance of

his stick and the table; sitting in it all the time. After

performing this evolution, he rose and limped as fast as he could

up and down the room at least a dozen times, and then stopping

suddenly before Rose, kissed her without the slightest preface.

'Hush!' he said, as the young lady rose in some alarm at this

unusual proceeding. 'Don't be afraid. I'm old enough to be your

grandfather. You're a sweet girl. I like you. Here they are!'

In fact, as he threw himself at one dexterous dive into his

former seat, Mr. Brownlow returned, accompanied by Oliver, whom

Mr. Grimwig received very graciously; and if the gratification of

that moment had been the only reward for all her anxiety and care

in Oliver's behalf, Rose Maylie would have been well repaid.

'There is somebody else who should not be forgotten, by the bye,'

said Mr. Brownlow, ringing the bell. 'Send Mrs. Bedwin here, if

you please.'

The old housekeeper answered the summons with all dispatch; and

dropping a curtsey at the door, waited for orders.

'Why, you get blinder every day, Bedwin,' said Mr. Brownlow,

rather testily.

'Well, that I do, sir,' replied the old lady. 'People's eyes, at

my time of life, don't improve with age, sir.'

'I could have told you that,' rejoined Mr. Brownlow; 'but put on

your glasses, and see if you can't find out what you were wanted

for, will you?'

The old lady began to rummage in her pocket for her spectacles.

But Oliver's patience was not proof against this new trial; and

yielding to his first impulse, he sprang into her arms.

'God be good to me!' cried the old lady, embracing him; 'it is my

innocent boy!'

'My dear old nurse!' cried Oliver.

'He would come back--I knew he would,' said the old lady, holding

him in her arms. 'How well he looks, and how like a gentleman's

son he is dressed again! Where have you been, this long, long

while? Ah! the same sweet face, but not so pale; the same soft

eye, but not so sad. I have never forgotten them or his quiet

smile, but have seen them every day, side by side with those of

my own dear children, dead and gone since I was a lightsome young

creature.' Running on thus, and now holding Oliver from her to

mark how he had grown, now clasping him to her and passing her

fingers fondly through his hair, the good soul laughed and wept

upon his neck by turns.

Leaving her and Oliver to compare notes at leisure, Mr. Brownlow

led the way into another room; and there, heard from Rose a full

narration of her interview with Nancy, which occasioned him no

little surprise and perplexity. Rose also explained her reasons

for not confiding in her friend Mr. Losberne in the first

instance. The old gentleman considered that she had acted

prudently, and readily undertook to hold solemn conference with

the worthy doctor himself. To afford him an early opportunity

for the execution of this design, it was arranged that he should

call at the hotel at eight o'clock that evening, and that in the

meantime Mrs. Maylie should be cautiously informed of all that

had occurred. These preliminaries adjusted, Rose and Oliver

returned home.

Rose had by no means overrated the measure of the good doctor's

wrath. Nancy's history was no sooner unfolded to him, than he

poured forth a shower of mingled threats and execrations;

threatened to make her the first victim of the combined ingenuity

of Messrs. Blathers and Duff; and actually put on his hat

preparatory to sallying forth to obtain the assistance of those

worthies. And, doubtless, he would, in this first outbreak, have

carried the intention into effect without a moment's

consideration of the consequences, if he had not been restrained,

in part, by corresponding violence on the side of Mr. Brownlow,

who was himself of an irascible temperament, and party by such

arguments and representations as seemed best calculated to

dissuade him from his hotbrained purpose.

'Then what the devil is to be done?' said the impetuous doctor,

when they had rejoined the two ladies. 'Are we to pass a vote of

thanks to all these vagabonds, male and female, and beg them to

accept a hundred pounds, or so, apiece, as a trifling mark of our

esteem, and some slight acknowledgment of their kindness to

Oliver?'

'Not exactly that,' rejoined Mr. Brownlow, laughing; 'but we must

proceed gently and with great care.'

'Gentleness and care,' exclaimed the doctor. 'I'd send them one

and all to--'

'Never mind where,' interposed Mr. Brownlow. 'But reflect

whether sending them anywhere is likely to attain the object we

have in view.'

'What object?' asked the doctor.

'Simply, the discovery of Oliver's parentage, and regaining for

him the inheritance of which, if this story be true, he has been

fraudulently deprived.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Losberne, cooling himself with his

pocket-handkerchief; 'I almost forgot that.'

'You see,' pursued Mr. Brownlow; 'placing this poor girl entirely

out of the question, and supposing it were possible to bring

these scoundrels to justice without compromising her safety, what

good should we bring about?'

'Hanging a few of them at least, in all probability,' suggested

the doctor, 'and transporting the rest.'

'Very good,' replied Mr. Brownlow, smiling; 'but no doubt they

will bring that about for themselves in the fulness of time, and

if we step in to forestall them, it seems to me that we shall be

performing a very Quixotic act, in direct opposition to our own

interest--or at least to Oliver's, which is the same thing.'

'How?' inquired the doctor.

'Thus. It is quite clear that we shall have extreme difficulty

in getting to the bottom of this mystery, unless we can bring

this man, Monks, upon his knees. That can only be done by

stratagem, and by catching him when he is not surrounded by these

people. For, suppose he were apprehended, we have no proof

against him. He is not even (so far as we know, or as the facts

appear to us) concerned with the gang in any of their robberies.

If he were not discharged, it is very unlikely that he could

receive any further punishment than being committed to prison as

a rogue and vagabond; and of course ever afterwards his mouth

would be so obstinately closed that he might as well, for our

purposes, be deaf, dumb, blind, and an idiot.'

'Then,' said the doctor impetuously, 'I put it to you again,

whether you think it reasonable that this promise to the girl

should be considered binding; a promise made with the best and

kindest intentions, but really--'

'Do not discuss the point, my dear young lady, pray,' said Mr.

Brownlow, interrupting Rose as she was about to speak. 'The

promise shall be kept. I don't think it will, in the slightest

degree, interfere with our proceedings. But, before we can

resolve upon any precise course of action, it will be necessary

to see the girl; to ascertain from her whether she will point out

this Monks, on the understanding that he is to be dealt with by

us, and not by the law; or, if she will not, or cannot do that,

to procure from her such an account of his haunts and description

of his person, as will enable us to identify him. She cannot be

seen until next Sunday night; this is Tuesday. I would suggest

that in the meantime, we remain perfectly quiet, and keep these

matters secret even from Oliver himself.'

Although Mr. Losberne received with many wry faces a proposal

involving a delay of five whole days, he was fain to admit that

no better course occurred to him just then; and as both Rose and

Mrs. Maylie sided very strongly with Mr. Brownlow, that

gentleman's proposition was carried unanimously.

'I should like,' he said, 'to call in the aid of my friend

Grimwig. He is a strange creature, but a shrewd one, and might

prove of material assistance to us; I should say that he was bred

a lawyer, and quitted the Bar in disgust because he had only one

brief and a motion of course, in twenty years, though whether

that is recommendation or not, you must determine for

yourselves.'

'I have no objection to your calling in your friend if I may call

in mine,' said the doctor.

'We must put it to the vote,' replied Mr. Brownlow, 'who may he

be?'

'That lady's son, and this young lady's--very old friend,' said

the doctor, motioning towards Mrs. Maylie, and concluding with an

expressive glance at her niece.

Rose blushed deeply, but she did not make any audible objection

to this motion (possibly she felt in a hopeless minority); and

Harry Maylie and Mr. Grimwig were accordingly added to the

committee.

'We stay in town, of course,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'while there

remains the slightest prospect of prosecuting this inquiry with a

chance of success. I will spare neither trouble nor expense in

behalf of the object in which we are all so deeply interested,

and I am content to remain here, if it be for twelve months, so

long as you assure me that any hope remains.'

'Good!' rejoined Mr. Brownlow. 'And as I see on the faces about

me, a disposition to inquire how it happened that I was not in

the way to corroborate Oliver's tale, and had so suddenly left

the kingdom, let me stipulate that I shall be asked no questions

until such time as I may deem it expedient to forestall them by

telling my own story. Believe me, I make this request with good

reason, for I might otherwise excite hopes destined never to be

realised, and only increase difficulties and disappointments

already quite numerous enough. Come! Supper has been announced,

and young Oliver, who is all alone in the next room, will have

begun to think, by this time, that we have wearied of his

company, and entered into some dark conspiracy to thrust him

forth upon the world.'

With these words, the old gentleman gave his hand to Mrs. Maylie,

and escorted her into the supper-room. Mr. Losberne followed,

leading Rose; and the council was, for the present, effectually

broken up.

CHAPTER XLII

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE OF OLIVER'S, EXHIBITING DECIDED MARKS OF

GENIUS, BECOMES A PUBLIC CHARACTER IN THE METROPOLIS

Upon the night when Nancy, having lulled Mr. Sikes to sleep,

hurried on her self-imposed mission to Rose Maylie, there

advanced towards London, by the Great North Road, two persons,

upon whom it is expedient that this history should bestow some

attention.

They were a man and woman; or perhaps they would be better

described as a male and female: for the former was one of those

long-limbed, knock-kneed, shambling, bony people, to whom it is

difficult to assign any precise age,--looking as they do, when

they are yet boys, like undergrown men, and when they are almost

men, like overgrown boys. The woman was young, but of a robust

and hardy make, as she need have been to bear the weight of the

heavy bundle which was strapped to her back. Her companion was

not encumbered with much luggage, as there merely dangled from a

stick which he carried over his shoulder, a small parcel wrapped

in a common handkerchief, and apparently light enough. This

circumstance, added to the length of his legs, which were of

unusual extent, enabled him with much ease to keep some

half-dozen paces in advance of his companion, to whom he

occasionally turned with an impatient jerk of the head: as if

reproaching her tardiness, and urging her to greater exertion.

Thus, they had toiled along the dusty road, taking little heed of

any object within sight, save when they stepped aside to allow a

wider passage for the mail-coaches which were whirling out of

town, until they passed through Highgate archway; when the

foremost traveller stopped and called impatiently to his

companion,

'Come on, can't yer? What a lazybones yer are, Charlotte.'

'It's a heavy load, I can tell you,' said the female, coming up,

almost breathless with fatigue.

'Heavy! What are yer talking about? What are yer made for?'

rejoined the male traveller, changing his own little bundle as he

spoke, to the other shoulder. 'Oh, there yer are, resting again!

Well, if yer ain't enough to tire anybody's patience out, I don't

know what is!'

'Is it much farther?' asked the woman, resting herself against a

bank, and looking up with the perspiration streaming from her

face.

'Much farther! Yer as good as there,' said the long-legged

tramper, pointing out before him. 'Look there! Those are the

lights of London.'

'They're a good two mile off, at least,' said the woman

despondingly.

'Never mind whether they're two mile off, or twenty,' said Noah

Claypole; for he it was; 'but get up and come on, or I'll kick

yer, and so I give yer notice.'

As Noah's red nose grew redder with anger, and as he crossed the

road while speaking, as if fully prepared to put his threat into

execution, the woman rose without any further remark, and trudged

onward by his side.

'Where do you mean to stop for the night, Noah?' she asked, after

they had walked a few hundred yards.

'How should I know?' replied Noah, whose temper had been

considerably impaired by walking.

'Near, I hope,' said Charlotte.

'No, not near,' replied Mr. Claypole. 'There! Not near; so

don't think it.'

'Why not?'

'When I tell yer that I don't mean to do a thing, that's enough,

without any why or because either,' replied Mr. Claypole with

dignity.

'Well, you needn't be so cross,' said his companion.

'A pretty thing it would be, wouldn't it to go and stop at the

very first public-house outside the town, so that Sowerberry, if

he come up after us, might poke in his old nose, and have us

taken back in a cart with handcuffs on,' said Mr. Claypole in a

jeering tone. 'No! I shall go and lose myself among the

narrowest streets I can find, and not stop till we come to the

very out-of-the-wayest house I can set eyes on. 'Cod, yer may

thanks yer stars I've got a head; for if we hadn't gone, at

first, the wrong road a purpose, and come back across country,

yer'd have been locked up hard and fast a week ago, my lady. And

serve yer right for being a fool.'

'I know I ain't as cunning as you are,' replied Charlotte; 'but

don't put all the blame on me, and say I should have been locked

up. You would have been if I had been, any way.'

'Yer took the money from the till, yer know yer did,' said Mr.

Claypole.

'I took it for you, Noah, dear,' rejoined Charlotte.

'Did I keep it?' asked Mr. Claypole.

'No; you trusted in me, and let me carry it like a dear, and so

you are,' said the lady, chucking him under the chin, and drawing

her arm through his.

This was indeed the case; but as it was not Mr. Claypole's habit

to repose a blind and foolish confidence in anybody, it should be

observed, in justice to that gentleman, that he had trusted

Charlotte to this extent, in order that, if they were pursued,

the money might be found on her: which would leave him an

opportunity of asserting his innocence of any theft, and would

greatly facilitate his chances of escape. Of course, he entered

at this juncture, into no explanation of his motives, and they

walked on very lovingly together.

In pursuance of this cautious plan, Mr. Claypole went on, without

halting, until he arrived at the Angel at Islington, where he

wisely judged, from the crowd of passengers and numbers of

vehicles, that London began in earnest. Just pausing to observe

which appeared the most crowded streets, and consequently the

most to be avoided, he crossed into Saint John's Road, and was

soon deep in the obscurity of the intricate and dirty ways,

which, lying between Gray's Inn Lane and Smithfield, render that

part of the town one of the lowest and worst that improvement has

left in the midst of London.

Through these streets, Noah Claypole walked, dragging Charlotte

after him; now stepping into the kennel to embrace at a glance

the whole external character of some small public-house; now

jogging on again, as some fancied appearance induced him to

believe it too public for his purpose. At length, he stopped in

front of one, more humble in appearance and more dirty than any

he had yet seen; and, having crossed over and surveyed it from

the opposite pavement, graciously announced his intention of

putting up there, for the night.

'So give us the bundle,' said Noah, unstrapping it from the

woman's shoulders, and slinging it over his own; 'and don't yer

speak, except when yer spoke to. What's the name of the

house--t-h-r--three what?'

'Cripples,' said Charlotte.

'Three Cripples,' repeated Noah, 'and a very good sign too. Now,

then! Keep close at my heels, and come along.' With these

injunctions, he pushed the rattling door with his shoulder, and

entered the house, followed by his companion.

There was nobody in the bar but a young Jew, who, with his two

elbows on the counter, was reading a dirty newspaper. He stared

very hard at Noah, and Noah stared very hard at him.

If Noah had been attired in his charity-boy's dress, there might

have been some reason for the Jew opening his eyes so wide; but

as he had discarded the coat and badge, and wore a short

smock-frock over his leathers, there seemed no particular reason

for his appearance exciting so much attention in a public-house.

'Is this the Three Cripples?' asked Noah.

'That is the dabe of this 'ouse,' replied the Jew.

'A gentleman we met on the road, coming up from the country,

recommended us here,' said Noah, nudging Charlotte, perhaps to

call her attention to this most ingenious device for attracting

respect, and perhaps to warn her to betray no surprise. 'We want

to sleep here to-night.'

'I'b dot certaid you cad,' said Barney, who was the attendant

sprite; 'but I'll idquire.'

'Show us the tap, and give us a bit of cold meat and a drop of

beer while yer inquiring, will yer?' said Noah.

Barney complied by ushering them into a small back-room, and

setting the required viands before them; having done which, he

informed the travellers that they could be lodged that night, and

left the amiable couple to their refreshment.

Now, this back-room was immediately behind the bar, and some

steps lower, so that any person connected with the house,

undrawing a small curtain which concealed a single pane of glass

fixed in the wall of the last-named apartment, about five feet

from its flooring, could not only look down upon any guests in

the back-room without any great hazard of being observed (the

glass being in a dark angle of the wall, between which and a

large upright beam the observer had to thrust himself), but

could, by applying his ear to the partition, ascertain with

tolerable distinctness, their subject of conversation. The

landlord of the house had not withdrawn his eye from this place

of espial for five minutes, and Barney had only just returned

from making the communication above related, when Fagin, in the

course of his evening's business, came into the bar to inquire

after some of his young pupils.

'Hush!' said Barney: 'stradegers id the next roob.'

'Strangers!' repeated the old man in a whisper.

'Ah! Ad rub uds too,' added Barney. 'Frob the cuttry, but

subthig in your way, or I'b bistaked.'

Fagin appeared to receive this communication with great interest.

Mounting a stool, he cautiously applied his eye to the pane of

glass, from which secret post he could see Mr. Claypole taking

cold beef from the dish, and porter from the pot, and

administering homeopathic doses of both to Charlotte, who sat

patiently by, eating and drinking at his pleasure.

'Aha!' he whispered, looking round to Barney, 'I like that

fellow's looks. He'd be of use to us; he knows how to train the

girl already. Don't make as much noise as a mouse, my dear, and

let me hear 'em talk--let me hear 'em.'

He again applied his eye to the glass, and turning his ear to the

partition, listened attentively: with a subtle and eager look

upon his face, that might have appertained to some old goblin.

'So I mean to be a gentleman,' said Mr. Claypole, kicking out his

legs, and continuing a conversation, the commencement of which

Fagin had arrived too late to hear. 'No more jolly old coffins,

Charlotte, but a gentleman's life for me: and, if yer like, yer

shall be a lady.'

'I should like that well enough, dear,' replied Charlotte; 'but

tills ain't to be emptied every day, and people to get clear off

after it.'

'Tills be blowed!' said Mr. Claypole; 'there's more things

besides tills to be emptied.'

'What do you mean?' asked his companion.

'Pockets, women's ridicules, houses, mail-coaches, banks!' said

Mr. Claypole, rising with the porter.

'But you can't do all that, dear,' said Charlotte.

'I shall look out to get into company with them as can,' replied

Noah. 'They'll be able to make us useful some way or another.

Why, you yourself are worth fifty women; I never see such a

precious sly and deceitful creetur as yer can be when I let yer.'

'Lor, how nice it is to hear yer say so!' exclaimed Charlotte,

imprinting a kiss upon his ugly face.

'There, that'll do: don't yer be too affectionate, in case I'm

cross with yer,' said Noah, disengaging himself with great

gravity. 'I should like to be the captain of some band, and have

the whopping of 'em, and follering 'em about, unbeknown to

themselves. That would suit me, if there was good profit; and if

we could only get in with some gentleman of this sort, I say it

would be cheap at that twenty-pound note you've got,--especially

as we don't very well know how to get rid of it ourselves.'

After expressing this opinion, Mr. Claypole looked into the

porter-pot with an aspect of deep wisdom; and having well shaken

its contents, nodded condescendingly to Charlotte, and took a

draught, wherewith he appeared greatly refreshed. He was

meditating another, when the sudden opening of the door, and the

appearance of a stranger, interrupted him.

The stranger was Mr. Fagin. And very amiable he looked, and a

very low bow he made, as he advanced, and setting himself down at

the nearest table, ordered something to drink of the grinning

Barney.

'A pleasant night, sir, but cool for the time of year,' said

Fagin, rubbing his hands. 'From the country, I see, sir?'

'How do yer see that?' asked Noah Claypole.

'We have not so much dust as that in London,' replied Fagin,

pointing from Noah's shoes to those of his companion, and from

them to the two bundles.

'Yer a sharp feller,' said Noah. 'Ha! ha! only hear that,

Charlotte!'

'Why, one need be sharp in this town, my dear,' replied the Jew,

sinking his voice to a confidential whisper; 'and that's the

truth.'

Fagin followed up this remark by striking the side of his nose

with his right forefinger,--a gesture which Noah attempted to

imitate, though not with complete success, in consequence of his

own nose not being large enough for the purpose. However, Mr.

Fagin seemed to interpret the endeavour as expressing a perfect

coincidence with his opinion, and put about the liquor which

Barney reappeared with, in a very friendly manner.

'Good stuff that,' observed Mr. Claypole, smacking his lips.

'Dear!' said Fagin. 'A man need be always emptying a till, or a

pocket, or a woman's reticule, or a house, or a mail-coach, or a

bank, if he drinks it regularly.'

Mr. Claypole no sooner heard this extract from his own remarks

than he fell back in his chair, and looked from the Jew to

Charlotte with a countenance of ashy paleness and excessive

terror.

'Don't mind me, my dear,' said Fagin, drawing his chair closer.

'Ha! ha! it was lucky it was only me that heard you by chance.

It was very lucky it was only me.'

'I didn't take it,' stammered Noah, no longer stretching out his

legs like an independent gentleman, but coiling them up as well

as he could under his chair; 'it was all her doing; yer've got it

now, Charlotte, yer know yer have.'

'No matter who's got it, or who did it, my dear,' replied Fagin,

glancing, nevertheless, with a hawk's eye at the girl and the two

bundles. 'I'm in that way myself, and I like you for it.'

'In what way?' asked Mr. Claypole, a little recovering.

'In that way of business,' rejoined Fagin; 'and so are the people

of the house. You've hit the right nail upon the head, and are

as safe here as you could be. There is not a safer place in all

this town than is the Cripples; that is, when I like to make it

so. And I have taken a fancy to you and the young woman; so I've

said the word, and you may make your minds easy.'

Noah Claypole's mind might have been at ease after this

assurance, but his body certainly was not; for he shuffled and

writhed about, into various uncouth positions: eyeing his new

friend meanwhile with mingled fear and suspicion.

'I'll tell you more,' said Fagin, after he had reassured the

girl, by dint of friendly nods and muttered encouragements. 'I

have got a friend that I think can gratify your darling wish, and

put you in the right way, where you can take whatever department

of the business you think will suit you best at first, and be

taught all the others.'

'Yer speak as if yer were in earnest,' replied Noah.

'What advantage would it be to me to be anything else?' inquired

Fagin, shrugging his shoulders. 'Here! Let me have a word with

you outside.'

'There's no occasion to trouble ourselves to move,' said Noah,

getting his legs by gradual degrees abroad again. 'She'll take

the luggage upstairs the while. Charlotte, see to them bundles.'

This mandate, which had been delivered with great majesty, was

obeyed without the slightest demur; and Charlotte made the best

of her way off with the packages while Noah held the door open

and watched her out.

'She's kept tolerably well under, ain't she?' he asked as he

resumed his seat: in the tone of a keeper who had tamed some

wild animal.

'Quite perfect,' rejoined Fagin, clapping him on the shoulder.

'You're a genius, my dear.'

'Why, I suppose if I wasn't, I shouldn't be here,' replied Noah.

'But, I say, she'll be back if yer lose time.'

'Now, what do you think?' said Fagin. 'If you was to like my

friend, could you do better than join him?'

'Is he in a good way of business; that's where it is!' responded

Noah, winking one of his little eyes.

'The top of the tree; employs a power of hands; has the very best

society in the profession.'

'Regular town-maders?' asked Mr. Claypole.

'Not a countryman among 'em; and I don't think he'd take you,

even on my recommendation, if he didn't run rather short of

assistants just now,' replied Fagin.

'Should I have to hand over?' said Noah, slapping his

breeches-pocket.

'It couldn't possibly be done without,' replied Fagin, in a most

decided manner.

'Twenty pound, though--it's a lot of money!'

'Not when it's in a note you can't get rid of,' retorted Fagin.

'Number and date taken, I suppose? Payment stopped at the Bank?

Ah! It's not worth much to him. It'll have to go abroad, and he

couldn't sell it for a great deal in the market.'

'When could I see him?' asked Noah doubtfully.

'To-morrow morning.'

'Where?'

'Here.'

'Um!' said Noah. 'What's the wages?'

'Live like a gentleman--board and lodging, pipes and spirits

free--half of all you earn, and half of all the young woman

earns,' replied Mr. Fagin.

