

OLIVER TWIST;

OR, THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS.

BY BOZ.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

BOOK THE THIRD.

"Yes," said Monks, scowling at the trembling boy, the beating of whose heart he might have heard. "That is their bastard child."

"The term you use," said Mr. Brownlow sternly, "is a reproach to those who long since passed beyond the feeble censure of this world. It reflects true 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," returned Monks. "His father being taken ill at Rome, as you know, 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, 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, and 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—as I believe he had.”

“The will,” said Mr. Brownlow, as Oliver’s tears fell fast.

“I will go on to that.”

“The will was in the same spirit as that 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 was a girl, it was to come into 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 mother, and his conviction—only strengthened by approaching death—that the child would share her gentle heart and noble nature. If he was 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 recognize 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, and it was on the night that 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; strict searches made, 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 dragging it, if 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; I would, I would!"

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 work-house 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, and who 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. “What are we brought here to answer to such nonsense as this for?”

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 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 you are neither of you 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 must

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," returned 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 is the eye of the law, the law's 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 down stairs.

"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 gentleman, 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."

"See 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 promising 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 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 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—cannot—bear all this."

"You have borne more, and 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, feelings—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 does this mean?" faltered the young lady.

"It means but this—that when I left you last, I left you with the 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."

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