

# **THE ADVENTURES OF OLIVER TWIST**

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The Adventures of Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens

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**CHARLES DICKENS**

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OF OLIVER TWIST**



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# OLIVER TWIST.

## INTRODUCTORY.

[OLIVER TWIST was born in the workhouse, where his mother, friendless and ill, had taken refuge. She died almost as soon as her child was born, and the little orphan was thus left entirely to the care of the parish,—“to be cuffed and buffeted through the world.”]

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## I. EARLY YEARS.

THE parish authorities resolved that Oliver should be “farmed,” or, in other words, that he should be despatched to a branch-workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-half-penny per small head per week.

It cannot be expected that this system of farming would produce any very luxuriant crop. Oliver Twist's ninth birth-day found him a pale, thin child. But nature had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's breast. It had had plenty of room to expand, thanks to the spare diet of the establishment; and perhaps to this circumstance may be attributed his having any ninth birth-day at all.

Be this as it may, however, it *was* his ninth birth-day; and he was keeping it in the coal-cellar with a select party of two other young gentlemen, who, after participating with him in a sound thrashing, had been locked up therein for presuming to be hungry, when Mrs. Mann, the good lady of the house, was unexpectedly startled by the apparition of Mr. Bumble, the beadle, striving to undo the wicket of the garden-gate.

"Goodness gracious! is it you, Mr. Bumble, sir?" said Mrs. Mann, thrusting her head out of the window. "(Susan, take Oliver and them two brats upstairs, and wash 'em directly.)—My heart alive! Mr. Bumble, how glad I am to see you, sure-ly!"

Now Mr. Bumble, instead of responding to this open-hearted salutation in a kindred spirit, gave the little wicket a tremendous shake, and then bestowed upon it a kick.

"Only think," said Mrs. Mann, running out,—for the three boys had been removed by this time,—“only think of that! That I should have forgotten that the gate was bolted on the inside, on account of the dear children! Walk in, sir; walk in, pray, Mr. Bumble, do, sir.”

"Do you think this respectful or proper conduct, Mrs. Mann," inquired Mr. Bumble, "to keep the parish officers a waiting at your garden gate, when they come?"

"I'm sure, Mr. Bumble, that I was only a telling one or two of the dear children as is so fond of you, that it was you a coming," replied Mrs. Mann, with great humility.

"Well, well, Mrs. Mann," he replied in a calmer tone; "it may be as you say; it may be. Lead the way in, Mrs. Mann, for I come on business, and have something to say."

Mrs. Mann ushered the beadle into a small parlour with a brick floor; placed a seat for him; and deposited his cocked hat and cane on the table before him. Mr. Bumble



wiped the perspiration from his forehead ; glanced at the cocked hat ; and smiled. Yes, he smiled. Beadles are but men : and Mr. Bumble smiled.

## II. A CHANGE FOR OLIVER.

"AND now about business," said the beadle, taking out a leathern pocket-book. "The child that was half-baptised Oliver Twist, is nine year old to-day."

"Bless him !" interposed Mrs. Mann, inflaming her left eye with the corner of her apron.

"And notwithstanding an offered reward of ten pound," said Bumble, "we have never been able to discover who is his father, or what was his mother's settlement, name, or condition."

Mrs. Mann raised her hands in astonishment.

"Oliver being now too old to remain here, the board have determined to have him back into the house. I have come out myself to take him there. So let me see him at once."

"I'll fetch him directly," said Mrs. Mann, leaving the room for that purpose. Oliver, having had by this time as much of the outer coat of dirt removed as could be scrubbed off in one washing, was led into the room.

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

Oliver made a bow, which was divided between the beadle on the chair, and the cocked hat on the table.

"Will you go along with me, Oliver ?" said Mr. Bumble, in a majestic voice.

Oliver was about to say that he would go along with anybody with great readiness, when, glancing upwards,

he caught sight of Mrs. Mann, who had got behind the beadle's chair, and was shaking her fist at him with a furious countenance. He took the hint at once, for the fist had been too often impressed upon his body not to be deeply impressed upon his recollection.

"Will *she* go with me?" inquired poor Oliver.

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

This was no very great consolation to the child. Young as he was, however, he had sense enough to make a feint of feeling great regret at going away.

It was no very difficult matter for the boy to call the tears into his eyes. Hunger and recent ill-usage are great assistants if you want to cry; and Oliver cried very naturally indeed. Mrs. Mann gave him a thousand embraces, and, what Oliver wanted a great deal more, a piece of bread and butter, lest he should seem too hungry when he got to the workhouse.

With the slice of bread in his hand, and the little brown-cloth parish cap on his head, Oliver was then led away by Mr. Bumble from the wretched home, where one kind word or look had never lighted the gloom of his infant years. And yet he burst into an agony of childish grief, as the cottage-gate closed after him.

Wretched as were the little companions in misery he was leaving behind, they were the only friends he had ever known; and a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world, sank into the child's heart for the first time.

Mr. Bumble walked on with long strides; little Oliver, firmly grasping his gold-laced cuff, trotted beside him; inquiring at the end of every quarter of a mile whether they were "nearly there."

## III. OLIVER BEFORE "THE BOARD."

OLIVER had not been within the walls of the workhouse a quarter of an hour, when Mr. Bumble, who had handed him over to the care of an old woman, returned; and, telling him it was a board night, informed him that the board had said he was to appear before it forthwith.

Not having a very clear notion of what a live board was, Oliver was rather astounded by this intelligence, and was not quite certain whether he ought to laugh or cry.

He had no time to think about the matter, however; for Mr. Bumble gave him a tap on the head, with his cane, to wake him up: and another on the back to make him lively: and, bidding him follow, conducted him into a large whitewashed room, where eight or ten fat gentlemen were sitting round a table. At the top of the table, seated in an arm-chair rather higher than the rest, was a particularly fat gentleman, with a very round, red face.

"Bow to the board," said Bumble. Oliver brushed away two or three tears that were lingering in his eyes; and seeing no board but the table, fortunately bowed to that.

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

Oliver was frightened at the sight of so many gentlemen, which made him tremble; and the beadle gave him another tap behind, which made him cry. These two causes made him answer in a very low and hesitating voice; whereupon a gentleman in a white waistcoat said he was a fool. Which was a capital way of raising his spirits, and putting him quite at his ease.

"Boy," said the gentleman in the high chair, "listen to me. You know you're an orphan, I suppose?"

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