Whether Noah Claypole, whose rapacity was none of the least

comprehensive, would have acceded even to these glowing terms,

had he been a perfectly free agent, is very doubtful; but as he

recollected that, in the event of his refusal, it was in the

power of his new acquaintance to give him up to justice

immediately (and more unlikely things had come to pass), he

gradually relented, and said he thought that would suit him.

'But, yer see,' observed Noah, 'as she will be able to do a good

deal, I should like to take something very light.'

'A little fancy work?' suggested Fagin.

'Ah! something of that sort,' replied Noah. 'What do you think

would suit me now? Something not too trying for the strength,

and not very dangerous, you know. That's the sort of thing!'

'I heard you talk of something in the spy way upon the others, my

dear,' said Fagin. 'My friend wants somebody who would do that

well, very much.'

'Why, I did mention that, and I shouldn't mind turning my hand to

it sometimes,' rejoined Mr. Claypole slowly; 'but it wouldn't pay

by itself, you know.'

'That's true!' observed the Jew, ruminating or pretending to

ruminate. 'No, it might not.'

'What do you think, then?' asked Noah, anxiously regarding him.

'Something in the sneaking way, where it was pretty sure work,

and not much more risk than being at home.'

'What do you think of the old ladies?' asked Fagin. 'There's a

good deal of money made in snatching their bags and parcels, and

running round the corner.'

'Don't they holler out a good deal, and scratch sometimes?' asked

Noah, shaking his head. 'I don't think that would answer my

purpose. Ain't there any other line open?'

'Stop!' said Fagin, laying his hand on Noah's knee. 'The kinchin

lay.'

'What's that?' demanded Mr. Claypole.

'The kinchins, my dear,' said Fagin, 'is the young children

that's sent on errands by their mothers, with sixpences and

shillings; and the lay is just to take their money away--they've

always got it ready in their hands,--then knock 'em into the

kennel, and walk off very slow, as if there were nothing else the

matter but a child fallen down and hurt itself. Ha! ha! ha!'

'Ha! ha!' roared Mr. Claypole, kicking up his legs in an ecstasy.

'Lord, that's the very thing!'

'To be sure it is,' replied Fagin; 'and you can have a few good

beats chalked out in Camden Town, and Battle Bridge, and

neighborhoods like that, where they're always going errands; and

you can upset as many kinchins as you want, any hour in the day.

Ha! ha! ha!'

With this, Fagin poked Mr. Claypole in the side, and they joined

in a burst of laughter both long and loud.

'Well, that's all right!' said Noah, when he had recovered

himself, and Charlotte had returned. 'What time to-morrow shall

we say?'

'Will ten do?' asked Fagin, adding, as Mr. Claypole nodded

assent, 'What name shall I tell my good friend.'

'Mr. Bolter,' replied Noah, who had prepared himself for such

emergency. 'Mr. Morris Bolter. This is Mrs. Bolter.'

'Mrs. Bolter's humble servant,' said Fagin, bowing with grotesque

politeness. 'I hope I shall know her better very shortly.'

'Do you hear the gentleman, Charlotte?' thundered Mr. Claypole.

'Yes, Noah, dear!' replied Mrs. Bolter, extending her hand.

'She calls me Noah, as a sort of fond way of talking,' said Mr.

Morris Bolter, late Claypole, turning to Fagin. 'You

understand?'

'Oh yes, I understand--perfectly,' replied Fagin, telling the

truth for once. 'Good-night! Good-night!'

With many adieus and good wishes, Mr. Fagin went his way. Noah

Claypole, bespeaking his good lady's attention, proceeded to

enlighten her relative to the arrangement he had made, with all

that haughtiness and air of superiority, becoming, not only a

member of the sterner sex, but a gentleman who appreciated the

dignity of a special appointment on the kinchin lay, in London

and its vicinity.

CHAPTER XLIII

WHEREIN IS SHOWN HOW THE ARTFUL DODGER GOT INTO TROUBLE

'And so it was you that was your own friend, was it?' asked Mr.

Claypole, otherwise Bolter, when, by virtue of the compact

entered into between them, he had removed next day to Fagin's

house. ''Cod, I thought as much last night!'

'Every man's his own friend, my dear,' replied Fagin, with his

most insinuating grin. 'He hasn't as good a one as himself

anywhere.'

'Except sometimes,' replied Morris Bolter, assuming the air of a

man of the world. 'Some people are nobody's enemies but their

own, yer know.'

'Don't believe that,' said Fagin. 'When a man's his own enemy,

it's only because he's too much his own friend; not because he's

careful for everybody but himself. Pooh! pooh! There ain't such

a thing in nature.'

'There oughn't to be, if there is,' replied Mr. Bolter.

'That stands to reason. Some conjurers say that number three is

the magic number, and some say number seven. It's neither, my

friend, neither. It's number one.

'Ha! ha!' cried Mr. Bolter. 'Number one for ever.'

'In a little community like ours, my dear,' said Fagin, who felt

it necessary to qualify this position, 'we have a general number

one, without considering me too as the same, and all the other

young people.'

'Oh, the devil!' exclaimed Mr. Bolter.

'You see,' pursued Fagin, affecting to disregard this

interruption, 'we are so mixed up together, and identified in our

interests, that it must be so. For instance, it's your object to

take care of number one--meaning yourself.'

'Certainly,' replied Mr. Bolter. 'Yer about right there.'

'Well! You can't take care of yourself, number one, without

taking care of me, number one.'

'Number two, you mean,' said Mr. Bolter, who was largely endowed

with the quality of selfishness.

'No, I don't!' retorted Fagin. 'I'm of the same importance to

you, as you are to yourself.'

'I say,' interrupted Mr. Bolter, 'yer a very nice man, and I'm

very fond of yer; but we ain't quite so thick together, as all

that comes to.'

'Only think,' said Fagin, shrugging his shoulders, and stretching

out his hands; 'only consider. You've done what's a very pretty

thing, and what I love you for doing; but what at the same time

would put the cravat round your throat, that's so very easily

tied and so very difficult to unloose--in plain English, the

halter!'

Mr. Bolter put his hand to his neckerchief, as if he felt it

inconveniently tight; and murmured an assent, qualified in tone

but not in substance.

'The gallows,' continued Fagin, 'the gallows, my dear, is an ugly

finger-post, which points out a very short and sharp turning that

has stopped many a bold fellow's career on the broad highway. To

keep in the easy road, and keep it at a distance, is object

number one with you.'

'Of course it is,' replied Mr. Bolter. 'What do yer talk about

such things for?'

'Only to show you my meaning clearly,' said the Jew, raising his

eyebrows. 'To be able to do that, you depend upon me. To keep my

little business all snug, I depend upon you. The first is your

number one, the second my number one. The more you value your

number one, the more careful you must be of mine; so we come at

last to what I told you at first--that a regard for number one

holds us all together, and must do so, unless we would all go to

pieces in company.'

'That's true,' rejoined Mr. Bolter, thoughtfully. 'Oh! yer a

cunning old codger!'

Mr. Fagin saw, with delight, that this tribute to his powers was

no mere compliment, but that he had really impressed his recruit

with a sense of his wily genius, which it was most important that

he should entertain in the outset of their acquaintance. To

strengthen an impression so desirable and useful, he followed up

the blow by acquainting him, in some detail, with the magnitude

and extent of his operations; blending truth and fiction

together, as best served his purpose; and bringing both to bear,

with so much art, that Mr. Bolter's respect visibly increased,

and became tempered, at the same time, with a degree of wholesome

fear, which it was highly desirable to awaken.

'It's this mutual trust we have in each other that consoles me

under heavy losses,' said Fagin. 'My best hand was taken from

me, yesterday morning.'

'You don't mean to say he died?' cried Mr. Bolter.

'No, no,' replied Fagin, 'not so bad as that. Not quite so bad.'

'What, I suppose he was--'

'Wanted,' interposed Fagin. 'Yes, he was wanted.'

'Very particular?' inquired Mr. Bolter.

'No,' replied Fagin, 'not very. He was charged with attempting

to pick a pocket, and they found a silver snuff-box on him,--his

own, my dear, his own, for he took snuff himself, and was very

fond of it. They remanded him till to-day, for they thought they

knew the owner. Ah! he was worth fifty boxes, and I'd give the

price of as many to have him back. You should have known the

Dodger, my dear; you should have known the Dodger.'

'Well, but I shall know him, I hope; don't yer think so?' said

Mr. Bolter.

'I'm doubtful about it,' replied Fagin, with a sigh. 'If they

don't get any fresh evidence, it'll only be a summary conviction,

and we shall have him back again after six weeks or so; but, if

they do, it's a case of lagging. They know what a clever lad he

is; he'll be a lifer. They'll make the Artful nothing less than

a lifer.'

'What do you mean by lagging and a lifer?' demanded Mr. Bolter.

'What's the good of talking in that way to me; why don't yer

speak so as I can understand yer?'

Fagin was about to translate these mysterious expressions into

the vulgar tongue; and, being interpreted, Mr. Bolter would have

been informed that they represented that combination of words,

'transportation for life,' when the dialogue was cut short by the

entry of Master Bates, with his hands in his breeches-pockets,

and his face twisted into a look of semi-comical woe.

'It's all up, Fagin,' said Charley, when he and his new companion

had been made known to each other.

'What do you mean?'

'They've found the gentleman as owns the box; two or three more's

a coming to 'dentify him; and the Artful's booked for a passage

out,' replied Master Bates. 'I must have a full suit of

mourning, Fagin, and a hatband, to wisit him in, afore he sets

out upon his travels. To think of Jack Dawkins--lummy Jack--the

Dodger--the Artful Dodger--going abroad for a common

twopenny-halfpenny sneeze-box! I never thought he'd a done it

under a gold watch, chain, and seals, at the lowest. Oh, why

didn't he rob some rich old gentleman of all his walables, and go

out as a gentleman, and not like a common prig, without no honour

nor glory!'

With this expression of feeling for his unfortunate friend,

Master Bates sat himself on the nearest chair with an aspect of

chagrin and despondency.

'What do you talk about his having neither honour nor glory for!'

exclaimed Fagin, darting an angry look at his pupil. 'Wasn't he

always the top-sawyer among you all! Is there one of you that

could touch him or come near him on any scent! Eh?'

'Not one,' replied Master Bates, in a voice rendered husky by

regret; 'not one.'

'Then what do you talk of?' replied Fagin angrily; 'what are you

blubbering for?'

''Cause it isn't on the rec-ord, is it?' said Charley, chafed

into perfect defiance of his venerable friend by the current of

his regrets; ''cause it can't come out in the 'dictment; 'cause

nobody will never know half of what he was. How will he stand in

the Newgate Calendar? P'raps not be there at all. Oh, my eye,

my eye, wot a blow it is!'

'Ha! ha!' cried Fagin, extending his right hand, and turning to

Mr. Bolter in a fit of chuckling which shook him as though he had

the palsy; 'see what a pride they take in their profession, my

dear. Ain't it beautiful?'

Mr. Bolter nodded assent, and Fagin, after contemplating the

grief of Charley Bates for some seconds with evident

satisfaction, stepped up to that young gentleman and patted him

on the shoulder.

'Never mind, Charley,' said Fagin soothingly; 'it'll come out,

it'll be sure to come out. They'll all know what a clever fellow

he was; he'll show it himself, and not disgrace his old pals and

teachers. Think how young he is too! What a distinction,

Charley, to be lagged at his time of life!'

'Well, it is a honour that is!' said Charley, a little consoled.

'He shall have all he wants,' continued the Jew. 'He shall be

kept in the Stone Jug, Charley, like a gentleman. Like a

gentleman! With his beer every day, and money in his pocket to

pitch and toss with, if he can't spend it.'

'No, shall he though?' cried Charley Bates.

'Ay, that he shall,' replied Fagin, 'and we'll have a big-wig,

Charley: one that's got the greatest gift of the gab: to carry

on his defence; and he shall make a speech for himself too, if he

likes; and we'll read it all in the papers--"Artful

Dodger--shrieks of laughter--here the court was convulsed"--eh,

Charley, eh?'

'Ha! ha!' laughed Master Bates, 'what a lark that would be,

wouldn't it, Fagin? I say, how the Artful would bother 'em

wouldn't he?'

'Would!' cried Fagin. 'He shall--he will!'

'Ah, to be sure, so he will,' repeated Charley, rubbing his

hands.

'I think I see him now,' cried the Jew, bending his eyes upon his

pupil.

'So do I,' cried Charley Bates. 'Ha! ha! ha! so do I. I see it

all afore me, upon my soul I do, Fagin. What a game! What a

regular game! All the big-wigs trying to look solemn, and Jack

Dawkins addressing of 'em as intimate and comfortable as if he

was the judge's own son making a speech arter dinner--ha! ha!

ha!'

In fact, Mr. Fagin had so well humoured his young friend's

eccentric disposition, that Master Bates, who had at first been

disposed to consider the imprisoned Dodger rather in the light of

a victim, now looked upon him as the chief actor in a scene of

most uncommon and exquisite humour, and felt quite impatient for

the arrival of the time when his old companion should have so

favourable an opportunity of displaying his abilities.

'We must know how he gets on to-day, by some handy means or

other,' said Fagin. 'Let me think.'

'Shall I go?' asked Charley.

'Not for the world,' replied Fagin. 'Are you mad, my dear, stark

mad, that you'd walk into the very place where--No, Charley, no.

One is enough to lose at a time.'

'You don't mean to go yourself, I suppose?' said Charley with a

humorous leer.

'That wouldn't quite fit,' replied Fagin shaking his head.

'Then why don't you send this new cove?' asked Master Bates,

laying his hand on Noah's arm. 'Nobody knows him.'

'Why, if he didn't mind--' observed Fagin.

'Mind!' interposed Charley. 'What should he have to mind?'

'Really nothing, my dear,' said Fagin, turning to Mr. Bolter,

'really nothing.'

'Oh, I dare say about that, yer know,' observed Noah, backing

towards the door, and shaking his head with a kind of sober

alarm. 'No, no--none of that. It's not in my department, that

ain't.'

'Wot department has he got, Fagin?' inquired Master Bates,

surveying Noah's lank form with much disgust. 'The cutting away

when there's anything wrong, and the eating all the wittles when

there's everything right; is that his branch?'

'Never mind,' retorted Mr. Bolter; 'and don't yer take liberties

with yer superiors, little boy, or yer'll find yerself in the

wrong shop.'

Master Bates laughed so vehemently at this magnificent threat,

that it was some time before Fagin could interpose, and represent

to Mr. Bolter that he incurred no possible danger in visiting the

police-office; that, inasmuch as no account of the little affair

in which he had engaged, nor any description of his person, had

yet been forwarded to the metropolis, it was very probable that

he was not even suspected of having resorted to it for shelter;

and that, if he were properly disguised, it would be as safe a

spot for him to visit as any in London, inasmuch as it would be,

of all places, the very last, to which he could be supposed

likely to resort of his own free will.

Persuaded, in part, by these representations, but overborne in a

much greater degree by his fear of Fagin, Mr. Bolter at length

consented, with a very bad grace, to undertake the expedition.

By Fagin's directions, he immediately substituted for his own

attire, a waggoner's frock, velveteen breeches, and leather

leggings: all of which articles the Jew had at hand. He was

likewise furnished with a felt hat well garnished with turnpike

tickets; and a carter's whip. Thus equipped, he was to saunter

into the office, as some country fellow from Covent Garden market

might be supposed to do for the gratification of his curiousity;

and as he was as awkward, ungainly, and raw-boned a fellow as

need be, Mr. Fagin had no fear but that he would look the part to

perfection.

These arrangements completed, he was informed of the necessary

signs and tokens by which to recognise the Artful Dodger, and was

conveyed by Master Bates through dark and winding ways to within

a very short distance of Bow Street. Having described the precise

situation of the office, and accompanied it with copious

directions how he was to walk straight up the passage, and when

he got into the side, and pull off his hat as he went into the

room, Charley Bates bade him hurry on alone, and promised to bide

his return on the spot of their parting.

Noah Claypole, or Morris Bolter as the reader pleases, punctually

followed the directions he had received, which--Master Bates

being pretty well acquainted with the locality--were so exact

that he was enabled to gain the magisterial presence without

asking any question, or meeting with any interruption by the way.

He found himself jostled among a crowd of people, chiefly women,

who were huddled together in a dirty frowsy room, at the upper

end of which was a raised platform railed off from the rest, with

a dock for the prisoners on the left hand against the wall, a box

for the witnesses in the middle, and a desk for the magistrates

on the right; the awful locality last named, being screened off

by a partition which concealed the bench from the common gaze,

and left the vulgar to imagine (if they could) the full majesty

of justice.

There were only a couple of women in the dock, who were nodding

to their admiring friends, while the clerk read some depositions

to a couple of policemen and a man in plain clothes who leant

over the table. A jailer stood reclining against the dock-rail,

tapping his nose listlessly with a large key, except when he

repressed an undue tendency to conversation among the idlers, by

proclaiming silence; or looked sternly up to bid some woman 'Take

that baby out,' when the gravity of justice was disturbed by

feeble cries, half-smothered in the mother's shawl, from some

meagre infant. The room smelt close and unwholesome; the walls

were dirt-discoloured; and the ceiling blackened. There was an

old smoky bust over the mantel-shelf, and a dusty clock above the

dock--the only thing present, that seemed to go on as it ought;

for depravity, or poverty, or an habitual acquaintance with both,

had left a taint on all the animate matter, hardly less

unpleasant than the thick greasy scum on every inamimate object

that frowned upon it.

Noah looked eagerly about him for the Dodger; but although there

were several women who would have done very well for that

distinguished character's mother or sister, and more than one man

who might be supposed to bear a strong resemblance to his father,

nobody at all answering the description given him of Mr. Dawkins

was to be seen. He waited in a state of much suspense and

uncertainty until the women, being committed for trial, went

flaunting out; and then was quickly relieved by the appearance of

another prisoner who he felt at once could be no other than the

object of his visit.

It was indeed Mr. Dawkins, who, shuffling into the office with

the big coat sleeves tucked up as usual, his left hand in his

pocket, and his hat in his right hand, preceded the jailer, with

a rolling gait altogether indescribable, and, taking his place in

the dock, requested in an audible voice to know what he was

placed in that 'ere disgraceful sitivation for.

'Hold your tongue, will you?' said the jailer.

'I'm an Englishman, ain't I?' rejoined the Dodger. 'Where are my

priwileges?'

'You'll get your privileges soon enough,' retorted the jailer,

'and pepper with 'em.'

'We'll see wot the Secretary of State for the Home Affairs has

got to say to the beaks, if I don't,' replied Mr. Dawkins. 'Now

then! Wot is this here business? I shall thank the madg'strates

to dispose of this here little affair, and not to keep me while

they read the paper, for I've got an appointment with a genelman

in the City, and as I am a man of my word and wery punctual in

business matters, he'll go away if I ain't there to my time, and

then pr'aps ther won't be an action for damage against them as

kep me away. Oh no, certainly not!'

At this point, the Dodger, with a show of being very particular

with a view to proceedings to be had thereafter, desired the

jailer to communicate 'the names of them two files as was on the

bench.' Which so tickled the spectators, that they laughed

almost as heartily as Master Bates could have done if he had

heard the request.

'Silence there!' cried the jailer.

'What is this?' inquired one of the magistrates.

'A pick-pocketing case, your worship.'

'Has the boy ever been here before?'

'He ought to have been, a many times,' replied the jailer. 'He

has been pretty well everywhere else. \_I\_ know him well, your

worship.'

'Oh! you know me, do you?' cried the Artful, making a note of the

statement. 'Wery good. That's a case of deformation of

character, any way.'

Here there was another laugh, and another cry of silence.

'Now then, where are the witnesses?' said the clerk.

'Ah! that's right,' added the Dodger. 'Where are they? I should

like to see 'em.'

This wish was immediately gratified, for a policeman stepped

forward who had seen the prisoner attempt the pocket of an

unknown gentleman in a crowd, and indeed take a handkerchief

therefrom, which, being a very old one, he deliberately put back

again, after trying it on his own countenance. For this reason,

he took the Dodger into custody as soon as he could get near him,

and the said Dodger, being searched, had upon his person a silver

snuff-box, with the owner's name engraved upon the lid. This

gentleman had been discovered on reference to the Court Guide,

and being then and there present, swore that the snuff-box was

his, and that he had missed it on the previous day, the moment he

had disengaged himself from the crowd before referred to. He had

also remarked a young gentleman in the throng, particularly

active in making his way about, and that young gentleman was the

prisoner before him.

'Have you anything to ask this witness, boy?' said the

magistrate.

'I wouldn't abase myself by descending to hold no conversation

with him,' replied the Dodger.

'Have you anything to say at all?'

'Do you hear his worship ask if you've anything to say?' inquired

the jailer, nudging the silent Dodger with his elbow.

'I beg your pardon,' said the Dodger, looking up with an air of

abstraction. 'Did you redress yourself to me, my man?'

'I never see such an out-and-out young wagabond, your worship,'

observed the officer with a grin. 'Do you mean to say anything,

you young shaver?'

'No,' replied the Dodger, 'not here, for this ain't the shop for

justice: besides which, my attorney is a-breakfasting this

morning with the Wice President of the House of Commons; but I

shall have something to say elsewhere, and so will he, and so

will a wery numerous and 'spectable circle of acquaintance as'll

make them beaks wish they'd never been born, or that they'd got

their footmen to hang 'em up to their own hat-pegs, afore they

let 'em come out this morning to try it on upon me. I'll--'

'There! He's fully committed!' interposed the clerk. 'Take him

away.'

'Come on,' said the jailer.

'Oh ah! I'll come on,' replied the Dodger, brushing his hat with

the palm of his hand. 'Ah! (to the Bench) it's no use your

looking frightened; I won't show you no mercy, not a ha'porth of

it. \_You'll\_ pay for this, my fine fellers. I wouldn't be you for

something! I wouldn't go free, now, if you was to fall down on

your knees and ask me. Here, carry me off to prison! Take me

away!'

With these last words, the Dodger suffered himself to be led off

by the collar; threatening, till he got into the yard, to make a

parliamentary business of it; and then grinning in the officer's

face, with great glee and self-approval.

Having seen him locked up by himself in a little cell, Noah made

the best of his way back to where he had left Master Bates.

After waiting here some time, he was joined by that young

gentleman, who had prudently abstained from showing himself until

he had looked carefully abroad from a snug retreat, and

ascertained that his new friend had not been followed by any

impertinent person.

The two hastened back together, to bear to Mr. Fagin the

animating news that the Dodger was doing full justice to his

bringing-up, and establishing for himself a glorious reputation.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE TIME ARRIVES FOR NANCY TO REDEEM HER PLEDGE TO ROSE MAYLIE.

SHE FAILS.

Adept as she was, in all the arts of cunning and dissimulation,

the girl Nancy could not wholly conceal the effect which the

knowledge of the step she had taken, wrought upon her mind. She

remembered that both the crafty Jew and the brutal Sikes had

confided to her schemes, which had been hidden from all others:

in the full confidence that she was trustworthy and beyond the

reach of their suspicion. Vile as those schemes were, desperate

as were their originators, and bitter as were her feelings

towards Fagin, who had led her, step by step, deeper and deeper

down into an abyss of crime and misery, whence was no escape;

still, there were times when, even towards him, she felt some

relenting, lest her disclosure should bring him within the iron

grasp he had so long eluded, and he should fall at last--richly

as he merited such a fate--by her hand.

But, these were the mere wanderings of a mind unable wholly to detach

itself from old companions and associations, though enabled to

fix itself steadily on one object, and resolved not to be turned

aside by any consideration. Her fears for Sikes would have been

more powerful inducements to recoil while there was yet time; but

she had stipulated that her secret should be rigidly kept, she

had dropped no clue which could lead to his discovery, she had

refused, even for his sake, a refuge from all the guilt and

wretchedness that encompasses her--and what more could she do!

