

OLIVER TWIST;

OR, THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS.

BY BOZ.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

BOOK THE THIRD.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE OF OLIVER'S, EXHIBITING DECIDED MARKS OF GENIUS,
BECOMES A PUBLIC CHARACTER IN THE METROPOLIS.

UPON the very same 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 figures, to whom it is difficult to assign any precise age,—looking as they do, when they are yet boys, like under-grown 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 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 you ain't enough to tire anybody's patience out, I don't know what is."

"Is it much farther?" asked the woman, resting herself on a

bank, and looking up with the perspiration streaming from her face.

"Much farther!—Yer as good as there," said the long-legged trumper, 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 farther remark, and trudged onwards 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, you may thank your stars I've got a head on; for if we hadn't gone at first the wrong road on purpose, and come back across country, you'd have been locked up hard and fast a week ago, my lady, and serve you right for being a fool."

"I know I an'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 utter innocence of any theft, and 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 his 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 number 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, and 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 spoken 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's 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 house," replied the Jew.

"A gentleman we met on the road coming up from the country recommended us here," said Noah, nudging Charlotte, per-

haps 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, will 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, and, mounting on a stool, 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 homœopathic doses of both to Charlotte, who sat patiently by, eating and drinking at his pleasure.

"Aha!" whispered the Jew, looking round to Barney, "I like this 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."

The Jew 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."

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The Jew & Morris Boller begin to understand each other.

"I should like that well enough, dear," replied Charlotte; "but tills an'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 you 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 gentlemen 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 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, sitting 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 the Jew, 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."

The Jew followed up this remark by striking the side of his nose with his right fore-finger,—a gesture which Noah attempted to imitate, though not with complete success, in conse-

quence 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 re-appeared 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 this 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've 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 the Jew, after he had re-assured 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 the Jew, 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 up stairs the while. Char-lotte, 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, sir?" he asked, as he resumed his seat, in the tone of a keeper who has 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 the Jew. "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," said the Jew, "employs a power of hands, and 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 the Jew.

"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," replied the Jew.

"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 the Jew. "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 the Jew. "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 the Jew, laying his hand on Noah's knee. "The kinchin lay."

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Claypole.

"The kinchins, my dear," said the Jew, "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,—and then knock 'em into the kennel, and walk off very slow, as if there was 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 neighbourhoods like that, where they're always going errands, and 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 the Jew, adding, as Mr. Claypole nodded assent, "What name shall I tell my good friend?"

"Mr. Bolter," replied Noah, who had prepared himself for such an 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, Char-lotte?" 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 the Jew. "You understand?"

"Oh, yes, I understand,—perfectly," replied Fagin, telling the truth for once. "Good night! Good night!"

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

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 the Jew's house. "'Cod, I thought as much last night!"

"Every man's his own friend," replied Fagin. "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," said the Jew, who felt it necessary to qualify this position, "we have a general number one; that is, you can't consider yourself as number one without considering me too as the same, and all the other young people."

"Oh, the devil!" exclaimed Mr. Bolter.

"You see," pursued the Jew, 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 the Jew. "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 the Jew, 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 unloosen,—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 the Jew. "My best hand was taken from me yesterday morning."

"What, I suppose he was——"

"Wanted," interposed the Jew. "Yes, he was wanted."

"Very particular?" inquired Mr. Bolter.

"No," replied the Jew, "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 the Jew, 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 yer 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?" asked the Jew with trembling lips.

"They've found the gentleman as owns the box; two or three more's a coming to identify 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 visit 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 ha' 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 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 the Jew 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 indictment; '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 the Jew, 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. Isn't it beautiful?"

Mr. Bolter nodded assent; and the Jew, 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 the Jew, “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 the Jew. “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, the Jew 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 the Jew.

“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 the Jew.

"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 isn't."

"Wot department has he got, Fagin?" inquired Master Bates, surveying Noah's lanky 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 been 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 the Jew, 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 curiosity; 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 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 yard, take the door up the steps on the right-hand 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 inanimate 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, whom 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, 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 situation for.

"Hold your tongue, will you?" said the jailer.

"I'm an Englishman, an't I?" rejoined the Dodger. "Where are my privileges?"

"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 appintment with a genelman in the city, and as I'm a man of my word, and wery punctual in bisness matters, he'll go away if I ain't there to my time, and then pr'aps there won't be an action for damage against them as kept 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 old 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 that 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 any 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 address 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 Vice 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 respectable circle of acquaintance as'll make them beaks wish they'd never been born, or that they'd got their footman to hang 'em up to their own hat-pegs 'fore 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 wos 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.