

# BENTLEY'S MISCELLANY.

## OLIVER TWIST;

OR, THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS.

BY BOZ.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

BOOK THE SECOND.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH.

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 men had taken. "I missed them all 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 meadowland 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, taking him aside.

"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 that I told you of, who came upon me so suddenly 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 certain of that?"

"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 inefficacious nature of their search, however, 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 despatched to the different alehouses in the village, furnished with the best description Oliver could give of the appearance and dress of the strangers; of whom the Jew was at all events sufficiently remarkable to be remembered supposing he had been seen drinking, or loitering about; but he returned without any intelligence calculated to dispel or lessen the mystery.

On the next day further search was made, and the enquiries

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; and, 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 with 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 yet heard them stated.”

Rose had been very pale from the moment of his entrance, although 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 agonizing of all apprehensions,” said the young man, “the fear of losing the one dear being on whom my every wish and hope are centred. 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, and hence it is that the best and fairest of our kind so 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 outpourings of a fresh young heart claimed common kindred with the loveliest things in nature.

“An angel,” continued the young man passionately, “a crea-

ture 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, and to know no reason why you should—to feel that you belonged to that bright sphere whither so many gifted creatures in infancy and youth have winged their early flight—and yet to pray, amid all these consolations, that you might be restored to those who loved you—these are 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 moistened with their own 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 wished 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 in my day dreams how I would remind you in that happy moment and tell you it had been sought, only for you to share; thinking of the many silent tokens I had given of a boy's attachment, and rally you who had blushed to mark them, and then claim your hand, as if in redemption of some old mute contract that had been sealed between us. That time has not arrived; but here, with no fame won and no young vision realized, I give to 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—is it, 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 equally proud to gain are there. Confide some other passion to me if you will, and I will be the truest, warmest, 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—may I ask them?"

"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 the world reason to suspect that I had sordidly yielded to your first passion, and fastened myself, a clog, upon 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, 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 with great eagerness. "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! for as we have met to-day, we meet no more: but in other relations than those in which this conversation would have placed us, may we be long and happily entwined; and may every blessing that the prayers of a true and earnest heart can call down from where all is 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 connexions can help men in public life are in store for you. But those connexions are proud, and I will neither mingle with such as hold in scorn the mother who gave me life, nor bring

disgrace or failure upon 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—dear Rose, one more," cried Harry throwing himself before her. "If I had been less, less fortunate, as 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, 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 dreary 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 us 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 that 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 some 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,—let me 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 or 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 upon her beautiful forehead, hurried from the room.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH.

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 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 further. 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 away.

"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 fortnight, every alternate Monday, to the General Post Office in London: will you?" said Mr. Maylie.

"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, and Mr. Maylie took leave of him with many warm 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 postilion. "something very far 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 THE FOURTEENTH.

IN WHICH THE READER, IF HE OR SHE RESORT TO THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF THIS SECOND BOOK, WILL 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, and 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, acquire 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 cocked hat and gold 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, and 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 reflection, "for six teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a milk-

pot, with a small quantity of second-hand furniter, 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 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, and if it fails with her my power is gone.”

Whether an exceedingly small expansion of eye is 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,” observed 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 would 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 do 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 tight 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 off, 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, and picking up his hat, 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, and 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 bullying propensity, 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 the 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 upon 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, and whence 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, and 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!"

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*Mr. Bumble degraded in the eyes of the Paupers.*

London, Richard Bentley, July 1, 1838.

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—not more than two months ago I was not only my own master, but everybody else’s, so far as the parochial 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, and at length paused before one in a bye-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, and 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 importance.

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 most 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 would have known my name. You don't know it, and I should recommend you not to inquire."

"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. "Parochial 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 have 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. Parochial 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 as to say he found 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 gulph 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, and 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; and when Mr. Bumble had scrupulously examined the coins to see that they were genuine, and 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 that means?" 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 impatiently; "I speak of one, a meek-looking pale-faced hound, 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 very 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 any way."

"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, and rose as if to depart.

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 an obscure address, by the water-side, upon it, in characters that betrayed his agitation, "at nine in the evening, bring her to me there. I needn't tell you to be secret, for 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; and shortly remarking that their roads were different, 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.

"Who's that?" 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.