She was resolved.

Though all her mental struggles terminated in this conclusion,

they forced themselves upon her, again and again, and left their

traces too. She grew pale and thin, even within a few days. At

times, she took no heed of what was passing before her, or no

part in conversations where once, she would have been the

loudest. At other times, she laughed without merriment, and was

noisy without a moment afterwards--she sat silent and dejected,

brooding with her head upon her hands, while the very effort by

which she roused herself, told, more forcibly than even these

indications, that she was ill at ease, and that her thoughts were

occupied with matters very different and distant from those in

the course of discussion by her companions.

It was Sunday night, and the bell of the nearest church struck

the hour. Sikes and the Jew were talking, but they paused to

listen. The girl looked up from the low seat on which she

crouched, and listened too. Eleven.

'An hour this side of midnight,' said Sikes, raising the blind to

look out and returning to his seat. 'Dark and heavy it is too.

A good night for business this.'

'Ah!' replied Fagin. 'What a pity, Bill, my dear, that there's

none quite ready to be done.'

'You're right for once,' replied Sikes gruffly. 'It is a pity,

for I'm in the humour too.'

Fagin sighed, and shook his head despondingly.

'We must make up for lost time when we've got things into a good

train. That's all I know,' said Sikes.

'That's the way to talk, my dear,' replied Fagin, venturing to

pat him on the shoulder. 'It does me good to hear you.'

'Does you good, does it!' cried Sikes. 'Well, so be it.'

'Ha! ha! ha!' laughed Fagin, as if he were relieved by even this

concession. 'You're like yourself to-night, Bill. Quite like

yourself.'

'I don't feel like myself when you lay that withered old claw on

my shoulder, so take it away,' said Sikes, casting off the Jew's

hand.

'It make you nervous, Bill,--reminds you of being nabbed, does

it?' said Fagin, determined not to be offended.

'Reminds me of being nabbed by the devil,' returned Sikes. 'There

never was another man with such a face as yours, unless it was

your father, and I suppose \_he\_ is singeing his grizzled red beard

by this time, unless you came straight from the old 'un without

any father at all betwixt you; which I shouldn't wonder at, a

bit.'

Fagin offered no reply to this compliment: but, pulling Sikes by

the sleeve, pointed his finger towards Nancy, who had taken

advantage of the foregoing conversation to put on her bonnet, and

was now leaving the room.

'Hallo!' cried Sikes. 'Nance. Where's the gal going to at this

time of night?'

'Not far.'

'What answer's that?' retorted Sikes. 'Do you hear me?'

'I don't know where,' replied the girl.

'Then I do,' said Sikes, more in the spirit of obstinacy than

because he had any real objection to the girl going where she

listed. 'Nowhere. Sit down.'

'I'm not well. I told you that before,' rejoined the girl. 'I

want a breath of air.'

'Put your head out of the winder,' replied Sikes.

'There's not enough there,' said the girl. 'I want it in the

street.'

'Then you won't have it,' replied Sikes. With which assurance he

rose, locked the door, took the key out, and pulling her bonnet

from her head, flung it up to the top of an old press. 'There,'

said the robber. 'Now stop quietly where you are, will you?'

'It's not such a matter as a bonnet would keep me,' said the girl

turning very pale. 'What do you mean, Bill? Do you know what

you're doing?'

'Know what I'm--Oh!' cried Sikes, turning to Fagin, 'she's out of

her senses, you know, or she daren't talk to me in that way.'

'You'll drive me on the something desperate,' muttered the girl

placing both hands upon her breast, as though to keep down by

force some violent outbreak. 'Let me go, will you,--this

minute--this instant.'

'No!' said Sikes.

'Tell him to let me go, Fagin. He had better. It'll be better

for him. Do you hear me?' cried Nancy stamping her foot upon the

ground.

'Hear you!' repeated Sikes turning round in his chair to confront

her. 'Aye! And if I hear you for half a minute longer, the dog

shall have such a grip on your throat as'll tear some of that

screaming voice out. Wot has come over you, you jade! Wot is

it?'

'Let me go,' said the girl with great earnestness; then sitting

herself down on the floor, before the door, she said, 'Bill, let

me go; you don't know what you are doing. You don't, indeed. For

only one hour--do--do!'

'Cut my limbs off one by one!' cried Sikes, seizing her roughly

by the arm, 'If I don't think the gal's stark raving mad. Get

up.'

'Not till you let me go--not till you let me go--Never--never!'

screamed the girl. Sikes looked on, for a minute, watching his

opportunity, and suddenly pinioning her hands dragged her,

struggling and wrestling with him by the way, into a small room

adjoining, where he sat himself on a bench, and thrusting her

into a chair, held her down by force. She struggled and implored

by turns until twelve o'clock had struck, and then, wearied and

exhausted, ceased to contest the point any further. With a

caution, backed by many oaths, to make no more efforts to go out

that night, Sikes left her to recover at leisure and rejoined

Fagin.

'Whew!' said the housebreaker wiping the perspiration from his

face. 'Wot a precious strange gal that is!'

'You may say that, Bill,' replied Fagin thoughtfully. 'You may

say that.'

'Wot did she take it into her head to go out to-night for, do you

think?' asked Sikes. 'Come; you should know her better than me.

Wot does it mean?'

'Obstinacy; woman's obstinacy, I suppose, my dear.'

'Well, I suppose it is,' growled Sikes. 'I thought I had tamed

her, but she's as bad as ever.'

'Worse,' said Fagin thoughtfully. 'I never knew her like this,

for such a little cause.'

'Nor I,' said Sikes. 'I think she's got a touch of that fever in

her blood yet, and it won't come out--eh?'

'Like enough.'

'I'll let her a little blood, without troubling the doctor, if

she's took that way again,' said Sikes.

Fagin nodded an expressive approval of this mode of treatment.

'She was hanging about me all day, and night too, when I was

stretched on my back; and you, like a blackhearted wolf as you

are, kept yourself aloof,' said Sikes. 'We was poor too, all the

time, and I think, one way or other, it's worried and fretted

her; and that being shut up here so long has made her

restless--eh?'

'That's it, my dear,' replied the Jew in a whisper. 'Hush!'

As he uttered these words, the girl herself appeared and resumed

her former seat. Her eyes were swollen and red; she rocked

herself to and fro; tossed her head; and, after a little time,

burst out laughing.

'Why, now she's on the other tack!' exclaimed Sikes, turning a

look of excessive surprise on his companion.

Fagin nodded to him to take no further notice just then; and, in

a few minutes, the girl subsided into her accustomed demeanour.

Whispering Sikes that there was no fear of her relapsing, Fagin

took up his hat and bade him good-night. He paused when he

reached the room-door, and looking round, asked if somebody would

light him down the dark stairs.

'Light him down,' said Sikes, who was filling his pipe. 'It's a

pity he should break his neck himself, and disappoint the

sight-seers. Show him a light.'

Nancy followed the old man downstairs, with a candle. When they

reached the passage, he laid his finger on his lip, and drawing

close to the girl, said, in a whisper.

'What is it, Nancy, dear?'

'What do you mean?' replied the girl, in the same tone.

'The reason of all this,' replied Fagin. 'If \_he\_'--he pointed

with his skinny fore-finger up the stairs--'is so hard with you

(he's a brute, Nance, a brute-beast), why don't you--'

'Well?' said the girl, as Fagin paused, with his mouth almost

touching her ear, and his eyes looking into hers.

'No matter just now. We'll talk of this again. You have a

friend in me, Nance; a staunch friend. I have the means at hand,

quiet and close. If you want revenge on those that treat you

like a dog--like a dog! worse than his dog, for he humours him

sometimes--come to me. I say, come to me. He is the mere hound

of a day, but you know me of old, Nance.'

'I know you well,' replied the girl, without manifesting the

least emotion. 'Good-night.'

She shrank back, as Fagin offered to lay his hand on hers, but

said good-night again, in a steady voice, and, answering his

parting look with a nod of intelligence, closed the door between

them.

Fagin walked towards his home, intent upon the thoughts that were

working within his brain. He had conceived the idea--not from

what had just passed though that had tended to confirm him, but

slowly and by degrees--that Nancy, wearied of the housebreaker's

brutality, had conceived an attachment for some new friend. Her

altered manner, her repeated absences from home alone, her

comparative indifference to the interests of the gang for which

she had once been so zealous, and, added to these, her desperate

impatience to leave home that night at a particular hour, all

favoured the supposition, and rendered it, to him at least,

almost matter of certainty. The object of this new liking was

not among his myrmidons. He would be a valuable acquisition with

such an assistant as Nancy, and must (thus Fagin argued) be

secured without delay.

There was another, and a darker object, to be gained. Sikes knew

too much, and his ruffian taunts had not galled Fagin the less,

because the wounds were hidden. The girl must know, well, that

if she shook him off, she could never be safe from his fury, and

that it would be surely wreaked--to the maiming of limbs, or

perhaps the loss of life--on the object of her more recent fancy.

'With a little persuasion,' thought Fagin, 'what more likely than

that she would consent to poison him? Women have done such

things, and worse, to secure the same object before now. There

would be the dangerous villain: the man I hate: gone; another

secured in his place; and my influence over the girl, with a

knowledge of this crime to back it, unlimited.'

These things passed through the mind of Fagin, during the short

time he sat alone, in the housebreaker's room; and with them

uppermost in his thoughts, he had taken the opportunity

afterwards afforded him, of sounding the girl in the broken hints

he threw out at parting. There was no expression of surprise, no

assumption of an inability to understand his meaning. The girl

clearly comprehended it. Her glance at parting showed \_that\_.

But perhaps she would recoil from a plot to take the life of

Sikes, and that was one of the chief ends to be attained. 'How,'

thought Fagin, as he crept homeward, 'can I increase my influence

with her? What new power can I acquire?'

Such brains are fertile in expedients. If, without extracting a

confession from herself, he laid a watch, discovered the object

of her altered regard, and threatened to reveal the whole history

to Sikes (of whom she stood in no common fear) unless she entered

into his designs, could he not secure her compliance?

'I can,' said Fagin, almost aloud. 'She durst not refuse me

then. Not for her life, not for her life! I have it all. The

means are ready, and shall be set to work. I shall have you

yet!'

He cast back a dark look, and a threatening motion of the hand,

towards the spot where he had left the bolder villain; and went

on his way: busying his bony hands in the folds of his tattered

garment, which he wrenched tightly in his grasp, as though there

were a hated enemy crushed with every motion of his fingers.

CHAPTER XLV

NOAH CLAYPOLE IS EMPLOYED BY FAGIN ON A SECRET MISSION

The old man was up, betimes, next morning, and waited impatiently

for the appearance of his new associate, who after a delay that

seemed interminable, at length presented himself, and commenced a

voracious assault on the breakfast.

'Bolter,' said Fagin, drawing up a chair and seating himself

opposite Morris Bolter.

'Well, here I am,' returned Noah. 'What's the matter? Don't yer

ask me to do anything till I have done eating. That's a great

fault in this place. Yer never get time enough over yer meals.'

'You can talk as you eat, can't you?' said Fagin, cursing his

dear young friend's greediness from the very bottom of his heart.

'Oh yes, I can talk. I get on better when I talk,' said Noah,

cutting a monstrous slice of bread. 'Where's Charlotte?'

'Out,' said Fagin. 'I sent her out this morning with the other

young woman, because I wanted us to be alone.'

'Oh!' said Noah. 'I wish yer'd ordered her to make some buttered

toast first. Well. Talk away. Yer won't interrupt me.'

There seemed, indeed, no great fear of anything interrupting him,

as he had evidently sat down with a determination to do a great

deal of business.

'You did well yesterday, my dear,' said Fagin. 'Beautiful! Six

shillings and ninepence halfpenny on the very first day! The

kinchin lay will be a fortune to you.'

'Don't you forget to add three pint-pots and a milk-can,' said

Mr. Bolter.

'No, no, my dear. The pint-pots were great strokes of genius:

but the milk-can was a perfect masterpiece.'

'Pretty well, I think, for a beginner,' remarked Mr. Bolter

complacently. 'The pots I took off airy railings, and the

milk-can was standing by itself outside a public-house. I

thought it might get rusty with the rain, or catch cold, yer

know. Eh? Ha! ha! ha!'

Fagin affected to laugh very heartily; and Mr. Bolter having had

his laugh out, took a series of large bites, which finished his

first hunk of bread and butter, and assisted himself to a second.

'I want you, Bolter,' said Fagin, leaning over the table, 'to do

a piece of work for me, my dear, that needs great care and

caution.'

'I say,' rejoined Bolter, 'don't yer go shoving me into danger,

or sending me any more o' yer police-offices. That don't suit me,

that don't; and so I tell yer.'

'That's not the smallest danger in it--not the very smallest,'

said the Jew; 'it's only to dodge a woman.'

'An old woman?' demanded Mr. Bolter.

'A young one,' replied Fagin.

'I can do that pretty well, I know,' said Bolter. 'I was a

regular cunning sneak when I was at school. What am I to dodge

her for? Not to--'

'Not to do anything, but to tell me where she goes, who she sees,

and, if possible, what she says; to remember the street, if it is

a street, or the house, if it is a house; and to bring me back

all the information you can.'

'What'll yer give me?' asked Noah, setting down his cup, and

looking his employer, eagerly, in the face.

'If you do it well, a pound, my dear. One pound,' said Fagin,

wishing to interest him in the scent as much as possible. 'And

that's what I never gave yet, for any job of work where there

wasn't valuable consideration to be gained.'

'Who is she?' inquired Noah.

'One of us.'

'Oh Lor!' cried Noah, curling up his nose. 'Yer doubtful of her,

are yer?'

'She has found out some new friends, my dear, and I must know who

they are,' replied Fagin.

'I see,' said Noah. 'Just to have the pleasure of knowing them,

if they're respectable people, eh? Ha! ha! ha! I'm your man.'

'I knew you would be,' cried Fagin, elated by the success of his

proposal.

'Of course, of course,' replied Noah. 'Where is she? Where am I

to wait for her? Where am I to go?'

'All that, my dear, you shall hear from me. I'll point her out

at the proper time,' said Fagin. 'You keep ready, and leave the

rest to me.'

That night, and the next, and the next again, the spy sat booted

and equipped in his carter's dress: ready to turn out at a word

from Fagin. Six nights passed--six long weary nights--and on

each, Fagin came home with a disappointed face, and briefly

intimated that it was not yet time. On the seventh, he returned

earlier, and with an exultation he could not conceal. It was

Sunday.

'She goes abroad to-night,' said Fagin, 'and on the right errand,

I'm sure; for she has been alone all day, and the man she is

afraid of will not be back much before daybreak. Come with me.

Quick!'

Noah started up without saying a word; for the Jew was in a state

of such intense excitement that it infected him. They left the

house stealthily, and hurrying through a labyrinth of streets,

arrived at length before a public-house, which Noah recognised as

the same in which he had slept, on the night of his arrival in

London.

It was past eleven o'clock, and the door was closed. It opened

softly on its hinges as Fagin gave a low whistle. They entered,

without noise; and the door was closed behind them.

Scarcely venturing to whisper, but substituting dumb show for

words, Fagin, and the young Jew who had admitted them, pointed

out the pane of glass to Noah, and signed to him to climb up and

observe the person in the adjoining room.

'Is that the woman?' he asked, scarcely above his breath.

Fagin nodded yes.

'I can't see her face well,' whispered Noah. 'She is looking

down, and the candle is behind her.

'Stay there,' whispered Fagin. He signed to Barney, who

withdrew. In an instant, the lad entered the room adjoining,

and, under pretence of snuffing the candle, moved it in the

required position, and, speaking to the girl, caused her to raise

her face.

'I see her now,' cried the spy.

'Plainly?'

'I should know her among a thousand.'

He hastily descended, as the room-door opened, and the girl came

out. Fagin drew him behind a small partition which was curtained

off, and they held their breaths as she passed within a few feet

of their place of concealment, and emerged by the door at which

they had entered.

'Hist!' cried the lad who held the door. 'Dow.'

Noah exchanged a look with Fagin, and darted out.

'To the left,' whispered the lad; 'take the left had, and keep od

the other side.'

He did so; and, by the light of the lamps, saw the girl's

retreating figure, already at some distance before him. He

advanced as near as he considered prudent, and kept on the

opposite side of the street, the better to observe her motions.

She looked nervously round, twice or thrice, and once stopped to

let two men who were following close behind her, pass on. She

seemed to gather courage as she advanced, and to walk with a

steadier and firmer step. The spy preserved the same relative

distance between them, and followed: with his eye upon her.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE APPOINTMENT KEPT

The church clocks chimed three quarters past eleven, as two

figures emerged on London Bridge. One, which advanced with a

swift and rapid step, was that of a woman who looked eagerly

about her as though in quest of some expected object; the other

figure was that of a man, who slunk along in the deepest shadow

he could find, and, at some distance, accommodated his pace to

hers: stopping when she stopped: and as she moved again,

creeping stealthily on: but never allowing himself, in the

ardour of his pursuit, to gain upon her footsteps. Thus, they

crossed the bridge, from the Middlesex to the Surrey shore, when

the woman, apparently disappointed in her anxious scrutiny of the

foot-passengers, turned back. The movement was sudden; but he

who watched her, was not thrown off his guard by it; for,

shrinking into one of the recesses which surmount the piers of

the bridge, and leaning over the parapet the better to conceal

his figure, he suffered her to pass on the opposite pavement.

When she was about the same distance in advance as she had been

before, he slipped quietly down, and followed her again. At

nearly the centre of the bridge, she stopped. The man stopped

too.

It was a very dark night. The day had been unfavourable, and at

that hour and place there were few people stirring. Such as there

were, hurried quickly past: very possibly without seeing, but

certainly without noticing, either the woman, or the man who kept

her in view. Their appearance was not calculated to attract the

importunate regards of such of London's destitute population, as

chanced to take their way over the bridge that night in search of

some cold arch or doorless hovel wherein to lay their heads; they

stood there in silence: neither speaking nor spoken to, by any

one who passed.

A mist hung over the river, deepening the red glare of the fires

that burnt upon the small craft moored off the different wharfs,

and rendering darker and more indistinct the murky buildings on

the banks. The old smoke-stained storehouses on either side,

rose heavy and dull from the dense mass of roofs and gables, and

frowned sternly upon water too black to reflect even their

lumbering shapes. The tower of old Saint Saviour's Church, and

the spire of Saint Magnus, so long the giant-warders of the

ancient bridge, were visible in the gloom; but the forest of

shipping below bridge, and the thickly scattered spires of

churches above, were nearly all hidden from sight.

The girl had taken a few restless turns to and fro--closely

watched meanwhile by her hidden observer--when the heavy bell of

St. Paul's tolled for the death of another day. Midnight had

come upon the crowded city. The palace, the night-cellar, the

jail, the madhouse: the chambers of birth and death, of health

and sickness, the rigid face of the corpse and the calm sleep of

the child: midnight was upon them all.

The hour had not struck two minutes, when a young lady,

accompanied by a grey-haired gentleman, alighted from a

hackney-carriage within a short distance of the bridge, and,

having dismissed the vehicle, walked straight towards it. They

had scarcely set foot upon its pavement, when the girl started,

and immediately made towards them.

They walked onward, looking about them with the air of persons

who entertained some very slight expectation which had little

chance of being realised, when they were suddenly joined by this

new associate. They halted with an exclamation of surprise, but

suppressed it immediately; for a man in the garments of a

countryman came close up--brushed against them, indeed--at that

precise moment.

'Not here,' said Nancy hurriedly, 'I am afraid to speak to you

here. Come away--out of the public road--down the steps yonder!'

As she uttered these words, and indicated, with her hand, the

direction in which she wished them to proceed, the countryman

looked round, and roughly asking what they took up the whole

pavement for, passed on.

The steps to which the girl had pointed, were those which, on the

Surrey bank, and on the same side of the bridge as Saint

Saviour's Church, form a landing-stairs from the river. To this

spot, the man bearing the appearance of a countryman, hastened

unobserved; and after a moment's survey of the place, he began to

descend.

These stairs are a part of the bridge; they consist of three

flights. Just below the end of the second, going down, the stone

wall on the left terminates in an ornamental pilaster facing

towards the Thames. At this point the lower steps widen: so

that a person turning that angle of the wall, is necessarily

unseen by any others on the stairs who chance to be above him, if

only a step. The countryman looked hastily round, when he reached

this point; and as there seemed no better place of concealment,

and, the tide being out, there was plenty of room, he slipped

aside, with his back to the pilaster, and there waited: pretty

certain that they would come no lower, and that even if he could

not hear what was said, he could follow them again, with safety.

So tardily stole the time in this lonely place, and so eager was

the spy to penetrate the motives of an interview so different

from what he had been led to expect, that he more than once gave

the matter up for lost, and persuaded himself, either that they

had stopped far above, or had resorted to some entirely different

spot to hold their mysterious conversation. He was on the point

of emerging from his hiding-place, and regaining the road above,

when he heard the sound of footsteps, and directly afterwards of

voices almost close at his ear.

He drew himself straight upright against the wall, and, scarcely

breathing, listened attentively.

'This is far enough,' said a voice, which was evidently that of

the gentleman. 'I will not suffer the young lady to go any

farther. Many people would have distrusted you too much to have

come even so far, but you see I am willing to humour you.'

'To humour me!' cried the voice of the girl whom he had followed.

'You're considerate, indeed, sir. To humour me! Well, well,

it's no matter.'

'Why, for what,' said the gentleman in a kinder tone, 'for what

purpose can you have brought us to this strange place? Why not

have let me speak to you, above there, where it is light, and

there is something stirring, instead of bringing us to this dark

and dismal hole?'

'I told you before,' replied Nancy, 'that I was afraid to speak

to you there. I don't know why it is,' said the girl,

shuddering, 'but I have such a fear and dread upon me to-night

that I can hardly stand.'

'A fear of what?' asked the gentleman, who seemed to pity her.

'I scarcely know of what,' replied the girl. 'I wish I did.

Horrible thoughts of death, and shrouds with blood upon them, and

a fear that has made me burn as if I was on fire, have been upon

me all day. I was reading a book to-night, to wile the time

away, and the same things came into the print.'

'Imagination,' said the gentleman, soothing her.

'No imagination,' replied the girl in a hoarse voice. 'I'll swear

I saw "coffin" written in every page of the book in large black

letters,--aye, and they carried one close to me, in the streets

to-night.'

'There is nothing unusual in that,' said the gentleman. 'They

have passed me often.'

'\_Real ones\_,' rejoined the girl. 'This was not.'

There was something so uncommon in her manner, that the flesh of

the concealed listener crept as he heard the girl utter these

words, and the blood chilled within him. He had never

experienced a greater relief than in hearing the sweet voice of

the young lady as she begged her to be calm, and not allow

herself to become the prey of such fearful fancies.

'Speak to her kindly,' said the young lady to her companion.

'Poor creature! She seems to need it.'

'Your haughty religious people would have held their heads up to

see me as I am to-night, and preached of flames and vengeance,'

cried the girl. 'Oh, dear lady, why ar'n't those who claim to be

God's own folks as gentle and as kind to us poor wretches as you,

who, having youth, and beauty, and all that they have lost, might

be a little proud instead of so much humbler?'

'Ah!' said the gentleman. 'A Turk turns his face, after washing

it well, to the East, when he says his prayers; these good

people, after giving their faces such a rub against the World as

to take the smiles off, turn with no less regularity, to the

darkest side of Heaven. Between the Mussulman and the Pharisee,

commend me to the first!'

These words appeared to be addressed to the young lady, and were

perhaps uttered with the view of affording Nancy time to recover

herself. The gentleman, shortly afterwards, addressed himself to

her.

'You were not here last Sunday night,' he said.

'I couldn't come,' replied Nancy; 'I was kept by force.'

'By whom?'

'Him that I told the young lady of before.'

'You were not suspected of holding any communication with anybody

on the subject which has brought us here to-night, I hope?' asked

the old gentleman.

'No,' replied the girl, shaking her head. 'It's not very easy

for me to leave him unless he knows why; I couldn't give him a

drink of laudanum before I came away.'

'Did he awake before you returned?' inquired the gentleman.

'No; and neither he nor any of them suspect me.'

'Good,' said the gentleman. 'Now listen to me.'

'I am ready,' replied the girl, as he paused for a moment.

'This young lady,' the gentleman began, 'has communicated to me,

and to some other friends who can be safely trusted, what you

told her nearly a fortnight since. I confess to you that I had

doubts, at first, whether you were to be implicitly relied upon,

but now I firmly believe you are.'

'I am,' said the girl earnestly.

'I repeat that I firmly believe it. To prove to you that I am

disposed to trust you, I tell you without reserve, that we

propose to extort the secret, whatever it may be, from the fear

of this man Monks. But if--if--' said the gentleman, 'he cannot

be secured, or, if secured, cannot be acted upon as we wish, you

must deliver up the Jew.'

'Fagin,' cried the girl, recoiling.

'That man must be delivered up by you,' said the gentleman.

'I will not do it! I will never do it!' replied the girl. 'Devil

that he is, and worse than devil as he has been to me, I will

never do that.'

'You will not?' said the gentleman, who seemed fully prepared for

this answer.

'Never!' returned the girl.

'Tell me why?'

'For one reason,' rejoined the girl firmly, 'for one reason, that

the lady knows and will stand by me in, I know she will, for I

have her promise: and for this other reason, besides, that, bad

life as he has led, I have led a bad life too; there are many of

us who have kept the same courses together, and I'll not turn

upon them, who might--any of them--have turned upon me, but

didn't, bad as they are.'

'Then,' said the gentleman, quickly, as if this had been the

point he had been aiming to attain; 'put Monks into my hands, and

leave him to me to deal with.'

'What if he turns against the others?'

'I promise you that in that case, if the truth is forced from

him, there the matter will rest; there must be circumstances in

Oliver's little history which it would be painful to drag before

the public eye, and if the truth is once elicited, they shall go

scot free.'

'And if it is not?' suggested the girl.

'Then,' pursued the gentleman, 'this Fagin shall not be brought

to justice without your consent. In such a case I could show you

reasons, I think, which would induce you to yield it.'

'Have I the lady's promise for that?' asked the girl.

'You have,' replied Rose. 'My true and faithful pledge.'

'Monks would never learn how you knew what you do?' said the

girl, after a short pause.

'Never,' replied the gentleman. 'The intelligence should be

brought to bear upon him, that he could never even guess.'

'I have been a liar, and among liars from a little child,' said

the girl after another interval of silence, 'but I will take your

words.'

After receiving an assurance from both, that she might safely do

so, she proceeded in a voice so low that it was often difficult

for the listener to discover even the purport of what she said,

to describe, by name and situation, the public-house whence she

had been followed that night. From the manner in which she

occasionally paused, it appeared as if the gentleman were making

some hasty notes of the information she communicated. When she

had thoroughly explained the localities of the place, the best

position from which to watch it without exciting observation, and

the night and hour on which Monks was most in the habit of

frequenting it, she seemed to consider for a few moments, for the

purpose of recalling his features and appearances more forcibly

to her recollection.

'He is tall,' said the girl, 'and a strongly made man, but not

stout; he has a lurking walk; and as he walks, constantly looks

over his shoulder, first on one side, and then on the other.

Don't forget that, for his eyes are sunk in his head so much

deeper than any other man's, that you might almost tell him by

that alone. His face is dark, like his hair and eyes; and,

although he can't be more than six or eight and twenty, withered

and haggard. His lips are often discoloured and disfigured with

the marks of teeth; for he has desperate fits, and sometimes even

bites his hands and covers them with wounds--why did you start?'

said the girl, stopping suddenly.

The gentleman replied, in a hurried manner, that he was not

conscious of having done so, and begged her to proceed.

'Part of this,' said the girl, 'I have drawn out from other

people at the house I tell you of, for I have only seen him

twice, and both times he was covered up in a large cloak. I

think that's all I can give you to know him by. Stay though,'

she added. 'Upon his throat: so high that you can see a part of

it below his neckerchief when he turns his face: there is--'

'A broad red mark, like a burn or scald?' cried the gentleman.

'How's this?' said the girl. 'You know him!'

The young lady uttered a cry of surprise, and for a few moments

they were so still that the listener could distinctly hear them

breathe.

'I think I do,' said the gentleman, breaking silence. 'I should

by your description. We shall see. Many people are singularly

like each other. It may not be the same.'

As he expressed himself to this effect, with assumed

carelessness, he took a step or two nearer the concealed spy, as

the latter could tell from the distinctness with which he heard

him mutter, 'It must be he!'

'Now,' he said, returning: so it seemed by the sound: to the

spot where he had stood before, 'you have given us most valuable

assistance, young woman, and I wish you to be the better for it.

What can I do to serve you?'

'Nothing,' replied Nancy.

'You will not persist in saying that,' rejoined the gentleman,

with a voice and emphasis of kindness that might have touched a

much harder and more obdurate heart. 'Think now. Tell me.'

'Nothing, sir,' rejoined the girl, weeping. 'You can do nothing

to help me. I am past all hope, indeed.'

'You put yourself beyond its pale,' said the gentleman. 'The past

has been a dreary waste with you, of youthful energies mis-spent,

and such priceless treasures lavished, as the Creator bestows but

once and never grants again, but, for the future, you may hope.

I do not say that it is in our power to offer you peace of heart

and mind, for that must come as you seek it; but a quiet asylum,

either in England, or, if you fear to remain here, in some

foreign country, it is not only within the compass of our ability

but our most anxious wish to secure you. Before the dawn of

morning, before this river wakes to the first glimpse of

day-light, you shall be placed as entirely beyond the reach of

your former associates, and leave as utter an absence of all

trace behind you, as if you were to disappear from the earth this

moment. Come! I would not have you go back to exchange one word

with any old companion, or take one look at any old haunt, or

breathe the very air which is pestilence and death to you. Quit

them all, while there is time and opportunity!'

'She will be persuaded now,' cried the young lady. 'She

hesitates, I am sure.'

'I fear not, my dear,' said the gentleman.

'No sir, I do not,' replied the girl, after a short struggle. 'I

am chained to my old life. I loathe and hate it now, but I

cannot leave it. I must have gone too far to turn back,--and yet

I don't know, for if you had spoken to me so, some time ago, I

should have laughed it off. But,' she said, looking hastily

round, 'this fear comes over me again. I must go home.'

'Home!' repeated the young lady, with great stress upon the word.

'Home, lady,' rejoined the girl. 'To such a home as I have

raised for myself with the work of my whole life. Let us part.

I shall be watched or seen. Go! Go! If I have done you any

service all I ask is, that you leave me, and let me go my way

alone.'

'It is useless,' said the gentleman, with a sigh. 'We compromise

her safety, perhaps, by staying here. We may have detained her

longer than she expected already.'

'Yes, yes,' urged the girl. 'You have.'

'What,' cried the young lady, 'can be the end of this poor

creature's life!'

'What!' repeated the girl. 'Look before you, lady. Look at that

dark water. How many times do you read of such as I who spring

into the tide, and leave no living thing, to care for, or bewail

them. It may be years hence, or it may be only months, but I

shall come to that at last.'

'Do not speak thus, pray,' returned the young lady, sobbing.

'It will never reach your ears, dear lady, and God forbid such

horrors should!' replied the girl. 'Good-night, good-night!'

The gentleman turned away.

'This purse,' cried the young lady. 'Take it for my sake, that

you may have some resource in an hour of need and trouble.'

'No!' replied the girl. 'I have not done this for money. Let me

have that to think of. And yet--give me something that you have

worn: I should like to have something--no, no, not a ring--your

gloves or handkerchief--anything that I can keep, as having

belonged to you, sweet lady. There. Bless you! God bless you.

Good-night, good-night!'

The violent agitation of the girl, and the apprehension of some

discovery which would subject her to ill-usage and violence,

seemed to determine the gentleman to leave her, as she requested.

The sound of retreating footsteps were audible and the voices

ceased.

The two figures of the young lady and her companion soon

afterwards appeared upon the bridge. They stopped at the summit

of the stairs.

'Hark!' cried the young lady, listening. 'Did she call! I

thought I heard her voice.'

'No, my love,' replied Mr. Brownlow, looking sadly back. 'She has

not moved, and will not till we are gone.'

Rose Maylie lingered, but the old gentleman drew her arm through

his, and led her, with gentle force, away. As they disappeared,

the girl sunk down nearly at her full length upon one of the

stone stairs, and vented the anguish of her heart in bitter

tears.

After a time she arose, and with feeble and tottering steps

ascended the street. The astonished listener remained motionless

on his post for some minutes afterwards, and having ascertained,

with many cautious glances round him, that he was again alone,

crept slowly from his hiding-place, and returned, stealthily and

in the shade of the wall, in the same manner as he had descended.

Peeping out, more than once, when he reached the top, to make

sure that he was unobserved, Noah Claypole darted away at his

utmost speed, and made for the Jew's house as fast as his legs

would carry him.

CHAPTER XLVII

FATAL CONSEQUENCES

It was nearly two hours before day-break; that time which in the

autumn of the year, may be truly called the dead of night; when

the streets are silent and deserted; when even sounds appear to

slumber, and profligacy and riot have staggered home to dream; it

was at this still and silent hour, that Fagin sat watching in his

old lair, with face so distorted and pale, and eyes so red and

blood-shot, that he looked less like a man, than like some

hideous phantom, moist from the grave, and worried by an evil

spirit.

He sat crouching over a cold hearth, wrapped in an old torn

coverlet, with his face turned towards a wasting candle that

stood upon a table by his side. His right hand was raised to his

lips, and as, absorbed in thought, he hit his long black nails,

he disclosed among his toothless gums a few such fangs as should

have been a dog's or rat's.

Stretched upon a mattress on the floor, lay Noah Claypole, fast

asleep. Towards him the old man sometimes directed his eyes for

an instant, and then brought them back again to the candle; which

with a long-burnt wick drooping almost double, and hot grease

falling down in clots upon the table, plainly showed that his

thoughts were busy elsewhere.

Indeed they were. Mortification at the overthrow of his notable

scheme; hatred of the girl who had dared to palter with

strangers; and utter distrust of the sincerity of her refusal to

yield him up; bitter disappointment at the loss of his revenge on

Sikes; the fear of detection, and ruin, and death; and a fierce

and deadly rage kindled by all; these were the passionate

considerations which, following close upon each other with rapid

and ceaseless whirl, shot through the brain of Fagin, as every

evil thought and blackest purpose lay working at his heart.

He sat without changing his attitude in the least, or appearing

to take the smallest heed of time, until his quick ear seemed to

be attracted by a footstep in the street.

'At last,' he muttered, wiping his dry and fevered mouth. 'At

last!'

The bell rang gently as he spoke. He crept upstairs to the door,

and presently returned accompanied by a man muffled to the chin,

who carried a bundle under one arm. Sitting down and throwing

back his outer coat, the man displayed the burly frame of Sikes.

'There!' he said, laying the bundle on the table. 'Take care of

that, and do the most you can with it. It's been trouble enough

to get; I thought I should have been here, three hours ago.'

Fagin laid his hand upon the bundle, and locking it in the

cupboard, sat down again without speaking. But he did not take

his eyes off the robber, for an instant, during this action; and

now that they sat over against each other, face to face, he

looked fixedly at him, with his lips quivering so violently, and

his face so altered by the emotions which had mastered him, that

the housebreaker involuntarily drew back his chair, and surveyed

him with a look of real affright.

'Wot now?' cried Sikes. 'Wot do you look at a man so for?'

Fagin raised his right hand, and shook his trembling forefinger

in the air; but his passion was so great, that the power of

speech was for the moment gone.

'Damme!' said Sikes, feeling in his breast with a look of alarm.

'He's gone mad. I must look to myself here.'

'No, no,' rejoined Fagin, finding his voice. 'It's not--you're

not the person, Bill. I've no--no fault to find with you.'

'Oh, you haven't, haven't you?' said Sikes, looking sternly at

him, and ostentatiously passing a pistol into a more convenient

pocket. 'That's lucky--for one of us. Which one that is, don't

matter.'

'I've got that to tell you, Bill,' said Fagin, drawing his chair

nearer, 'will make you worse than me.'

'Aye?' returned the robber with an incredulous air. 'Tell away!

Look sharp, or Nance will think I'm lost.'

'Lost!' cried Fagin. 'She has pretty well settled that, in her

own mind, already.'

Sikes looked with an aspect of great perplexity into the Jew's

face, and reading no satisfactory explanation of the riddle

there, clenched his coat collar in his huge hand and shook him

soundly.

'Speak, will you!' he said; 'or if you don't, it shall be for

want of breath. Open your mouth and say wot you've got to say in

plain words. Out with it, you thundering old cur, out with it!'

'Suppose that lad that's laying there--' Fagin began.

Sikes turned round to where Noah was sleeping, as if he had not

previously observed him. 'Well!' he said, resuming his former

position.

'Suppose that lad,' pursued Fagin, 'was to peach--to blow upon us

all--first seeking out the right folks for the purpose, and then

having a meeting with 'em in the street to paint our likenesses,

describe every mark that they might know us by, and the crib

where we might be most easily taken. Suppose he was to do all

this, and besides to blow upon a plant we've all been in, more or

less--of his own fancy; not grabbed, trapped, tried, earwigged by

the parson and brought to it on bread and water,--but of his own

fancy; to please his own taste; stealing out at nights to find

those most interested against us, and peaching to them. Do you

hear me?' cried the Jew, his eyes flashing with rage. 'Suppose

he did all this, what then?'

'What then!' replied Sikes; with a tremendous oath. 'If he was

left alive till I came, I'd grind his skull under the iron heel

of my boot into as many grains as there are hairs upon his head.'

'What if I did it!' cried Fagin almost in a yell. 'I, that knows

so much, and could hang so many besides myself!'

'I don't know,' replied Sikes, clenching his teeth and turning

white at the mere suggestion. 'I'd do something in the jail that

'ud get me put in irons; and if I was tried along with you, I'd

fall upon you with them in the open court, and beat your brains

out afore the people. I should have such strength,' muttered the

robber, poising his brawny arm, 'that I could smash your head as

if a loaded waggon had gone over it.'

'You would?'

'Would I!' said the housebreaker. 'Try me.'

'If it was Charley, or the Dodger, or Bet, or--'

'I don't care who,' replied Sikes impatiently. 'Whoever it was,

I'd serve them the same.'

Fagin looked hard at the robber; and, motioning him to be silent,

stooped over the bed upon the floor, and shook the sleeper to

rouse him. Sikes leant forward in his chair: looking on with

his hands upon his knees, as if wondering much what all this

questioning and preparation was to end in.

'Bolter, Bolter! Poor lad!' said Fagin, looking up with an

expression of devilish anticipation, and speaking slowly and with

marked emphasis. 'He's tired--tired with watching for her so

long,--watching for \_her\_, Bill.'

'Wot d'ye mean?' asked Sikes, drawing back.

Fagin made no answer, but bending over the sleeper again, hauled

him into a sitting posture. When his assumed name had been

repeated several times, Noah rubbed his eyes, and, giving a heavy

yawn, looked sleepily about him.

'Tell me that again--once again, just for him to hear,' said the

Jew, pointing to Sikes as he spoke.

'Tell yer what?' asked the sleepy Noah, shaking himself pettishly.

'That about-- \_Nancy\_,' said Fagin, clutching Sikes by the wrist, as

if to prevent his leaving the house before he had heard enough.

'You followed her?'

'Yes.'

'To London Bridge?'

'Yes.'

'Where she met two people.'

'So she did.'

'A gentleman and a lady that she had gone to of her own accord

before, who asked her to give up all her pals, and Monks first,

which she did--and to describe him, which she did--and to tell

her what house it was that we meet at, and go to, which she

did--and where it could be best watched from, which she did--and

what time the people went there, which she did. She did all

this. She told it all every word without a threat, without a

murmur--she did--did she not?' cried Fagin, half mad with fury.

'All right,' replied Noah, scratching his head. 'That's just

what it was!'

'What did they say, about last Sunday?'

'About last Sunday!' replied Noah, considering. 'Why I told yer

that before.'

'Again. Tell it again!' cried Fagin, tightening his grasp on

Sikes, and brandishing his other hand aloft, as the foam flew

from his lips.

'They asked her,' said Noah, who, as he grew more wakeful, seemed

to have a dawning perception who Sikes was, 'they asked her why

she didn't come, last Sunday, as she promised. She said she

couldn't.'

'Why--why? Tell him that.'

'Because she was forcibly kept at home by Bill, the man she had

told them of before,' replied Noah.

'What more of him?' cried Fagin. 'What more of the man she had

told them of before? Tell him that, tell him that.'

'Why, that she couldn't very easily get out of doors unless he

knew where she was going to,' said Noah; 'and so the first time

she went to see the lady, she--ha! ha! ha! it made me laugh when

she said it, that it did--she gave him a drink of laudanum.'

'Hell's fire!' cried Sikes, breaking fiercely from the Jew. 'Let

me go!'

Flinging the old man from him, he rushed from the room, and

darted, wildly and furiously, up the stairs.

'Bill, Bill!' cried Fagin, following him hastily. 'A word. Only

a word.'

The word would not have been exchanged, but that the housebreaker

was unable to open the door: on which he was expending fruitless

oaths and violence, when the Jew came panting up.

'Let me out,' said Sikes. 'Don't speak to me; it's not safe.

Let me out, I say!'

'Hear me speak a word,' rejoined Fagin, laying his hand upon the

lock. 'You won't be--'

'Well,' replied the other.

'You won't be--too--violent, Bill?'

The day was breaking, and there was light enough for the men to

see each other's faces. They exchanged one brief glance; there

was a fire in the eyes of both, which could not be mistaken.

'I mean,' said Fagin, showing that he felt all disguise was now

useless, 'not too violent for safety. Be crafty, Bill, and not

too bold.'

Sikes made no reply; but, pulling open the door, of which Fagin

had turned the lock, dashed into the silent streets.

Without one pause, or moment's consideration; without once

turning his head to the right or left, or raising his eyes to the

sky, or lowering them to the ground, but looking straight before

him with savage resolution: his teeth so tightly compressed that

the strained jaw seemed starting through his skin; the robber

held on his headlong course, nor muttered a word, nor relaxed a

muscle, until he reached his own door. He opened it, softly,

with a key; strode lightly up the stairs; and entering his own

room, double-locked the door, and lifting a heavy table against

it, drew back the curtain of the bed.

The girl was lying, half-dressed, upon it. He had roused her

from her sleep, for she raised herself with a hurried and

startled look.

'Get up!' said the man.

'It is you, Bill!' said the girl, with an expression of pleasure

at his return.

'It is,' was the reply. 'Get up.'

There was a candle burning, but the man hastily drew it from the

candlestick, and hurled it under the grate. Seeing the faint

light of early day without, the girl rose to undraw the curtain.

'Let it be,' said Sikes, thrusting his hand before her. 'There's

enough light for wot I've got to do.'

'Bill,' said the girl, in the low voice of alarm, 'why do you

look like that at me!'

The robber sat regarding her, for a few seconds, with dilated

nostrils and heaving breast; and then, grasping her by the head

and throat, dragged her into the middle of the room, and looking

once towards the door, placed his heavy hand upon her mouth.

'Bill, Bill!' gasped the girl, wrestling with the strength of

mortal fear,--'I--I won't scream or cry--not once--hear me--speak

to me--tell me what I have done!'

'You know, you she devil!' returned the robber, suppressing his

breath. 'You were watched to-night; every word you said was

heard.'

'Then spare my life for the love of Heaven, as I spared yours,'

rejoined the girl, clinging to him. 'Bill, dear Bill, you cannot

have the heart to kill me. Oh! think of all I have given up,

only this one night, for you. You \_shall\_ have time to think, and

save yourself this crime; I will not loose my hold, you cannot

throw me off. Bill, Bill, for dear God's sake, for your own, for

mine, stop before you spill my blood! I have been true to you,

upon my guilty soul I have!'

The man struggled violently, to release his arms; but those of

the girl were clasped round his, and tear her as he would, he

could not tear them away.

'Bill,' cried the girl, striving to lay her head upon his breast,

'the gentleman and that dear lady, told me to-night of a home in

some foreign country where I could end my days in solitude and

peace. Let me see them again, and beg them, on my knees, to show

the same mercy and goodness to you; and let us both leave this

dreadful place, and far apart lead better lives, and forget how

we have lived, except in prayers, and never see each other more.

It is never too late to repent. They told me so--I feel it

now--but we must have time--a little, little time!'

The housebreaker freed one arm, and grasped his pistol. The

certainty of immediate detection if he fired, flashed across his

mind even in the midst of his fury; and he beat it twice with all

the force he could summon, upon the upturned face that almost

touched his own.

She staggered and fell: nearly blinded with the blood that

rained down from a deep gash in her forehead; but raising

herself, with difficulty, on her knees, drew from her bosom a

white handkerchief--Rose Maylie's own--and holding it up, in her

folded hands, as high towards Heaven as her feeble strength would

allow, breathed one prayer for mercy to her Maker.

It was a ghastly figure to look upon. The murderer staggering

backward to the wall, and shutting out the sight with his hand,

seized a heavy club and struck her down.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE FLIGHT OF SIKES

Of all bad deeds that, under cover of the darkness, had been

committed within wide London's bounds since night hung over it,

that was the worst. Of all the horrors that rose with an ill

scent upon the morning air, that was the foulest and most cruel.

The sun--the bright sun, that brings back, not light alone, but

new life, and hope, and freshness to man--burst upon the crowded

city in clear and radiant glory. Through costly-coloured glass

and paper-mended window, through cathedral dome and rotten

crevice, it shed its equal ray. It lighted up the room where the

murdered woman lay. It did. He tried to shut it out, but it

would stream in. If the sight had been a ghastly one in the dull

morning, what was it, now, in all that brilliant light!

He had not moved; he had been afraid to stir. There had been a

moan and motion of the hand; and, with terror added to rage, he

had struck and struck again. Once he threw a rug over it; but it

was worse to fancy the eyes, and imagine them moving towards him,

than to see them glaring upward, as if watching the reflection of

the pool of gore that quivered and danced in the sunlight on the

ceiling. He had plucked it off again. And there was the

body--mere flesh and blood, no more--but such flesh, and so much

blood!

He struck a light, kindled a fire, and thrust the club into it.

There was hair upon the end, which blazed and shrunk into a light

cinder, and, caught by the air, whirled up the chimney. Even

that frightened him, sturdy as he was; but he held the weapon

till it broke, and then piled it on the coals to burn away, and

smoulder into ashes. He washed himself, and rubbed his clothes;

there were spots that would not be removed, but he cut the pieces

out, and burnt them. How those stains were dispersed about the

room! The very feet of the dog were bloody.

All this time he had, never once, turned his back upon the

corpse; no, not for a moment. Such preparations completed, he

moved, backward, towards the door: dragging the dog with him,

lest he should soil his feet anew and carry out new evidence of

the crime into the streets. He shut the door softly, locked it,

took the key, and left the house.

He crossed over, and glanced up at the window, to be sure that

nothing was visible from the outside. There was the curtain

still drawn, which she would have opened to admit the light she

never saw again. It lay nearly under there. \_He\_ knew that. God,

how the sun poured down upon the very spot!

The glance was instantaneous. It was a relief to have got free

of the room. He whistled on the dog, and walked rapidly away.

He went through Islington; strode up the hill at Highgate on

which stands the stone in honour of Whittington; turned down to

Highgate Hill, unsteady of purpose, and uncertain where to go;

struck off to the right again, almost as soon as he began to

descend it; and taking the foot-path across the fields, skirted

Caen Wood, and so came on Hampstead Heath. Traversing the hollow

by the Vale of Heath, he mounted the opposite bank, and crossing

the road which joins the villages of Hampstead and Highgate, made

along the remaining portion of the heath to the fields at North

End, in one of which he laid himself down under a hedge, and

slept.

Soon he was up again, and away,--not far into the country, but

back towards London by the high-road--then back again--then over

another part of the same ground as he already traversed--then

wandering up and down in fields, and lying on ditches' brinks to

rest, and starting up to make for some other spot, and do the

same, and ramble on again.

Where could he go, that was near and not too public, to get some

meat and drink? Hendon. That was a good place, not far off, and

out of most people's way. Thither he directed his

steps,--running sometimes, and sometimes, with a strange

perversity, loitering at a snail's pace, or stopping altogether

and idly breaking the hedges with a stick. But when he got

there, all the people he met--the very children at the

doors--seemed to view him with suspicion. Back he turned again,

without the courage to purchase bit or drop, though he had tasted

no food for many hours; and once more he lingered on the Heath,

uncertain where to go.

He wandered over miles and miles of ground, and still came back

to the old place. Morning and noon had passed, and the day was

on the wane, and still he rambled to and fro, and up and down,

and round and round, and still lingered about the same spot. At

last he got away, and shaped his course for Hatfield.

It was nine o'clock at night, when the man, quite tired out, and

the dog, limping and lame from the unaccustomed exercise, turned

down the hill by the church of the quiet village, and plodding

along the little street, crept into a small public-house, whose

scanty light had guided them to the spot. There was a fire in

the tap-room, and some country-labourers were drinking before it.

They made room for the stranger, but he sat down in the furthest

corner, and ate and drank alone, or rather with his dog: to whom

he cast a morsel of food from time to time.

The conversation of the men assembled here, turned upon the

neighbouring land, and farmers; and when those topics were

exhausted, upon the age of some old man who had been buried on

the previous Sunday; the young men present considering him very

old, and the old men present declaring him to have been quite

young--not older, one white-haired grandfather said, than he

was--with ten or fifteen year of life in him at least--if he had

taken care; if he had taken care.

There was nothing to attract attention, or excite alarm in this.

The robber, after paying his reckoning, sat silent and unnoticed

in his corner, and had almost dropped asleep, when he was half

wakened by the noisy entrance of a new comer.

This was an antic fellow, half pedlar and half mountebank, who

travelled about the country on foot to vend hones, strops, razors,

washballs, harness-paste, medicine for dogs and horses, cheap

perfumery, cosmetics, and such-like wares, which he carried in a

case slung to his back. His entrance was the signal for various

homely jokes with the countrymen, which slackened not until he

had made his supper, and opened his box of treasures, when he

ingeniously contrived to unite business with amusement.

'And what be that stoof? Good to eat, Harry?' asked a grinning

countryman, pointing to some composition-cakes in one corner.

'This,' said the fellow, producing one, 'this is the infallible

and invaluable composition for removing all sorts of stain, rust,

dirt, mildew, spick, speck, spot, or spatter, from silk, satin,

linen, cambric, cloth, crape, stuff, carpet, merino, muslin,

bombazeen, or woollen stuff. Wine-stains, fruit-stains,

beer-stains, water-stains, paint-stains, pitch-stains, any

stains, all come out at one rub with the infallible and

invaluable composition. If a lady stains her honour, she has

only need to swallow one cake and she's cured at once--for it's

poison. If a gentleman wants to prove this, he has only need to

bolt one little square, and he has put it beyond question--for

it's quite as satisfactory as a pistol-bullet, and a great deal

nastier in the flavour, consequently the more credit in taking

it. One penny a square. With all these virtues, one penny a

square!'

There were two buyers directly, and more of the listeners plainly

hesitated. The vendor observing this, increased in loquacity.

'It's all bought up as fast as it can be made,' said the fellow.

'There are fourteen water-mills, six steam-engines, and a

galvanic battery, always a-working upon it, and they can't make

it fast enough, though the men work so hard that they die off,

and the widows is pensioned directly, with twenty pound a-year

for each of the children, and a premium of fifty for twins. One

penny a square! Two half-pence is all the same, and four

farthings is received with joy. One penny a square!

Wine-stains, fruit-stains, beer-stains, water-stains,

paint-stains, pitch-stains, mud-stains, blood-stains! Here is a

stain upon the hat of a gentleman in company, that I'll take

clean out, before he can order me a pint of ale.'

'Hah!' cried Sikes starting up. 'Give that back.'

'I'll take it clean out, sir,' replied the man, winking to the

company, 'before you can come across the room to get it.

Gentlemen all, observe the dark stain upon this gentleman's hat,

no wider than a shilling, but thicker than a half-crown. Whether

it is a wine-stain, fruit-stain, beer-stain, water-stain,

paint-stain, pitch-stain, mud-stain, or blood-stain--'

The man got no further, for Sikes with a hideous imprecation

overthrew the table, and tearing the hat from him, burst out of

the house.

With the same perversity of feeling and irresolution that had

fastened upon him, despite himself, all day, the murderer,

finding that he was not followed, and that they most probably

considered him some drunken sullen fellow, turned back up the

town, and getting out of the glare of the lamps of a stage-coach

that was standing in the street, was walking past, when he

recognised the mail from London, and saw that it was standing at

the little post-office. He almost knew what was to come; but he

crossed over, and listened.

The guard was standing at the door, waiting for the letter-bag.

A man, dressed like a game-keeper, came up at the moment, and he

handed him a basket which lay ready on the pavement.

'That's for your people,' said the guard. 'Now, look alive in

there, will you. Damn that 'ere bag, it warn't ready night afore

last; this won't do, you know!'

'Anything new up in town, Ben?' asked the game-keeper, drawing

back to the window-shutters, the better to admire the horses.

'No, nothing that I knows on,' replied the man, pulling on his

gloves. 'Corn's up a little. I heerd talk of a murder, too,

down Spitalfields way, but I don't reckon much upon it.'

'Oh, that's quite true,' said a gentleman inside, who was looking

out of the window. 'And a dreadful murder it was.'

'Was it, sir?' rejoined the guard, touching his hat. 'Man or

woman, pray, sir?'

'A woman,' replied the gentleman. 'It is supposed--'

'Now, Ben,' replied the coachman impatiently.

'Damn that 'ere bag,' said the guard; 'are you gone to sleep in

there?'

'Coming!' cried the office keeper, running out.

'Coming,' growled the guard. 'Ah, and so's the young 'ooman of

property that's going to take a fancy to me, but I don't know

when. Here, give hold. All ri--ight!'

The horn sounded a few cheerful notes, and the coach was gone.

Sikes remained standing in the street, apparently unmoved by what

he had just heard, and agitated by no stronger feeling than a

doubt where to go. At length he went back again, and took the

road which leads from Hatfield to St. Albans.

He went on doggedly; but as he left the town behind him, and

plunged into the solitude and darkness of the road, he felt a

dread and awe creeping upon him which shook him to the core.

Every object before him, substance or shadow, still or moving,

took the semblance of some fearful thing; but these fears were

nothing compared to the sense that haunted him of that morning's

ghastly figure following at his heels. He could trace its shadow

in the gloom, supply the smallest item of the outline, and note

how stiff and solemn it seemed to stalk along. He could hear its

garments rustling in the leaves, and every breath of wind came

laden with that last low cry. If he stopped it did the same. If

he ran, it followed--not running too: that would have been a

relief: but like a corpse endowed with the mere machinery of

life, and borne on one slow melancholy wind that never rose or

fell.

At times, he turned, with desperate determination, resolved to

beat this phantom off, though it should look him dead; but the

hair rose on his head, and his blood stood still, for it had

turned with him and was behind him then. He had kept it before

him that morning, but it was behind now--always. He leaned his

back against a bank, and felt that it stood above him, visibly

out against the cold night-sky. He threw himself upon the

road--on his back upon the road. At his head it stood, silent,

erect, and still--a living grave-stone, with its epitaph in

blood.

Let no man talk of murderers escaping justice, and hint that

Providence must sleep. There were twenty score of violent deaths

in one long minute of that agony of fear.

There was a shed in a field he passed, that offered shelter for

the night. Before the door, were three tall poplar trees, which

made it very dark within; and the wind moaned through them with a

dismal wail. He \_could not\_ walk on, till daylight came again; and

here he stretched himself close to the wall--to undergo new

torture.

For now, a vision came before him, as constant and more terrible

than that from which he had escaped. Those widely staring eyes,

so lustreless and so glassy, that he had better borne to see them

than think upon them, appeared in the midst of the darkness:

light in themselves, but giving light to nothing. There were but

two, but they were everywhere. If he shut out the sight, there

came the room with every well-known object--some, indeed, that he

would have forgotten, if he had gone over its contents from

memory--each in its accustomed place. The body was in \_its\_ place,

and its eyes were as he saw them when he stole away. He got up,

and rushed into the field without. The figure was behind him.

He re-entered the shed, and shrunk down once more. The eyes were

there, before he had laid himself along.

And here he remained in such terror as none but he can know,

trembling in every limb, and the cold sweat starting from every

pore, when suddenly there arose upon the night-wind the noise of

distant shouting, and the roar of voices mingled in alarm and

wonder. Any sound of men in that lonely place, even though it

conveyed a real cause of alarm, was something to him. He

regained his strength and energy at the prospect of personal

danger; and springing to his feet, rushed into the open air.

The broad sky seemed on fire. Rising into the air with showers

of sparks, and rolling one above the other, were sheets of flame,

lighting the atmosphere for miles round, and driving clouds of

smoke in the direction where he stood. The shouts grew louder as

new voices swelled the roar, and he could hear the cry of Fire!

mingled with the ringing of an alarm-bell, the fall of heavy

bodies, and the crackling of flames as they twined round some new

obstacle, and shot aloft as though refreshed by food. The noise

increased as he looked. There were people there--men and

women--light, bustle. It was like new life to him. He darted

onward--straight, headlong--dashing through brier and brake, and

leaping gate and fence as madly as his dog, who careered with

loud and sounding bark before him.

He came upon the spot. There were half-dressed figures tearing

to and fro, some endeavouring to drag the frightened horses from

the stables, others driving the cattle from the yard and

out-houses, and others coming laden from the burning pile, amidst

a shower of falling sparks, and the tumbling down of red-hot

beams. The apertures, where doors and windows stood an hour ago,

disclosed a mass of raging fire; walls rocked and crumbled into

the burning well; the molten lead and iron poured down, white

hot, upon the ground. Women and children shrieked, and men

encouraged each other with noisy shouts and cheers. The clanking

of the engine-pumps, and the spirting and hissing of the water as

it fell upon the blazing wood, added to the tremendous roar. He

shouted, too, till he was hoarse; and flying from memory and

himself, plunged into the thickest of the throng. Hither and

thither he dived that night: now working at the pumps, and now

hurrying through the smoke and flame, but never ceasing to engage

himself wherever noise and men were thickest. Up and down the

ladders, upon the roofs of buildings, over floors that quaked and

trembled with his weight, under the lee of falling bricks and

stones, in every part of that great fire was he; but he bore a

charmed life, and had neither scratch nor bruise, nor weariness

nor thought, till morning dawned again, and only smoke and

blackened ruins remained.

This mad excitement over, there returned, with ten-fold force,

the dreadful consciousness of his crime. He looked suspiciously

about him, for the men were conversing in groups, and he feared

to be the subject of their talk. The dog obeyed the significant

beck of his finger, and they drew off, stealthily, together. He

passed near an engine where some men were seated, and they called

to him to share in their refreshment. He took some bread and

meat; and as he drank a draught of beer, heard the firemen, who

were from London, talking about the murder. 'He has gone to

Birmingham, they say,' said one: 'but they'll have him yet, for

the scouts are out, and by to-morrow night there'll be a cry all

through the country.'

He hurried off, and walked till he almost dropped upon the

ground; then lay down in a lane, and had a long, but broken and

uneasy sleep. He wandered on again, irresolute and undecided,

and oppressed with the fear of another solitary night.

Suddenly, he took the desperate resolution to going back to

London.

'There's somebody to speak to there, at all event,' he thought.

'A good hiding-place, too. They'll never expect to nab me there,

after this country scent. Why can't I lie by for a week or so,

and, forcing blunt from Fagin, get abroad to France? Damme, I'll

risk it.'

He acted upon this impulse without delay, and choosing the least

frequented roads began his journey back, resolved to lie

concealed within a short distance of the metropolis, and,

entering it at dusk by a circuitous route, to proceed straight to

that part of it which he had fixed on for his destination.

The dog, though. If any description of him were out, it would

not be forgotten that the dog was missing, and had probably gone

with him. This might lead to his apprehension as he passed along

the streets. He resolved to drown him, and walked on, looking

about for a pond: picking up a heavy stone and tying it to his

handkerchief as he went.

The animal looked up into his master's face while these

preparations were making; whether his instinct apprehended

something of their purpose, or the robber's sidelong look at him

was sterner than ordinary, he skulked a little farther in the

rear than usual, and cowered as he came more slowly along. When

his master halted at the brink of a pool, and looked round to

call him, he stopped outright.

'Do you hear me call? Come here!' cried Sikes.

The animal came up from the very force of habit; but as Sikes

stooped to attach the handkerchief to his throat, he uttered a

low growl and started back.

'Come back!' said the robber.

The dog wagged his tail, but moved not. Sikes made a running

noose and called him again.

The dog advanced, retreated, paused an instant, and scoured away

at his hardest speed.

The man whistled again and again, and sat down and waited in the

expectation that he would return. But no dog appeared, and at

length he resumed his journey.

CHAPTER XLIX

MONKS AND MR. BROWNLOW AT LENGTH MEET. THEIR CONVERSATION, AND

THE INTELLIGENCE THAT INTERRUPTS IT

 The twilight was beginning to close in, when Mr. Brownlow

alighted from a hackney-coach at his own door, and knocked

softly. The door being opened, a sturdy man got out of the coach

and stationed himself on one side of the steps, while another

man, who had been seated on the box, dismounted too, and stood

upon the other side. At a sign from Mr. Brownlow, they helped

out a third man, and taking him between them, hurried him into

the house. This man was Monks.

They walked in the same manner up the stairs without speaking,

and Mr. Brownlow, preceding them, led the way into a back-room.

At the door of this apartment, Monks, who had ascended with

evident reluctance, stopped. The two men looked at the old

gentleman as if for instructions.

'He knows the alternative,' said Mr. Browlow. 'If he hesitates

or moves a finger but as you bid him, drag him into the street,

call for the aid of the police, and impeach him as a felon in my

name.'

'How dare you say this of me?' asked Monks.

'How dare you urge me to it, young man?' replied Mr. Brownlow,

confronting him with a steady look. 'Are you mad enough to leave

this house? Unhand him. There, sir. You are free to go, and we

to follow. But I warn you, by all I hold most solemn and most

sacred, that instant will have you apprehended on a charge of

fraud and robbery. I am resolute and immoveable. If you are

determined to be the same, your blood be upon your own head!'

'By what authority am I kidnapped in the street, and brought here

by these dogs?' asked Monks, looking from one to the other of the

men who stood beside him.

'By mine,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'Those persons are indemnified

by me. If you complain of being deprived of your liberty--you

had power and opportunity to retrieve it as you came along, but

you deemed it advisable to remain quiet--I say again, throw

yourself for protection on the law. I will appeal to the law

too; but when you have gone too far to recede, do not sue to me

for leniency, when the power will have passed into other hands;

and do not say I plunged you down the gulf into which you rushed,

yourself.'

Monks was plainly disconcerted, and alarmed besides. He

hesitated.

'You will decide quickly,' said Mr. Brownlow, with perfect

firmness and composure. 'If you wish me to prefer my charges

publicly, and consign you to a punishment the extent of which,

although I can, with a shudder, foresee, I cannot control, once

more, I say, for you know the way. If not, and you appeal to my

forbearance, and the mercy of those you have deeply injured, seat

yourself, without a word, in that chair. It has waited for you

two whole days.'

Monks muttered some unintelligible words, but wavered still.

'You will be prompt,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'A word from me, and

the alternative has gone for ever.'

Still the man hesitated.

'I have not the inclination to parley,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'and,

as I advocate the dearest interests of others, I have not the

right.'

'Is there--' demanded Monks with a faltering tongue,--'is

there--no middle course?'

'None.'

Monks looked at the old gentleman, with an anxious eye; but,

reading in his countenance nothing but severity and

determination, walked into the room, and, shrugging his

shoulders, sat down.

'Lock the door on the outside,' said Mr. Brownlow to the

attendants, 'and come when I ring.'

The men obeyed, and the two were left alone together.

'This is pretty treatment, sir,' said Monks, throwing down his

hat and cloak, 'from my father's oldest friend.'

'It is because I was your father's oldest friend, young man,'

returned Mr. Brownlow; 'it is because the hopes and wishes of

young and happy years were bound up with him, and that fair

creature of his blood and kindred who rejoined her God in youth,

and left me here a solitary, lonely man: it is because he knelt

with me beside his only sisters' death-bed when he was yet a boy,

on the morning that would--but Heaven willed otherwise--have made

her my young wife; it is because my seared heart clung to him,

from that time forth, through all his trials and errors, till he

died; it is because old recollections and associations filled my

heart, and even the sight of you brings with it old thoughts of

him; it is because of all these things that I am moved to treat

you gently now--yes, Edward Leeford, even now--and blush for your

unworthiness who bear the name.'

'What has the name to do with it?' asked the other, after

contemplating, half in silence, and half in dogged wonder, the

agitation of his companion. 'What is the name to me?'

'Nothing,' replied Mr. Brownlow, 'nothing to you. But it was

\_hers\_, and even at this distance of time brings back to me, an old

man, the glow and thrill which I once felt, only to hear it

repeated by a stranger. I am very glad you have changed

it--very--very.'

'This is all mighty fine,' said Monks (to retain his assumed

designation) after a long silence, during which he had jerked

himself in sullen defiance to and fro, and Mr. Brownlow had sat,

shading his face with his hand. 'But what do you want with me?'

'You have a brother,' said Mr. Brownlow, rousing himself: 'a

brother, the whisper of whose name in your ear when I came behind

you in the street, was, in itself, almost enough to make you

accompany me hither, in wonder and alarm.'

'I have no brother,' replied Monks. 'You know I was an only

child. Why do you talk to me of brothers? You know that, as

well as I.'

'Attend to what I do know, and you may not,' said Mr. Brownlow.

'I shall interest you by and by. I know that of the wretched

marriage, into which family pride, and the most sordid and

narrowest of all ambition, forced your unhappy father when a mere

boy, you were the sole and most unnatural issue.'

'I don't care for hard names,' interrupted Monks with a jeering

laugh. 'You know the fact, and that's enough for me.'

'But I also know,' pursued the old gentleman, 'the misery, the

slow torture, the protracted anguish of that ill-assorted union.

I know how listlessly and wearily each of that wretched pair

dragged on their heavy chain through a world that was poisoned to

them both. I know how cold formalities were succeeded by open

taunts; how indifference gave place to dislike, dislike to hate,

and hate to loathing, until at last they wrenched the clanking

bond asunder, and retiring a wide space apart, carried each a

galling fragment, of which nothing but death could break the

rivets, to hide it in new society beneath the gayest looks they

could assume. Your mother succeeded; she forgot it soon. But it

rusted and cankered at your father's heart for years.'

'Well, they were separated,' said Monks, 'and what of that?'

'When they had been separated for some time,' returned Mr.

Brownlow, 'and your mother, wholly given up to continental

frivolities, had utterly forgotten the young husband ten good

years her junior, who, with prospects blighted, lingered on at

home, he fell among new friends. This circumstance, at least,

you know already.'

'Not I,' said Monks, turning away his eyes and beating his foot

upon the ground, as a man who is determined to deny everything.

'Not I.'

'Your manner, no less than your actions, assures me that you have

never forgotten it, or ceased to think of it with bitterness,'

returned Mr. Brownlow. 'I speak of fifteen years ago, when you

were not more than eleven years old, and your father but

one-and-thirty--for he was, I repeat, a boy, when \_his\_ father

ordered him to marry. Must I go back to events which cast a shade

upon the memory of your parent, or will you spare it, and

disclose to me the truth?'

'I have nothing to disclose,' rejoined Monks. 'You must talk on

if you will.'

'These new friends, then,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'were a naval

officer retired from active service, whose wife had died some

half-a-year before, and left him with two children--there had

been more, but, of all their family, happily but two survived.

They were both daughters; one a beautiful creature of nineteen,

and the other a mere child of two or three years old.'

'What's this to me?' asked Monks.

'They resided,' said Mr. Brownlow, without seeming to hear the

interruption, 'in a part of the country to which your father in

his wandering had repaired, and where he had taken up his abode.

Acquaintance, intimacy, friendship, fast followed on each other.

Your father was gifted as few men are. He had his sister's soul

and person. As the old officer knew him more and more, he grew

to love him. I would that it had ended there. His daughter did

the same.'

The old gentleman paused; Monks was biting his lips, with his

eyes fixed upon the floor; seeing this, he immediately resumed:

'The end of a year found him contracted, solemnly contracted, to

that daughter; the object of the first, true, ardent, only

passion of a guileless girl.'

'Your tale is of the longest,' observed Monks, moving restlessly

in his chair.

'It is a true tale of grief and trial, and sorrow, young man,'

returned Mr. Brownlow, 'and such tales usually are; if it were

one of unmixed joy and happiness, it would be very brief. At

length one of those rich relations to strengthen whose interest

and importance your father had been sacrificed, as others are

often--it is no uncommon case--died, and to repair the misery he

had been instrumental in occasioning, left him his panacea for

all griefs--Money. It was necessary that he should immediately

repair to Rome, whither this man had sped for health, and where

he had died, leaving his affairs in great confusion. He went;

was seized with mortal illness there; was followed, the moment

the intelligence reached Paris, by your mother who carried you

with her; he died the day after her arrival, leaving no will--\_no will\_

--so that the whole property fell to her and you.'

At this part of the recital Monks held his breath, and listened

with a face of intense eagerness, though his eyes were not

directed towards the speaker. As Mr. Brownlow paused, he changed

his position with the air of one who has experienced a sudden

relief, and wiped his hot face and hands.

'Before he went abroad, and as he passed through London on his

way,' said Mr. Brownlow, slowly, and fixing his eyes upon the

other's face, 'he came to me.'

'I never heard of that,' interrupted MOnks in a tone intended to

appear incredulous, but savouring more of disagreeable surprise.

'He came to me, and left with me, among some other things, a

picture--a portrait painted by himself--a likeness of this poor

girl--which he did not wish to leave behind, and could not carry

forward on his hasty journey. He was worn by anxiety and remorse

almost to a shadow; talked in a wild, distracted way, of ruin and

dishonour worked by himself; confided to me his intention to

convert his whole property, at any loss, into money, and, having

settled on his wife and you a portion of his recent acquisition,

to fly the country--I guessed too well he would not fly

alone--and never see it more. Even from me, his old and early

friend, whose strong attachment had taken root in the earth that

covered one most dear to both--even from me he withheld any more

particular confession, promising to write and tell me all, and

after that to see me once again, for the last time on earth.

Alas! \_That\_ was the last time. I had no letter, and I never saw

him more.'

'I went,' said Mr. Brownlow, after a short pause, 'I went, when

all was over, to the scene of his--I will use the term the world

would freely use, for worldly harshness or favour are now alike

to him--of his guilty love, resolved that if my fears were

realised that erring child should find one heart and home to

shelter and compassionate her. The family had left that part a

week before; they had called in such trifling debts as were

outstanding, discharged them, and left the place by night. Why,

or whither, none can tell.'

Monks drew his breath yet more freely, and looked round with a

smile of triumph.

'When your brother,' said Mr. Brownlow, drawing nearer to the

other's chair, 'When your brother: a feeble, ragged, neglected

child: was cast in my way by a stronger hand than chance, and

rescued by me from a life of vice and infamy--'

'What?' cried Monks.

'By me,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'I told you I should interest you

before long. I say by me--I see that your cunning associate

suppressed my name, although for ought he knew, it would be quite

strange to your ears. When he was rescued by me, then, and lay

recovering from sickness in my house, his strong resemblance to

this picture I have spoken of, struck me with astonishment. Even

when I first saw him in all his dirt and misery, there was a

lingering expression in his face that came upon me like a glimpse

of some old friend flashing on one in a vivid dream. I need not

tell you he was snared away before I knew his history--'

'Why not?' asked Monks hastily.

'Because you know it well.'

'I!'

'Denial to me is vain,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'I shall show you

that I know more than that.'

'You--you--can't prove anything against me,' stammered Monks. 'I

defy you to do it!'

'We shall see,' returned the old gentleman with a searching

glance. 'I lost the boy, and no efforts of mine could recover

him. Your mother being dead, I knew that you alone could solve

the mystery if anybody could, and as when I had last heard of you

you were on your own estate in the West Indies--whither, as you

well know, you retired upon your mother's death to escape the

consequences of vicious courses here--I made the voyage. You had

left it, months before, and were supposed to be in London, but no

one could tell where. I returned. Your agents had no clue to

your residence. You came and went, they said, as strangely as

you had ever done: sometimes for days together and sometimes not

for months: keeping to all appearance the same low haunts and

mingling with the same infamous herd who had been your associates

when a fierce ungovernable boy. I wearied them with new

applications. I paced the streets by night and day, but until

two hours ago, all my efforts were fruitless, and I never saw you

for an instant.'

'And now you do see me,' said Monks, rising boldly, 'what then?

Fraud and robbery are high-sounding words--justified, you think,

by a fancied resemblance in some young imp to an idle daub of a

dead man's Brother! You don't even know that a child was born of

this maudlin pair; you don't even know that.'

'I \_did not\_,' replied Mr. Brownlow, rising too; 'but within the

last fortnight I have learnt it all. You have a brother; you

know it, and him. There was a will, which your mother destroyed,

leaving the secret and the gain to you at her own death. It

contained a reference to some child likely to be the result of

this sad connection, which child was born, and accidentally

encountered by you, when your suspicions were first awakened by

his resemblance to your father. You repaired to the place of his

birth. There existed proofs--proofs long suppressed--of his birth

and parentage. Those proofs were destroyed by you, and now, in

your own words to your accomplice the Jew, "\_the only proofs of the

boy's identity lie at the bottom of the river, and the old hag

that received them from the mother is rotting in her coffin\_."

Unworthy son, coward, liar,--you, who hold your councils with

thieves and murderers in dark rooms at night,--you, whose plots

and wiles have brought a violent death upon the head of one worth

millions such as you,--you, who from your cradle were gall and

bitterness to your own father's heart, and in whom all evil

passions, vice, and profligacy, festered, till they found a vent

in a hideous disease which had made your face an index even to

your mind--you, Edward Leeford, do you still brave me!'

'No, no, no!' returned the coward, overwhelmed by these

accumulated charges.

'Every word!' cried the gentleman, 'every word that has passed

between you and this detested villain, is known to me. Shadows

on the wall have caught your whispers, and brought them to my

ear; the sight of the persecuted child has turned vice itself,

and given it the courage and almost the attributes of virtue.

Murder has been done, to which you were morally if not really a

party.'

'No, no,' interposed Monks. 'I--I knew nothing of that; I was

going to inquire the truth of the story when you overtook me. I

didn't know the cause. I thought it was a common quarrel.'

'It was the partial disclosure of your secrets,' replied Mr.

Brownlow. 'Will you disclose the whole?'

'Yes, I will.'

'Set your hand to a statement of truth and facts, and repeat it

before witnesses?'

'That I promise too.'

'Remain quietly here, until such a document is drawn up, and

proceed with me to such a place as I may deem most advisable, for

the purpose of attesting it?'

'If you insist upon that, I'll do that also,' replied Monks.

'You must do more than that,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'Make

restitution to an innocent and unoffending child, for such he is,

although the offspring of a guilty and most miserable love. You

have not forgotten the provisions of the will. Carry them into

execution so far as your brother is concerned, and then go where

you please. In this world you need meet no more.'

While Monks was pacing up and down, meditating with dark and evil

looks on this proposal and the possibilities of evading it: torn

by his fears on the one hand and his hatred on the other: the

door was hurriedly unlocked, and a gentleman (Mr. Losberne)

entered the room in violent agitation.

'The man will be taken,' he cried. 'He will be taken to-night!'

'The murderer?' asked Mr. Brownlow.

'Yes, yes,' replied the other. 'His dog has been seen lurking

about some old haunt, and there seems little doubt that his master

either is, or will be, there, under cover of the darkness. Spies

are hovering about in every direction. I have spoken to the men

who are charged with his capture, and they tell me he cannot

escape. A reward of a hundred pounds is proclaimed by Government

to-night.'

'I will give fifty more,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'and proclaim it

with my own lips upon the spot, if I can reach it. Where is Mr.

Maylie?'

'Harry? As soon as he had seen your friend here, safe in a coach

with you, he hurried off to where he heard this,' replied the

doctor, 'and mounting his horse sallied forth to join the first

party at some place in the outskirts agreed upon between them.'

'Fagin,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'what of him?'

'When I last heard, he had not been taken, but he will be, or is,

by this time. They're sure of him.'

'Have you made up your mind?' asked Mr. Brownlow, in a low voice,

of Monks.

'Yes,' he replied. 'You--you--will be secret with me?'

'I will. Remain here till I return. It is your only hope of

safety.'

They left the room, and the door was again locked.

'What have you done?' asked the doctor in a whisper.

'All that I could hope to do, and even more. Coupling the poor

girl's intelligence with my previous knowledge, and the result of

our good friend's inquiries on the spot, I left him no loophole

of escape, and laid bare the whole villainy which by these lights

became plain as day. Write and appoint the evening after

to-morrow, at seven, for the meeting. We shall be down there, a

few hours before, but shall require rest: especially the young

lady, who \_may\_ have greater need of firmness than either you or I

can quite foresee just now. But my blood boils to avenge this

poor murdered creature. Which way have they taken?'

'Drive straight to the office and you will be in time,' replied

Mr. Losberne. 'I will remain here.'

The two gentlemen hastily separated; each in a fever of

excitement wholly uncontrollable.

CHAPTER L

THE PURSUIT AND ESCAPE

Near to that part of the Thames on which the church at

Rotherhithe abuts, where the buildings on the banks are dirtiest

and the vessels on the river blackest with the dust of colliers

and the smoke of close-built low-roofed houses, there exists the

filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many

localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by

name, to the great mass of its inhabitants.

To reach this place, the visitor has to penetrate through a maze

of close, narrow, and muddy streets, thronged by the roughest and

poorest of waterside people, and devoted to the traffic they may

be supposed to occasion. The cheapest and least delicate

provisions are heaped in the shops; the coarsest and commonest

articles of wearing apparel dangle at the salesman's door, and

stream from the house-parapet and windows. Jostling with

unemployed labourers of the lowest class, ballast-heavers,

coal-whippers, brazen women, ragged children, and the raff and

refuse of the river, he makes his way with difficulty along,

assailed by offensive sights and smells from the narrow alleys

which branch off on the right and left, and deafened by the clash

of ponderous waggons that bear great piles of merchandise from

the stacks of warehouses that rise from every corner. Arriving,

at length, in streets remoter and less-frequented than those

through which he has passed, he walks beneath tottering

house-fronts projecting over the pavement, dismantled walls that

seem to totter as he passes, chimneys half crushed half

hesitating to fall, windows guarded by rusty iron bars that time

and dirt have almost eaten away, every imaginable sign of

desolation and neglect.

In such a neighborhood, beyond Dockhead in the Borough of

Southwark, stands Jacob's Island, surrounded by a muddy ditch,

six or eight feet deep and fifteen or twenty wide when the tide

is in, once called Mill Pond, but known in the days of this story

as Folly Ditch. It is a creek or inlet from the Thames, and can

always be filled at high water by opening the sluices at the Lead

Mills from which it took its old name. At such times, a

stranger, looking from one of the wooden bridges thrown across it

at Mill Lane, will see the inhabitants of the houses on either

side lowering from their back doors and windows, buckets, pails,

domestic utensils of all kinds, in which to haul the water up;

and when his eye is turned from these operations to the houses

themselves, his utmost astonishment will be excited by the scene

before him. Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half a

dozen houses, with holes from which to look upon the slime

beneath; windows, broken and patched, with poles thrust out, on

which to dry the linen that is never there; rooms so small, so

filthy, so confined, that the air would seem too tainted even for

the dirt and squalor which they shelter; wooden chambers

thrusting themselves out above the mud, and threatening to fall

into it--as some have done; dirt-besmeared walls and decaying

foundations; every repulsive lineament of poverty, every

loathsome indication of filth, rot, and garbage; all these

ornament the banks of Folly Ditch.

In Jacob's Island, the warehouses are roofless and empty; the

walls are crumbling down; the windows are windows no more; the

doors are falling into the streets; the chimneys are blackened,

but they yield no smoke. Thirty or forty years ago, before

losses and chancery suits came upon it, it was a thriving place;

but now it is a desolate island indeed. The houses have no

owners; they are broken open, and entered upon by those who have

the courage; and there they live, and there they die. They must

have powerful motives for a secret residence, or be reduced to a

destitute condition indeed, who seek a refuge in Jacob's Island.

In an upper room of one of these houses--a detached house of fair

size, ruinous in other respects, but strongly defended at door

and window: of which house the back commanded the ditch in

manner already described--there were assembled three men, who,

regarding each other every now and then with looks expressive of

perplexity and expectation, sat for some time in profound and

gloomy silence. One of these was Toby Crackit, another Mr.

Chitling, and the third a robber of fifty years, whose nose had

been almost beaten in, in some old scuffle, and whose face bore a

frightful scar which might probably be traced to the same

occasion. This man was a returned transport, and his name was

Kags.

'I wish,' said Toby turning to Mr. Chitling, 'that you had picked

out some other crib when the two old ones got too warm, and had

not come here, my fine feller.'

'Why didn't you, blunder-head!' said Kags.

'Well, I thought you'd have been a little more glad to see me

than this,' replied Mr. Chitling, with a melancholy air.

'Why, look'e, young gentleman,' said Toby, 'when a man keeps

himself so very ex-clusive as I have done, and by that means has

a snug house over his head with nobody a prying and smelling

about it, it's rather a startling thing to have the honour of a

wisit from a young gentleman (however respectable and pleasant a

person he may be to play cards with at conweniency) circumstanced

as you are.'

'Especially, when the exclusive young man has got a friend

stopping with him, that's arrived sooner than was expected from

foreign parts, and is too modest to want to be presented to the

Judges on his return,' added Mr. Kags.

There was a short silence, after which Toby Crackit, seeming to

abandon as hopeless any further effort to maintain his usual

devil-may-care swagger, turned to Chitling and said,

'When was Fagin took then?'

'Just at dinner-time--two o'clock this afternoon. Charley and I

made our lucky up the wash-us chimney, and Bolter got into the

empty water-butt, head downwards; but his legs were so precious

long that they stuck out at the top, and so they took him too.'

'And Bet?'

'Poor Bet! She went to see the Body, to speak to who it was,'

replied Chitling, his countenance falling more and more, 'and

went off mad, screaming and raving, and beating her head against

the boards; so they put a strait-weskut on her and took her to

the hospital--and there she is.'

'Wot's come of young Bates?' demanded Kags.

'He hung about, not to come over here afore dark, but he'll be

here soon,' replied Chitling. 'There's nowhere else to go to

now, for the people at the Cripples are all in custody, and the

bar of the ken--I went up there and see it with my own eyes--is

filled with traps.'

'This is a smash,' observed Toby, biting his lips. 'There's more

than one will go with this.'

'The sessions are on,' said Kags: 'if they get the inquest over,

and Bolter turns King's evidence: as of course he will, from

what he's said already: they can prove Fagin an accessory before

the fact, and get the trial on on Friday, and he'll swing in six

days from this, by G--!'

'You should have heard the people groan,' said Chitling; 'the

officers fought like devils, or they'd have torn him away. He

was down once, but they made a ring round him, and fought their

way along. You should have seen how he looked about him, all

muddy and bleeding, and clung to them as if they were his dearest

friends. I can see 'em now, not able to stand upright with the

pressing of the mob, and draggin him along amongst 'em; I can see

the people jumping up, one behind another, and snarling with

their teeth and making at him; I can see the blood upon his hair

and beard, and hear the cries with which the women worked

themselves into the centre of the crowd at the street corner, and

swore they'd tear his heart out!'

The horror-stricken witness of this scene pressed his hands upon

his ears, and with his eyes closed got up and paced violently to

and fro, like one distracted.

While he was thus engaged, and the two men sat by in silence with

their eyes fixed upon the floor, a pattering noise was heard upon

the stairs, and Sikes's dog bounded into the room. They ran to

the window, downstairs, and into the street. The dog had jumped

in at an open window; he made no attempt to follow them, nor was

his master to be seen.

'What's the meaning of this?' said Toby when they had returned.

'He can't be coming here. I--I--hope not.'

'If he was coming here, he'd have come with the dog,' said Kags,

stooping down to examine the animal, who lay panting on the

floor. 'Here! Give us some water for him; he has run himself

faint.'

'He's drunk it all up, every drop,' said Chitling after watching

the dog some time in silence. 'Covered with mud--lame--half

blind--he must have come a long way.'

'Where can he have come from!' exclaimed Toby. 'He's been to the

other kens of course, and finding them filled with strangers come

on here, where he's been many a time and often. But where can he

have come from first, and how comes he here alone without the

other!'

'He'--(none of them called the murderer by his old name)--'He

can't have made away with himself. What do you think?' said

Chitling.

Toby shook his head.

'If he had,' said Kags, 'the dog 'ud want to lead us away to

where he did it. No. I think he's got out of the country, and

left the dog behind. He must have given him the slip somehow, or

he wouldn't be so easy.'

This solution, appearing the most probable one, was adopted as

the right; the dog, creeping under a chair, coiled himself up to

sleep, without more notice from anybody.

It being now dark, the shutter was closed, and a candle lighted

and placed upon the table. The terrible events of the last two

days had made a deep impression on all three, increased by the

danger and uncertainty of their own position. They drew their

chairs closer together, starting at every sound. They spoke

little, and that in whispers, and were as silent and awe-stricken

as if the remains of the murdered woman lay in the next room.

They had sat thus, some time, when suddenly was heard a hurried

knocking at the door below.

'Young Bates,' said Kags, looking angrily round, to check the

fear he felt himself.

The knocking came again. No, it wasn't he. He never knocked

like that.

Crackit went to the window, and shaking all over, drew in his

head. There was no need to tell them who it was; his pale face

was enough. The dog too was on the alert in an instant, and ran

whining to the door.

'We must let him in,' he said, taking up the candle.

'Isn't there any help for it?' asked the other man in a hoarse

voice.

'None. He \_must\_ come in.'

'Don't leave us in the dark,' said Kags, taking down a candle

from the chimney-piece, and lighting it, with such a trembling

hand that the knocking was twice repeated before he had finished.

Crackit went down to the door, and returned followed by a man

with the lower part of his face buried in a handkerchief, and

another tied over his head under his hat. He drew them slowly

off. Blanched face, sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, beard of three

days' growth, wasted flesh, short thick breath; it was the very

ghost of Sikes.

He laid his hand upon a chair which stood in the middle of the

room, but shuddering as he was about to drop into it, and seeming

to glance over his shoulder, dragged it back close to the

wall--as close as it would go--and ground it against it--and sat

down.

Not a word had been exchanged. He looked from one to another in

silence. If an eye were furtively raised and met his, it was

instantly averted. When his hollow voice broke silence, they all

three started. They seemed never to have heard its tones before.

'How came that dog here?' he asked.

'Alone. Three hours ago.'

'To-night's paper says that Fagin's took. Is it true, or a lie?'

'True.'

They were silent again.

'Damn you all!' said Sikes, passing his hand across his forehead.

'Have you nothing to say to me?'

There was an uneasy movement among them, but nobody spoke.

'You that keep this house,' said Sikes, turning his face to

Crackit, 'do you mean to sell me, or to let me lie here till this

hunt is over?'

'You may stop here, if you think it safe,' returned the person

addressed, after some hesitation.

Sikes carried his eyes slowly up the wall behind him: rather

trying to turn his head than actually doing it: and said,

'Is--it--the body--is it buried?'

They shook their heads.

'Why isn't it!' he retorted with the same glance behind him.

'Wot do they keep such ugly things above the ground for?--Who's

that knocking?'

Crackit intimated, by a motion of his hand as he left the room,

that there was nothing to fear; and directly came back with

Charley Bates behind him. Sikes sat opposite the door, so that

the moment the boy entered the room he encountered his figure.

'Toby,' said the boy falling back, as Sikes turned his eyes

towards him, 'why didn't you tell me this, downstairs?'

There had been something so tremendous in the shrinking off of

the three, that the wretched man was willing to propitiate even

this lad. Accordingly he nodded, and made as though he would

shake hands with him.

'Let me go into some other room,' said the boy, retreating still

farther.

'Charley!' said Sikes, stepping forward. 'Don't you--don't you

know me?'

'Don't come nearer me,' answered the boy, still retreating, and

looking, with horror in his eyes, upon the murderer's face. 'You

monster!'

The man stopped half-way, and they looked at each other; but

Sikes's eyes sunk gradually to the ground.

'Witness you three,' cried the boy shaking his clenched fist, and

becoming more and more excited as he spoke. 'Witness you

three--I'm not afraid of him--if they come here after him, I'll

give him up; I will. I tell you out at once. He may kill me for

it if he likes, or if he dares, but if I am here I'll give him

up. I'd give him up if he was to be boiled alive. Murder!

Help! If there's the pluck of a man among you three, you'll help

me. Murder! Help! Down with him!'

Pouring out these cries, and accompanying them with violent

gesticulation, the boy actually threw himself, single-handed,

upon the strong man, and in the intensity of his energy and the

suddenness of his surprise, brought him heavily to the ground.

The three spectators seemed quite stupefied. They offered no

interference, and the boy and man rolled on the ground together;

the former, heedless of the blows that showered upon him,

wrenching his hands tighter and tighter in the garments about the

murderer's breast, and never ceasing to call for help with all

his might.

The contest, however, was too unequal to last long. Sikes had

him down, and his knee was on his throat, when Crackit pulled him

back with a look of alarm, and pointed to the window. There were

lights gleaming below, voices in loud and earnest conversation,

the tramp of hurried footsteps--endless they seemed in

number--crossing the nearest wooden bridge. One man on horseback

seemed to be among the crowd; for there was the noise of hoofs

rattling on the uneven pavement. The gleam of lights increased;

the footsteps came more thickly and noisily on. Then, came a

loud knocking at the door, and then a hoarse murmur from such a

multitude of angry voices as would have made the boldest quail.

'Help!' shrieked the boy in a voice that rent the air.

'He's here! Break down the door!'

'In the King's name,' cried the voices without; and the hoarse

cry arose again, but louder.

'Break down the door!' screamed the boy. 'I tell you they'll

never open it. Run straight to the room where the light is.

Break down the door!'

Strokes, thick and heavy, rattled upon the door and lower

window-shutters as he ceased to speak, and a loud huzzah burst

from the crowd; giving the listener, for the first time, some

adequate idea of its immense extent.

'Open the door of some place where I can lock this screeching

Hell-babe,' cried Sikes fiercely; running to and fro, and

dragging the boy, now, as easily as if he were an empty sack.

'That door. Quick!' He flung him in, bolted it, and turned the

key. 'Is the downstairs door fast?'

'Double-locked and chained,' replied Crackit, who, with the other

two men, still remained quite helpless and bewildered.

'The panels--are they strong?'

'Lined with sheet-iron.'

'And the windows too?'

'Yes, and the windows.'

'Damn you!' cried the desperate ruffian, throwing up the sash and

menacing the crowd. 'Do your worst! I'll cheat you yet!'

Of all the terrific yells that ever fell on mortal ears, none

could exceed the cry of the infuriated throng. Some shouted to

those who were nearest to set the house on fire; others roared to

the officers to shoot him dead. Among them all, none showed such

fury as the man on horseback, who, throwing himself out of the

saddle, and bursting through the crowd as if he were parting

water, cried, beneath the window, in a voice that rose above all

others, 'Twenty guineas to the man who brings a ladder!'

The nearest voices took up the cry, and hundreds echoed it. Some

called for ladders, some for sledge-hammers; some ran with

torches to and fro as if to seek them, and still came back and

roared again; some spent their breath in impotent curses and

execrations; some pressed forward with the ecstasy of madmen, and

thus impeded the progress of those below; some among the boldest

attempted to climb up by the water-spout and crevices in the

wall; and all waved to and fro, in the darkness beneath, like a

field of corn moved by an angry wind: and joined from time to

time in one loud furious roar.

'The tide,' cried the murderer, as he staggered back into the

room, and shut the faces out, 'the tide was in as I came up.

Give me a rope, a long rope. They're all in front. I may drop

into the Folly Ditch, and clear off that way. Give me a rope, or

I shall do three more murders and kill myself.'

The panic-stricken men pointed to where such articles were kept;

the murderer, hastily selecting the longest and strongest cord,

hurried up to the house-top.

All the window in the rear of the house had been long ago bricked

up, except one small trap in the room where the boy was locked,

and that was too small even for the passage of his body. But,

from this aperture, he had never ceased to call on those without,

to guard the back; and thus, when the murderer emerged at last on

the house-top by the door in the roof, a loud shout proclaimed

the fact to those in front, who immediately began to pour round,

pressing upon each other in an unbroken stream.

He planted a board, which he had carried up with him for the

purpose, so firmly against the door that it must be matter of

great difficulty to open it from the inside; and creeping over

the tiles, looked over the low parapet.

The water was out, and the ditch a bed of mud.

The crowd had been hushed during these few moments, watching his

motions and doubtful of his purpose, but the instant they

perceived it and knew it was defeated, they raised a cry of

triumphant execration to which all their previous shouting had

been whispers. Again and again it rose. Those who were at too

great a distance to know its meaning, took up the sound; it

echoed and re-echoed; it seemed as though the whole city had

poured its population out to curse him.

On pressed the people from the front--on, on, on, in a strong

struggling current of angry faces, with here and there a glaring

torch to lighten them up, and show them out in all their wrath

and passion. The houses on the opposite side of the ditch had

been entered by the mob; sashes were thrown up, or torn bodily

out; there were tiers and tiers of faces in every window; cluster

upon cluster of people clinging to every house-top. Each little

bridge (and there were three in sight) bent beneath the weight of

the crowd upon it. Still the current poured on to find some nook

or hole from which to vent their shouts, and only for an instant

see the wretch.

'They have him now,' cried a man on the nearest bridge. 'Hurrah!'

The crowd grew light with uncovered heads; and again the shout

uprose.

'I will give fifty pounds,' cried an old gentleman from the same

quarter, 'to the man who takes him alive. I will remain here,

till he come to ask me for it.'

There was another roar. At this moment the word was passed among

the crowd that the door was forced at last, and that he who had

first called for the ladder had mounted into the room. The

stream abruptly turned, as this intelligence ran from mouth to

mouth; and the people at the windows, seeing those upon the

bridges pouring back, quitted their stations, and running into

the street, joined the concourse that now thronged pell-mell to

the spot they had left: each man crushing and striving with his

neighbor, and all panting with impatience to get near the door,

and look upon the criminal as the officers brought him out. The

cries and shrieks of those who were pressed almost to

suffocation, or trampled down and trodden under foot in the

confusion, were dreadful; the narrow ways were completely blocked

up; and at this time, between the rush of some to regain the

space in front of the house, and the unavailing struggles of

others to extricate themselves from the mass, the immediate

attention was distracted from the murderer, although the

universal eagerness for his capture was, if possible, increased.

The man had shrunk down, thoroughly quelled by the ferocity of

the crowd, and the impossibility of escape; but seeing this

sudden change with no less rapidity than it had occurred, he

sprang upon his feet, determined to make one last effort for his

life by dropping into the ditch, and, at the risk of being

stifled, endeavouring to creep away in the darkness and

confusion.

Roused into new strength and energy, and stimulated by the noise

within the house which announced that an entrance had really been

effected, he set his foot against the stack of chimneys, fastened

one end of the rope tightly and firmly round it, and with the

other made a strong running noose by the aid of his hands and

teeth almost in a second. He could let himself down by the cord

to within a less distance of the ground than his own height, and

had his knife ready in his hand to cut it then and drop.

At the very instant when he brought the loop over his head

previous to slipping it beneath his arm-pits, and when the old

gentleman before-mentioned (who had clung so tight to the railing

of the bridge as to resist the force of the crowd, and retain his

position) earnestly warned those about him that the man was about

to lower himself down--at that very instant the murderer, looking

behind him on the roof, threw his arms above his head, and

uttered a yell of terror.

'The eyes again!' he cried in an unearthly screech.

Staggering as if struck by lightning, he lost his balance and

tumbled over the parapet. The noose was on his neck. It ran up

with his weight, tight as a bow-string, and swift as the arrow it

speeds. He fell for five-and-thirty feet. There was a sudden

jerk, a terrific convulsion of the limbs; and there he hung, with

the open knife clenched in his stiffening hand.

The old chimney quivered with the shock, but stood it bravely.

The murderer swung lifeless against the wall; and the boy,

thrusting aside the dangling body which obscured his view, called

to the people to come and take him out, for God's sake.

A dog, which had lain concealed till now, ran backwards and

forwards on the parapet with a dismal howl, and collecting

himself for a spring, jumped for the dead man's shoulders.

Missing his aim, he fell into the ditch, turning completely over

as he went; and striking his head against a stone, dashed out his

brains.

CHAPTER LI

AFFORDING AN EXPLANATION OF MORE MYSTERIES THAN ONE, AND

COMPREHENDING A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE WITH NO WORD OF SETTLEMENT

OR PIN-MONEY

The events narrated in the last chapter were yet but two days

old, when Oliver found himself, at three o'clock in the

afternoon, in a travelling-carriage rolling fast towards his

native town. Mrs. Maylie, and Rose, and Mrs. Bedwin, and the

good doctor were with him: and Mr. Brownlow followed in a

post-chaise, accompanied by one other person whose name had not

been mentioned.

They had not talked much upon the way; for Oliver was in a

flutter of agitation and uncertainty which deprived him of the

power of collecting his thoughts, and almost of speech, and

appeared to have scarcely less effect on his companions, who

shared it, in at least an equal degree. He and the two ladies

had been very carefully made acquainted by Mr. Brownlow with the

nature of the admissions which had been forced from Monks; and

although they knew that the object of their present journey was

to complete the work which had been so well begun, still the

whole matter was enveloped in enough of doubt and mystery to

leave them in endurance of the most intense suspense.

The same kind friend had, with Mr. Losberne's assistance,

cautiously stopped all channels of communication through which

they could receive intelligence of the dreadful occurrences that

so recently taken place. 'It was quite true,' he said, 'that

they must know them before long, but it might be at a better time

than the present, and it could not be at a worse.' So, they

travelled on in silence: each busied with reflections on the

object which had brought them together: and no one disposed to

give utterance to the thoughts which crowded upon all.

But if Oliver, under these influences, had remained silent while

they journeyed towards his birth-place by a road he had never

seen, how the whole current of his recollections ran back to old

times, and what a crowd of emotions were wakened up in his

breast, when they turned into that which he had traversed on

foot: a poor houseless, wandering boy, without a friend to help

him, or a roof to shelter his head.

'See there, there!' cried Oliver, eagerly clasping the hand of

Rose, and pointing out at the carriage window; 'that's the stile

I came over; there are the hedges I crept behind, for fear any

one should overtake me and force me back! Yonder is the path

across the fields, leading to the old house where I was a little

child! Oh Dick, Dick, my dear old friend, if I could only see

you now!'

'You will see him soon,' replied Rose, gently taking his folded

hands between her own. 'You shall tell him how happy you are,

and how rich you have grown, and that in all your happiness you

have none so great as the coming back to make him happy too.'

'Yes, yes,' said Oliver, 'and we'll--we'll take him away from

here, and have him clothed and taught, and send him to some quiet

country place where he may grow strong and well,--shall we?'

Rose nodded 'yes,' for the boy was smiling through such happy

tears that she could not speak.

'You will be kind and good to him, for you are to every one,'

said Oliver. 'It will make you cry, I know, to hear what he can

tell; but never mind, never mind, it will be all over, and you

will smile again--I know that too--to think how changed he is;

you did the same with me. He said "God bless you" to me when I

ran away,' cried the boy with a burst of affectionate emotion;

'and I will say "God bless you" now, and show him how I love him

for it!'

As they approached the town, and at length drove through its

narrow streets, it became matter of no small difficulty to

restrain the boy within reasonable bounds. There was

Sowerberry's the undertaker's just as it used to be, only smaller

and less imposing in appearance than he remembered it--there were

all the well-known shops and houses, with almost every one of

which he had some slight incident connected--there was Gamfield's

cart, the very cart he used to have, standing at the old

public-house door--there was the workhouse, the dreary prison of

his youthful days, with its dismal windows frowning on the

street--there was the same lean porter standing at the gate, at

sight of whom Oliver involuntarily shrunk back, and then laughed

at himself for being so foolish, then cried, then laughed

again--there were scores of faces at the doors and windows that

he knew quite well--there was nearly everything as if he had left

it but yesterday, and all his recent life had been but a happy

dream.

But it was pure, earnest, joyful reality. They drove straight to

the door of the chief hotel (which Oliver used to stare up at,

with awe, and think a mighty palace, but which had somehow fallen

off in grandeur and size); and here was Mr. Grimwig all ready to

receive them, kissing the young lady, and the old one too, when

they got out of the coach, as if he were the grandfather of the

whole party, all smiles and kindness, and not offering to eat his

head--no, not once; not even when he contradicted a very old

postboy about the nearest road to London, and maintained he knew

it best, though he had only come that way once, and that time

fast asleep. There was dinner prepared, and there were bedrooms

ready, and everything was arranged as if by magic.

Notwithstanding all this, when the hurry of the first half-hour

was over, the same silence and constraint prevailed that had

marked their journey down. Mr. Brownlow did not join them at

dinner, but remained in a separate room. The two other gentlemen

hurried in and out with anxious faces, and, during the short

intervals when they were present, conversed apart. Once, Mrs.

Maylie was called away, and after being absent for nearly an

hour, returned with eyes swollen with weeping. All these things

made Rose and Oliver, who were not in any new secrets, nervous

and uncomfortable. They sat wondering, in silence; or, if they

exchanged a few words, spoke in whispers, as if they were afraid

to hear the sound of their own voices.

At length, when nine o'clock had come, and they began to think

they were to hear no more that night, Mr. Losberne and Mr.

Grimwig entered the room, followed by Mr. Brownlow and a man whom

Oliver almost shrieked with surprise to see; for they told him it

was his brother, and it was the same man he had met at the

market-town, and seen looking in with Fagin at the window of his

little room. Monks cast a look of hate, which, even then, he

could not dissemble, at the astonished boy, and sat down near the

door. Mr. Brownlow, who had papers in his hand, walked to a

table near which Rose and Oliver were seated.

'This is a painful task,' said he, 'but these declarations, which

have been signed in London before many gentlemen, must be in

substance repeated here. I would have spared you the

degradation, but we must hear them from your own lips before we

part, and you know why.'

'Go on,' said the person addressed, turning away his face.

'Quick. I have almost done enough, I think. Don't keep me

here.'

'This child,' said Mr. Brownlow, drawing Oliver to him, and

laying his hand upon his head, 'is your half-brother; the

illegitimate son of your father, my dear friend Edwin Leeford, by

poor young Agnes Fleming, who died in giving him birth.'

'Yes,' said Monks, scowling at the trembling boy: the beating of

whose heart he might have heard. 'That is the bastard child.'

'The term you use,' said Mr. Brownlow, sternly, 'is a reproach to

those long since passed beyond the feeble censure of the world.

It reflects disgrace on no one living, except you who use it.

Let that pass. He was born in this town.'

'In the workhouse of this town,' was the sullen reply. 'You have

the story there.' He pointed impatiently to the papers as he

spoke.

'I must have it here, too,' said Mr. Brownlow, looking round upon

the listeners.

'Listen then! You!' returned Monks. 'His father being taken ill

at Rome, was joined by his wife, my mother, from whom he had been

long separated, who went from Paris and took me with her--to look

after his property, for what I know, for she had no great

affection for him, nor he for her. He knew nothing of us, for

his senses were gone, and he slumbered on till next day, when he

died. Among the papers in his desk, were two, dated on the night

his illness first came on, directed to yourself'; he addressed

himself to Mr. Brownlow; 'and enclosed in a few short lines to

you, with an intimation on the cover of the package that it was

not to be forwarded till after he was dead. One of these papers

was a letter to this girl Agnes; the other a will.'

'What of the letter?' asked Mr. Brownlow.

'The letter?--A sheet of paper crossed and crossed again, with a

penitent confession, and prayers to God to help her. He had

palmed a tale on the girl that some secret mystery--to be

explained one day--prevented his marrying her just then; and so

she had gone on, trusting patiently to him, until she trusted too

far, and lost what none could ever give her back. She was, at

that time, within a few months of her confinement. He told her

all he had meant to do, to hide her shame, if he had lived, and

prayed her, if he died, not to curse his memory, or think the

consequences of their sin would be visited on her or their young

child; for all the guilt was his. He reminded her of the day he

had given her the little locket and the ring with her christian

name engraved upon it, and a blank left for that which he hoped

one day to have bestowed upon her--prayed her yet to keep it, and

wear it next her heart, as she had done before--and then ran on,

wildly, in the same words, over and over again, as if he had gone

distracted. I believe he had.'

'The will,' said Mr. Brownlow, as Oliver's tears fell fast.

Monks was silent.

'The will,' said Mr. Brownlow, speaking for him, 'was in the same

spirit as the letter. He talked of miseries which his wife had

brought upon him; of the rebellious disposition, vice, malice,

and premature bad passions of you his only son, who had been

trained to hate him; and left you, and your mother, each an

annuity of eight hundred pounds. The bulk of his property he

divided into two equal portions--one for Agnes Fleming, and the

other for their child, if it should be born alive, and ever come

of age. If it were a girl, it was to inherit the money

unconditionally; but if a boy, only on the stipulation that in

his minority he should never have stained his name with any

public act of dishonour, meanness, cowardice, or wrong. He did

this, he said, to mark his confidence in the other, and his

conviction--only strengthened by approaching death--that the

child would share her gentle heart, and noble nature. If he were

disappointed in this expectation, then the money was to come to

you: for then, and not till then, when both children were equal,

would he recognise your prior claim upon his purse, who had none

upon his heart, but had, from an infant, repulsed him with

coldness and aversion.'

'My mother,' said Monks, in a louder tone, 'did what a woman

should have done. She burnt this will. The letter never reached

its destination; but that, and other proofs, she kept, in case

they ever tried to lie away the blot. The girl's father had the

truth from her with every aggravation that her violent hate--I

love her for it now--could add. Goaded by shame and dishonour he

fled with his children into a remote corner of Wales, changing

his very name that his friends might never know of his retreat;

and here, no great while afterwards, he was found dead in his

bed. The girl had left her home, in secret, some weeks before;

he had searched for her, on foot, in every town and village near;

it was on the night when he returned home, assured that she had

destroyed herself, to hide her shame and his, that his old heart

broke.'

There was a short silence here, until Mr. Brownlow took up the

thread of the narrative.

'Years after this,' he said, 'this man's--Edward

Leeford's--mother came to me. He had left her, when only

eighteen; robbed her of jewels and money; gambled, squandered,

forged, and fled to London: where for two years he had

associated with the lowest outcasts. She was sinking under a

painful and incurable disease, and wished to recover him before

she died. Inquiries were set on foot, and strict searches made.

They were unavailing for a long time, but ultimately successful;

and he went back with her to France.'

'There she died,' said Monks, 'after a lingering illness; and, on

her death-bed, she bequeathed these secrets to me, together with

her unquenchable and deadly hatred of all whom they

involved--though she need not have left me that, for I had

inherited it long before. She would not believe that the girl

had destroyed herself, and the child too, but was filled with the

impression that a male child had been born, and was alive. I

swore to her, if ever it crossed my path, to hunt it down; never

to let it rest; to pursue it with the bitterest and most

unrelenting animosity; to vent upon it the hatred that I deeply

felt, and to spit upon the empty vaunt of that insulting will by

draggin it, if I could, to the very gallows-foot. She was right.

He came in my way at last. I began well; and, but for babbling

drabs, I would have finished as I began!'

As the villain folded his arms tight together, and muttered

curses on himself in the impotence of baffled malice, Mr.

Brownlow turned to the terrified group beside him, and explained

that the Jew, who had been his old accomplice and confidant, had

a large reward for keeping Oliver ensnared: of which some part

was to be given up, in the event of his being rescued: and that

a dispute on this head had led to their visit to the country

house for the purpose of identifying him.

'The locket and ring?' said Mr. Brownlow, turning to Monks.

'I bought them from the man and woman I told you of, who stole

them from the nurse, who stole them from the corpse,' answered

Monks without raising his eyes. 'You know what became of them.'

Mr. Brownlow merely nodded to Mr. Grimwig, who disappearing with

great alacrity, shortly returned, pushing in Mrs. Bumble, and

dragging her unwilling consort after him.

'Do my hi's deceive me!' cried Mr. Bumble, with ill-feigned

enthusiasm, 'or is that little Oliver? Oh O-li-ver, if you

know'd how I've been a-grieving for you--'

'Hold your tongue, fool,' murmured Mrs. Bumble.

'Isn't natur, natur, Mrs. Bumble?' remonstrated the workhouse

master. 'Can't I be supposed to feel--\_I\_ as brought him up

porochially--when I see him a-setting here among ladies and

gentlemen of the very affablest description! I always loved that

boy as if he'd been my--my--my own grandfather,' said Mr. Bumble,

halting for an appropriate comparison. 'Master Oliver, my dear,

you remember the blessed gentleman in the white waistcoat? Ah!

he went to heaven last week, in a oak coffin with plated handles,

Oliver.'

'Come, sir,' said Mr. Grimwig, tartly; 'suppress your feelings.'

'I will do my endeavours, sir,' replied Mr. Bumble. 'How do you

do, sir? I hope you are very well.'

This salutation was addressed to Mr. Brownlow, who had stepped up

to within a short distance of the respectable couple. He

inquired, as he pointed to Monks,

'Do you know that person?'

'No,' replied Mrs. Bumble flatly.

'Perhaps \_you\_ don't?' said Mr. Brownlow, addressing her spouse.

'I never saw him in all my life,' said Mr. Bumble.

'Nor sold him anything, perhaps?'

'No,' replied Mrs. Bumble.

'You never had, perhaps, a certain gold locket and ring?' said

Mr. Brownlow.

'Certainly not,' replied the matron. 'Why are we brought here to

answer to such nonsense as this?'

Again Mr. Brownlow nodded to Mr. Grimwig; and again that

gentleman limped away with extraordinary readiness. But not

again did he return with a stout man and wife; for this time, he

led in two palsied women, who shook and tottered as they walked.

'You shut the door the night old Sally died,' said the foremost

one, raising her shrivelled hand, 'but you couldn't shut out the

sound, nor stop the chinks.'

'No, no,' said the other, looking round her and wagging her

toothless jaws. 'No, no, no.'

'We heard her try to tell you what she'd done, and saw you take a

paper from her hand, and watched you too, next day, to the

pawnbroker's shop,' said the first.

'Yes,' added the second, 'and it was a "locket and gold ring."

We found out that, and saw it given you. We were by. Oh! we

were by.'

'And we know more than that,' resumed the first, 'for she told us

often, long ago, that the young mother had told her that, feeling

she should never get over it, she was on her way, at the time

that she was taken ill, to die near the grave of the father of

the child.'

'Would you like to see the pawnbroker himself?' asked Mr. Grimwig

with a motion towards the door.

'No,' replied the woman; 'if he--she pointed to Monks--'has been

coward enough to confess, as I see he has, and you have sounded

all these hags till you have found the right ones, I have nothing

more to say. I \_did\_ sell them, and they're where you'll never get

them. What then?'

'Nothing,' replied Mr. Brownlow, 'except that it remains for us

to take care that neither of you is employed in a situation of

trust again. You may leave the room.'

'I hope,' said Mr. Bumble, looking about him with great

ruefulness, as Mr. Grimwig disappeared with the two old women:

'I hope that this unfortunate little circumstance will not

deprive me of my porochial office?'

'Indeed it will,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'You may make up your

mind to that, and think yourself well off besides.'

'It was all Mrs. Bumble. She \_would\_ do it,' urged Mr. Bumble;

first looking round to ascertain that his partner had left the

room.

'That is no excuse,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'You were present on

the occasion of the destruction of these trinkets, and indeed are

the more guilty of the two, in the eye of the law; for the law

supposes that your wife acts under your direction.'

'If the law supposes that,' said Mr. Bumble, squeezing his hat

emphatically in both hands, 'the law is a ass--a idiot. If

that's the eye of the law, the law is a bachelor; and the worst I

wish the law is, that his eye may be opened by experience--by

experience.'

Laying great stress on the repetition of these two words, Mr.

Bumble fixed his hat on very tight, and putting his hands in his

pockets, followed his helpmate downstairs.

'Young lady,' said Mr. Brownlow, turning to Rose, 'give me your

hand. Do not tremble. You need not fear to hear the few

remaining words we have to say.'

'If they have--I do not know how they can, but if they have--any

reference to me,' said Rose, 'pray let me hear them at some other

time. I have not strength or spirits now.'

'Nay,' returned the old gentlman, drawing her arm through his;

'you have more fortitude than this, I am sure. Do you know this

young lady, sir?'

'Yes,' replied Monks.

'I never saw you before,' said Rose faintly.

'I have seen you often,' returned Monks.

'The father of the unhappy Agnes had \_two\_ daughters,' said Mr.

Brownlow. 'What was the fate of the other--the child?'

'The child,' replied Monks, 'when her father died in a strange

place, in a strange name, without a letter, book, or scrap of

paper that yielded the faintest clue by which his friends or

relatives could be traced--the child was taken by some wretched

cottagers, who reared it as their own.'

'Go on,' said Mr. Brownlow, signing to Mrs. Maylie to approach.

'Go on!'

'You couldn't find the spot to which these people had repaired,'

said Monks, 'but where friendship fails, hatred will often force

a way. My mother found it, after a year of cunning search--ay,

and found the child.'

'She took it, did she?'

'No. The people were poor and began to sicken--at least the man

did--of their fine humanity; so she left it with them, giving

them a small present of money which would not last long, and

promised more, which she never meant to send. She didn't quite

rely, however, on their discontent and poverty for the child's

unhappiness, but told the history of the sister's shame, with

such alterations as suited her; bade them take good heed of the

child, for she came of bad blood; and told them she was

illegitimate, and sure to go wrong at one time or other. The

circumstances countenanced all this; the people believed it; and

there the child dragged on an existence, miserable enough even to

satisfy us, until a widow lady, residing, then, at Chester, saw

the girl by chance, pitied her, and took her home. There was

some cursed spell, I think, against us; for in spite of all our

efforts she remained there and was happy. I lost sight of her,

two or three years ago, and saw her no more until a few months

back.'

'Do you see her now?'

'Yes. Leaning on your arm.'

'But not the less my niece,' cried Mrs. Maylie, folding the

fainting girl in her arms; 'not the less my dearest child. I

would not lose her now, for all the treasures of the world. My

sweet companion, my own dear girl!'

'The only friend I ever had,' cried Rose, clinging to her. 'The

kindest, best of friends. My heart will burst. I cannot bear

all this.'

'You have borne more, and have been, through all, the best and

gentlest creature that ever shed happiness on every one she

knew,' said Mrs. Maylie, embracing her tenderly. 'Come, come, my

love, remember who this is who waits to clasp you in his arms,

poor child! See here--look, look, my dear!'

'Not aunt,' cried Oliver, throwing his arms about her neck; 'I'll

never call her aunt--sister, my own dear sister, that something

taught my heart to love so dearly from the first! Rose, dear,

darling Rose!'

Let the tears which fell, and the broken words which were

exchanged in the long close embrace between the orphans, be

sacred. A father, sister, and mother, were gained, and lost, in

that one moment. Joy and grief were mingled in the cup; but

there were no bitter tears: for even grief itself arose so

softened, and clothed in such sweet and tender recollections,

that it became a solemn pleasure, and lost all character of pain.

They were a long, long time alone. A soft tap at the door, at

length announced that some one was without. Oliver opened it,

glided away, and gave place to Harry Maylie.

'I know it all,' he said, taking a seat beside the lovely girl.

'Dear Rose, I know it all.'

'I am not here by accident,' he added after a lengthened silence;

'nor have I heard all this to-night, for I knew it

yesterday--only yesterday. Do you guess that I have come to

remind you of a promise?'

'Stay,' said Rose. 'You \_do\_ know all.'

'All. You gave me leave, at any time within a year, to renew the

subject of our last discourse.'

'I did.'

'Not to press you to alter your determination,' pursued the young

man, 'but to hear you repeat it, if you would. I was to lay

whatever of station or fortune I might possess at your feet, and

if you still adhered to your former determination, I pledged

myself, by no word or act, to seek to change it.'

'The same reasons which influenced me then, will influence me

now,' said Rose firmly. 'If I ever owed a strict and rigid duty

to her, whose goodness saved me from a life of indigence and

suffering, when should I ever feel it, as I should to-night? It

is a struggle,' said Rose, 'but one I am proud to make; it is a

pang, but one my heart shall bear.'

'The disclosure of to-night,'--Harry began.

'The disclosure of to-night,' replied Rose softly, 'leaves me in

the same position, with reference to you, as that in which I

stood before.'

'You harden your heart against me, Rose,' urged her lover.

'Oh Harry, Harry,' said the young lady, bursting into tears; 'I

wish I could, and spare myself this pain.'

'Then why inflict it on yourself?' said Harry, taking her hand.

'Think, dear Rose, think what you have heard to-night.'

'And what have I heard! What have I heard!' cried Rose. 'That a

sense of his deep disgrace so worked upon my own father that he

shunned all--there, we have said enough, Harry, we have said

enough.'

'Not yet, not yet,' said the young man, detaining her as she

rose. 'My hopes, my wishes, prospects, feeling: every thought

in life except my love for you: have undergone a change. I

offer you, now, no distinction among a bustling crowd; no

mingling with a world of malice and detraction, where the blood

is called into honest cheeks by aught but real disgrace and

shame; but a home--a heart and home--yes, dearest Rose, and

those, and those alone, are all I have to offer.'

'What do you mean!' she faltered.

'I mean but this--that when I left you last, I left you with a

firm determination to level all fancied barriers between yourself

and me; resolved that if my world could not be yours, I would

make yours mine; that no pride of birth should curl the lip at

you, for I would turn from it. This I have done. Those who have

shrunk from me because of this, have shrunk from you, and proved

you so far right. Such power and patronage: such relatives of

influence and rank: as smiled upon me then, look coldly now; but

there are smiling fields and waving trees in England's richest

county; and by one village church--mine, Rose, my own!--there

stands a rustic dwelling which you can make me prouder of, than

all the hopes I have renounced, measured a thousandfold. This is

my rank and station now, and here I lay it down!'

 \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

'It's a trying thing waiting supper for lovers,' said Mr.

Grimwig, waking up, and pulling his pocket-handkerchief from over

his head.

Truth to tell, the supper had been waiting a most unreasonable

time. Neither Mrs. Maylie, nor Harry, nor Rose (who all came in

together), could offer a word in extenuation.

'I had serious thoughts of eating my head to-night,' said Mr.

Grimwig, 'for I began to think I should get nothing else. I'll

take the liberty, if you'll allow me, of saluting the bride that

is to be.'

Mr. Grimwig lost no time in carrying this notice into effect upon

the blushing girl; and the example, being contagious, was

followed both by the doctor and Mr. Brownlow: some people affirm

that Harry Maylie had been observed to set it, originally, in a

dark room adjoining; but the best authorities consider this

downright scandal: he being young and a clergyman.

'Oliver, my child,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'where have you been, and

why do you look so sad? There are tears stealing down your face

at this moment. What is the matter?'

It is a world of disappointment: often to the hopes we most

cherish, and hopes that do our nature the greatest honour.

Poor Dick was dead!

CHAPTER LII

FAGIN'S LAST NIGHT ALIVE

The court was paved, from floor to roof, with human faces.

Inquisitive and eager eyes peered from every inch of space. From

the rail before the dock, away into the sharpest angle of the

smallest corner in the galleries, all looks were fixed upon one

man--Fagin. Before him and behind: above, below, on the right

and on the left: he seemed to stand surrounded by a firmament,

all bright with gleaming eyes.

He stood there, in all this glare of living light, with one hand

resting on the wooden slab before him, the other held to his ear,

and his head thrust forward to enable him to catch with greater

distinctness every word that fell from the presiding judge, who

was delivering his charge to the jury. At times, he turned his

eyes sharply upon them to observe the effect of the slightest

featherweight in his favour; and when the points against him were

stated with terrible distinctness, looked towards his counsel, in

mute appeal that he would, even then, urge something in his

behalf. Beyond these manifestations of anxiety, he stirred not

hand or foot. He had scarcely moved since the trial began; and

now that the judge ceased to speak, he still remained in the same

strained attitude of close attention, with his gaze bent on him,

as though he listened still.

A slight bustle in the court, recalled him to himself. Looking

round, he saw that the juryman had turned together, to consider

their verdict. As his eyes wandered to the gallery, he could see

the people rising above each other to see his face: some hastily

applying their glasses to their eyes: and others whispering

their neighbours with looks expressive of abhorrence. A few

there were, who seemed unmindful of him, and looked only to the

jury, in impatient wonder how they could delay. But in no one

face--not even among the women, of whom there were many

there--could he read the faintest sympathy with himself, or any

feeling but one of all-absorbing interest that he should be

condemned.

As he saw all this in one bewildered glance, the deathlike

stillness came again, and looking back he saw that the jurymen

had turned towards the judge. Hush!

They only sought permission to retire.

He looked, wistfully, into their faces, one by one when they

passed out, as though to see which way the greater number leant;

but that was fruitless. The jailer touched him on the shoulder.

He followed mechanically to the end of the dock, and sat down on

a chair. The man pointed it out, or he would not have seen it.

He looked up into the gallery again. Some of the people were

eating, and some fanning themselves with handkerchiefs; for the

crowded place was very hot. There was one young man sketching

his face in a little note-book. He wondered whether it was like,

and looked on when the artist broke his pencil-point, and made

another with his knife, as any idle spectator might have done.

In the same way, when he turned his eyes towards the judge, his

mind began to busy itself with the fashion of his dress, and what

it cost, and how he put it on. There was an old fat gentleman on

the bench, too, who had gone out, some half an hour before, and

now come back. He wondered within himself whether this man had

been to get his dinner, what he had had, and where he had had it;

and pursued this train of careless thought until some new object

caught his eye and roused another.

Not that, all this time, his mind was, for an instant, free from

one oppressive overwhelming sense of the grave that opened at his

feet; it was ever present to him, but in a vague and general way,

and he could not fix his thoughts upon it. Thus, even while he

trembled, and turned burning hot at the idea of speedy death, he

fell to counting the iron spikes before him, and wondering how

the head of one had been broken off, and whether they would mend

it, or leave it as it was. Then, he thought of all the horrors

of the gallows and the scaffold--and stopped to watch a man

sprinkling the floor to cool it--and then went on to think again.

At length there was a cry of silence, and a breathless look from

all towards the door. The jury returned, and passed him close.

He could glean nothing from their faces; they might as well have

been of stone. Perfect stillness ensued--not a rustle--not a

breath--Guilty.

The building rang with a tremendous shout, and another, and

another, and then it echoed loud groans, that gathered strength

as they swelled out, like angry thunder. It was a peal of joy

from the populace outside, greeting the news that he would die on

Monday.

The noise subsided, and he was asked if he had anything to say

why sentence of death should not be passed upon him. He had

resumed his listening attitude, and looked intently at his

questioner while the demand was made; but it was twice repeated

before he seemed to hear it, and then he only muttered that he

was an old man--an old man--and so, dropping into a whisper, was

silent again.

The judge assumed the black cap, and the prisoner still stood

with the same air and gesture. A woman in the gallery, uttered

some exclamation, called forth by this dread solemnity; he looked

hastily up as if angry at the interruption, and bent forward yet

more attentively. The address was solemn and impressive; the

sentence fearful to hear. But he stood, like a marble figure,

without the motion of a nerve. His haggard face was still thrust

forward, his under-jaw hanging down, and his eyes staring out

before him, when the jailer put his hand upon his arm, and

beckoned him away. He gazed stupidly about him for an instant,

and obeyed.

They led him through a paved room under the court, where some

prisoners were waiting till their turns came, and others were

talking to their friends, who crowded round a grate which looked

into the open yard. There was nobody there to speak to \_him\_; but,

as he passed, the prisoners fell back to render him more visible

to the people who were clinging to the bars: and they assailed

him with opprobrious names, and screeched and hissed. He shook

his fist, and would have spat upon them; but his conductors

hurried him on, through a gloomy passage lighted by a few dim

lamps, into the interior of the prison.

Here, he was searched, that he might not have about him the means

of anticipating the law; this ceremony performed, they led him to

one of the condemned cells, and left him there--alone.

He sat down on a stone bench opposite the door, which served for

seat and bedstead; and casting his blood-shot eyes upon the

ground, tried to collect his thoughts. After awhile, he began to

remember a few disjointed fragments of what the judge had said:

though it had seemed to him, at the time, that he could not hear

a word. These gradually fell into their proper places, and by

degrees suggested more: so that in a little time he had the

whole, almost as it was delivered. To be hanged by the neck,

till he was dead--that was the end. To be hanged by the neck

till he was dead.

As it came on very dark, he began to think of all the men he had

known who had died upon the scaffold; some of them through his

means. They rose up, in such quick succession, that he could

hardly count them. He had seen some of them die,--and had joked

too, because they died with prayers upon their lips. With what a

rattling noise the drop went down; and how suddenly they changed,

from strong and vigorous men to dangling heaps of clothes!

Some of them might have inhabited that very cell--sat upon that

very spot. It was very dark; why didn't they bring a light? The

cell had been built for many years. Scores of men must have

passed their last hours there. It was like sitting in a vault

strewn with dead bodies--the cap, the noose, the pinioned arms,

the faces that he knew, even beneath that hideous veil.--Light,

light!

At length, when his hands were raw with beating against the heavy

door and walls, two men appeared: one bearing a candle, which he

thrust into an iron candlestick fixed against the wall: the

other dragging in a mattress on which to pass the night; for the

prisoner was to be left alone no more.

Then came the night--dark, dismal, silent night. Other watchers

are glad to hear this church-clock strike, for they tell of life

and coming day. To him they brought despair. The boom of every

iron bell came laden with the one, deep, hollow sound--Death.

What availed the noise and bustle of cheerful morning, which

penetrated even there, to him? It was another form of knell,

with mockery added to the warning.

The day passed off. Day? There was no day; it was gone as soon

as come--and night came on again; night so long, and yet so

short; long in its dreadful silence, and short in its fleeting

hours. At one time he raved and blasphemed; and at another

howled and tore his hair. Venerable men of his own persuasion

had come to pray beside him, but he had driven them away with

curses. They renewed their charitable efforts, and he beat them

off.

Saturday night. He had only one night more to live. And as he

thought of this, the day broke--Sunday.

It was not until the night of this last awful day, that a

withering sense of his helpless, desperate state came in its full

intensity upon his blighted soul; not that he had ever held any

defined or positive hope of mercy, but that he had never been

able to consider more than the dim probability of dying so soon.

He had spoken little to either of the two men, who relieved each

other in their attendance upon him; and they, for their parts,

made no effort to rouse his attention. He had sat there, awake,

but dreaming. Now, he started up, every minute, and with gasping

mouth and burning skin, hurried to and fro, in such a paroxysm of

fear and wrath that even they--used to such sights--recoiled from

him with horror. He grew so terrible, at last, in all the

tortures of his evil conscience, that one man could not bear to

sit there, eyeing him alone; and so the two kept watch together.

He cowered down upon his stone bed, and thought of the past. He

had been wounded with some missiles from the crowd on the day of

his capture, and his head was bandaged with a linen cloth. His

red hair hung down upon his bloodless face; his beard was torn,

and twisted into knots; his eyes shone with a terrible light; his

unwashed flesh crackled with the fever that burnt him up.

Eight--nine--then. If it was not a trick to frighten him, and

those were the real hours treading on each other's heels, where

would he be, when they came round again! Eleven! Another

struck, before the voice of the previous hour had ceased to

vibrate. At eight, he would be the only mourner in his own

funeral train; at eleven--

Those dreadful walls of Newgate, which have hidden so much misery

and such unspeakable anguish, not only from the eyes, but, too

often, and too long, from the thoughts, of men, never held so

dread a spectacle as that. The few who lingered as they passed,

and wondered what the man was doing who was to be hanged

to-morrow, would have slept but ill that night, if they could

have seen him.

From early in the evening until nearly midnight, little groups of

two and three presented themselves at the lodge-gate, and

inquired, with anxious faces, whether any reprieve had been

received. These being answered in the negative, communicated the

welcome intelligence to clusters in the street, who pointed out

to one another the door from which he must come out, and showed

where the scaffold would be built, and, walking with unwilling

steps away, turned back to conjure up the scene. By degrees they

fell off, one by one; and, for an hour, in the dead of night, the

street was left to solitude and darkness.

The space before the prison was cleared, and a few strong

barriers, painted black, had been already thrown across the road

to break the pressure of the expected crowd, when Mr. Brownlow

and Oliver appeared at the wicket, and presented an order of

admission to the prisoner, signed by one of the sheriffs. They

were immediately admitted into the lodge.

'Is the young gentleman to come too, sir?' said the man whose

duty it was to conduct them. 'It's not a sight for children,

sir.'

'It is not indeed, my friend,' rejoined Mr. Brownlow; 'but my

business with this man is intimately connected with him; and as

this child has seen him in the full career of his success and

villainy, I think it as well--even at the cost of some pain and

fear--that he should see him now.'

These few words had been said apart, so as to be inaudible to

Oliver. The man touched his hat; and glancing at Oliver with

some curiousity, opened another gate, opposite to that by which

they had entered, and led them on, through dark and winding ways,

towards the cells.

'This,' said the man, stopping in a gloomy passage where a couple

of workmen were making some preparations in profound

silence--'this is the place he passes through. If you step this

way, you can see the door he goes out at.'

He led them into a stone kitchen, fitted with coppers for

dressing the prison food, and pointed to a door. There was an

open grating above it, through which came the sound of men's

voices, mingled with the noise of hammering, and the throwing

down of boards. There were putting up the scaffold.

From this place, they passed through several strong gates, opened

by other turnkeys from the inner side; and, having entered an

open yard, ascended a flight of narrow steps, and came into a

passage with a row of strong doors on the left hand. Motioning

them to remain where they were, the turnkey knocked at one of

these with his bunch of keys. The two attendants, after a little

whispering, came out into the passage, stretching themselves as

if glad of the temporary relief, and motioned the visitors to

follow the jailer into the cell. They did so.

The condemned criminal was seated on his bed, rocking himself

from side to side, with a countenance more like that of a snared

beast than the face of a man. His mind was evidently wandering

to his old life, for he continued to mutter, without appearing

conscious of their presence otherwise than as a part of his

vision.

'Good boy, Charley--well done--' he mumbled. 'Oliver, too, ha!

ha! ha! Oliver too--quite the gentleman now--quite the--take

that boy away to bed!'

The jailer took the disengaged hand of Oliver; and, whispering

him not to be alarmed, looked on without speaking.

'Take him away to bed!' cried Fagin. 'Do you hear me, some of

you? He has been the--the--somehow the cause of all this. It's

worth the money to bring him up to it--Bolter's throat, Bill;

never mind the girl--Bolter's throat as deep as you can cut. Saw

his head off!'

'Fagin,' said the jailer.

'That's me!' cried the Jew, falling instantly, into the attitude

of listening he had assumed upon his trial. 'An old man, my

Lord; a very old, old man!'

'Here,' said the turnkey, laying his hand upon his breast to keep

him down. 'Here's somebody wants to see you, to ask you some

questions, I suppose. Fagin, Fagin! Are you a man?'

'I shan't be one long,' he replied, looking up with a face

retaining no human expression but rage and terror. 'Strike them

all dead! What right have they to butcher me?'

As he spoke he caught sight of Oliver and Mr. Brownlow. Shrinking

to the furthest corner of the seat, he demanded to know what they

wanted there.

'Steady,' said the turnkey, still holding him down. 'Now, sir,

tell him what you want. Quick, if you please, for he grows worse

as the time gets on.'

'You have some papers,' said Mr. Brownlow advancing, 'which were

placed in your hands, for better security, by a man called

Monks.'

'It's all a lie together,' replied Fagin. 'I haven't one--not

one.'

'For the love of God,' said Mr. Brownlow solemnly, 'do not say

that now, upon the very verge of death; but tell me where they

are. You know that Sikes is dead; that Monks has confessed; that

there is no hope of any further gain. Where are those papers?'

'Oliver,' cried Fagin, beckoning to him. 'Here, here! Let me

whisper to you.'

'I am not afraid,' said Oliver in a low voice, as he relinquished

Mr. Brownlow's hand.

'The papers,' said Fagin, drawing Oliver towards him, 'are in a

canvas bag, in a hole a little way up the chimney in the top

front-room. I want to talk to you, my dear. I want to talk to

you.'

'Yes, yes,' returned Oliver. 'Let me say a prayer. Do! Let me

say one prayer. Say only one, upon your knees, with me, and we

will talk till morning.'

'Outside, outside,' replied Fagin, pushing the boy before him

towards the door, and looking vacantly over his head. 'Say I've

gone to sleep--they'll believe you. You can get me out, if you

take me so. Now then, now then!'

'Oh! God forgive this wretched man!' cried the boy with a burst

of tears.

'That's right, that's right,' said Fagin. 'That'll help us on.

This door first. If I shake and tremble, as we pass the gallows,

don't you mind, but hurry on. Now, now, now!'

'Have you nothing else to ask him, sir?' inquired the turnkey.

'No other question,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'If I hoped we could

recall him to a sense of his position--'

'Nothing will do that, sir,' replied the man, shaking his head.

'You had better leave him.'

The door of the cell opened, and the attendants returned.

'Press on, press on,' cried Fagin. 'Softly, but not so slow.

Faster, faster!'

The men laid hands upon him, and disengaging Oliver from his

grasp, held him back. He struggled with the power of

desperation, for an instant; and then sent up cry upon cry that

penetrated even those massive walls, and rang in their ears until

they reached the open yard.

It was some time before they left the prison. Oliver nearly

swooned after this frightful scene, and was so weak that for an

hour or more, he had not the strength to walk.

Day was dawning when they again emerged. A great multitude had

already assembled; the windows were filled with people, smoking

and playing cards to beguile the time; the crowd were pushing,

quarrelling, joking. Everything told of life and animation, but

one dark cluster of objects in the centre of all--the black stage,

the cross-beam, the rope, and all the hideous apparatus of death.

CHAPTER LIII

AND LAST

The fortunes of those who have figured in this tale are nearly

closed. The little that remains to their historian to relate, is

told in few and simple words.

Before three months had passed, Rose Fleming and Harry Maylie

were married in the village church which was henceforth to be the

scene of the young clergyman's labours; on the same day they

entered into possession of their new and happy home.

Mrs. Maylie took up her abode with her son and daughter-in-law,

to enjoy, during the tranquil remainder of her days, the greatest

felicity that age and worth can know--the contemplation of the

happiness of those on whom the warmest affections and tenderest

cares of a well-spent life, have been unceasingly bestowed.

It appeared, on full and careful investigation, that if the wreck

of property remaining in the custody of Monks (which had never

prospered either in his hands or in those of his mother) were

equally divided between himself and Oliver, it would yield, to

each, little more than three thousand pounds. By the provisions

of his father's will, Oliver would have been entitled to the

whole; but Mr. Brownlow, unwilling to deprive the elder son of

the opportunity of retrieving his former vices and pursuing an

honest career, proposed this mode of distribution, to which his

young charge joyfully acceded.

Monks, still bearing that assumed name, retired with his portion

to a distant part of the New World; where, having quickly

squandered it, he once more fell into his old courses, and, after

undergoing a long confinement for some fresh act of fraud and

knavery, at length sunk under an attack of his old disorder, and

died in prison. As far from home, died the chief remaining

members of his friend Fagin's gang.

Mr. Brownlow adopted Oliver as his son. Removing with him and

the old housekeeper to within a mile of the parsonage-house,

where his dear friends resided, he gratified the only remaining

wish of Oliver's warm and earnest heart, and thus linked together

a little society, whose condition approached as nearly to one of

perfect happiness as can ever be known in this changing world.

Soon after the marriage of the young people, the worthy doctor

returned to Chertsey, where, bereft of the presence of his old

friends, he would have been discontented if his temperament had

admitted of such a feeling; and would have turned quite peevish

if he had known how. For two or three months, he contented

himself with hinting that he feared the air began to disagree

with him; then, finding that the place really no longer was, to

him, what it had been, he settled his business on his assistant,

took a bachelor's cottage outside the village of which his young

friend was pastor, and instantaneously recovered. Here he took

to gardening, planting, fishing, carpentering, and various other

pursuits of a similar kind: all undertaken with his

characteristic impetuosity. In each and all he has since become

famous throughout the neighborhood, as a most profound authority.

Before his removal, he had managed to contract a strong

friendship for Mr. Grimwig, which that eccentric gentleman

cordially reciprocated. He is accordingly visited by Mr. Grimwig

a great many times in the course of the year. On all such

occasions, Mr. Grimwig plants, fishes, and carpenters, with great

ardour; doing everything in a very singular and unprecedented

manner, but always maintaining with his favourite asseveration,

that his mode is the right one. On Sundays, he never fails to

criticise the sermon to the young clergyman's face: always

informing Mr. Losberne, in strict confidence afterwards, that he

considers it an excellent performance, but deems it as well not

to say so. It is a standing and very favourite joke, for Mr.

Brownlow to rally him on his old prophecy concerning Oliver, and

to remind him of the night on which they sat with the watch

between them, waiting his return; but Mr. Grimwig contends that

he was right in the main, and, in proof thereof, remarks that

Oliver did not come back after all; which always calls forth a

laugh on his side, and increases his good humour.

Mr. Noah Claypole: receiving a free pardon from the Crown in

consequence of being admitted approver against Fagin: and

considering his profession not altogether as safe a one as he

could wish: was, for some little time, at a loss for the means

of a livelihood, not burdened with too much work. After some

consideration, he went into business as an Informer, in which

calling he realises a genteel subsistence. His plan is, to walk

out once a week during church time attended by Charlotte in

respectable attire. The lady faints away at the doors of

charitable publicans, and the gentleman being accommodated with

three-penny worth of brandy to restore her, lays an information

next day, and pockets half the penalty. Sometimes Mr. Claypole

faints himself, but the result is the same.

Mr. and Mrs. Bumble, deprived of their situations, were gradually

reduced to great indigence and misery, and finally became paupers

in that very same workhouse in which they had once lorded it over

others. Mr. Bumble has been heard to say, that in this reverse

and degradation, he has not even spirits to be thankful for being

separated from his wife.

As to Mr. Giles and Brittles, they still remain in their old

posts, although the former is bald, and the last-named boy quite

grey. They sleep at the parsonage, but divide their attentions

so equally among its inmates, and Oliver and Mr. Brownlow, and

Mr. Losberne, that to this day the villagers have never been able

to discover to which establishment they properly belong.

Master Charles Bates, appalled by Sikes's crime, fell into a

train of reflection whether an honest life was not, after all,

the best. Arriving at the conclusion that it certainly was, he

turned his back upon the scenes of the past, resolved to amend it

in some new sphere of action. He struggled hard, and suffered

much, for some time; but, having a contented disposition, and a

good purpose, succeeded in the end; and, from being a farmer's

drudge, and a carrier's lad, he is now the merriest young grazier

in all Northamptonshire.

And now, the hand that traces these words, falters, as it

approaches the conclusion of its task; and would weave, for a

little longer space, the thread of these adventures.

I would fain linger yet with a few of those among whom I have so

long moved, and share their happiness by endeavouring to depict

it. I would show Rose Maylie in all the bloom and grace of early

womanhood, shedding on her secluded path in life soft and gentle

light, that fell on all who trod it with her, and shone into

their hearts. I would paint her the life and joy of the

fire-side circle and the lively summer group; I would follow her

through the sultry fields at noon, and hear the low tones of her

sweet voice in the moonlit evening walk; I would watch her in all

her goodness and charity abroad, and the smiling untiring

discharge of domestic duties at home; I would paint her and her

dead sister's child happy in their love for one another, and

passing whole hours together in picturing the friends whom they

had so sadly lost; I would summon before me, once again, those

joyous little faces that clustered round her knee, and listen to

their merry prattle; I would recall the tones of that clear

laugh, and conjure up the sympathising tear that glistened in the

soft blue eye. These, and a thousand looks and smiles, and turns

of thought and speech--I would fain recall them every one.

How Mr. Brownlow went on, from day to day, filling the mind of

his adopted child with stores of knowledge, and becoming attached

to him, more and more, as his nature developed itself, and showed

the thriving seeds of all he wished him to become--how he traced

in him new traits of his early friend, that awakened in his own

bosom old remembrances, melancholy and yet sweet and

soothing--how the two orphans, tried by adversity, remembered its

lessons in mercy to others, and mutual love, and fervent thanks

to Him who had protected and preserved them--these are all

matters which need not to be told. I have said that they were

truly happy; and without strong affection and humanity of heart,

and gratitude to that Being whose code is Mercy, and whose great

attribute is Benevolence to all things that breathe, happiness

can never be attained.

Within the altar of the old village church there stands a white

marble tablet, which bears as yet but one word: 'AGNES.' There

is no coffin in that tomb; and may it be many, many years, before

another name is placed above it! But, if the spirits of the Dead

ever come back to earth, to visit spots hallowed by the love--the

love beyond the grave--of those whom they knew in life, I believe

that the shade of Agnes sometimes hovers round that solemn nook.

I believe it none the less because that nook is in a Church, and

she was weak and erring.