A Tale of Two Cities: Part 05

Charles Dickens

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES.

By Charles Dickens.

BOOK THE SECOND. THE GOLDEN THREAD.

CHAPTER I. FIVE YEARS LATER.

TELLSON'S Bank by Temple Bar was an old-fashioned place, even in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty. It was very small, very dark, very ugly, very inconvenient. It was an old-fashioned place moreover, in the moral attribute that the partners in the House were proud of its smallness, proud of its darkness, proud of its ugliness, proud of its incommodiousness. They were even boastful of its eminence in those particulars, and were fired by an express conviction that, if it were less objectionable, it would be less respectable. This was no passive belief, but an active weapon which they flashed at more convenient places of business. Tellson's (they said) wanted no elbow room, Tellson's wanted no light, Tellson's wanted no embellishment. Noakes and Co.'s might, or Snooks Brothers' might; but Tellson's, thank Heaven!—Any one of these partners would have disinherited his son on the question of rebuilding Tellson's. In this respect, the house was much on a par with the Country, which did very often disinherit its sons for suggesting improvements in laws and customs that had long been highly objectionable, but were the more respectable.

But, indeed, at that time, putting to Death was a recipe much in vogue with all trades and professions, and not least of all with Tellson's. Death is Nature's remedy for all things, and why not Legislation's? Accordingly, the forger was put to Death; the utterer of a bad note was put to Death; the unlawful opener of a letter was put to Death; the purloiner of forty shillings and sixpence was put to Death; the holder of a horse at Tellson's door, who made off with it was put to Death; the coiner of a bad shilling was put to Death; the sounders of three-fourths of the notes in the whole gamut of Crime, were put to Death. Not that it did the least good in the way of prevention—it might almost have been worth remarking that the fact was exactly the reverse—but, it cleared off (as to this world) the trouble of each particular case, and left nothing else connected with it to be looked after. Thus, Tellson's, in its day, like greater places of business, its contemporaries, had taken so many lives, that, if the heads laid low before it had been ranged on Temple Bar instead of being privately disposed of, they would probably have excluded what little light the ground floor had, in a rather significant manner.

Cramped in all kinds of cupboards and hutch at Tellson's, the oldest of men carried on the signature by the dingiest of windows, which were always under a shower-bath of mud from Fleet-street, and which were made the dingier by their own iron bars proper, and the heavy shadow of Temple Bar. If your business necessitated your seeing "the House," you were put into a species of Condemned Hold at the back, where you meditated on a misspent life, until the House came with its hands in its pockets, and you could hardly blink at it in the dismal twilight.
the business gravely. When they took a young man into Tellson's London house, they hid him somewhere till he was old. They kept him in a dark place, like a cheese, until he had the full Tellson flavour and blue-mould upon him. Then only was he permitted to be seen, spectacularly poring over large books, and casting his breeches and gaiters into the general weight of the establishment.

Outside Tellson's—never by any means in it, unless called in—was an odd-job-man, an occasional porter and messenger, who served as the live sign of the house. He was never absent during business hours, unless upon an errand, and then he was represented by his son: a grisly urchin of twelve, who was his express image. People understood that Tellson's, in a stately and gaited way, tolerated the odd-job-man. The house had always tolerated some person in that capacity, and time and tide had drifted this person to the post. His surname was Cruncher, and on the youthful occasion of his renouncing by proxy the works of darkness, in the easterly parish church of Houndsditch, he had received the added appellation of Jerry.

The scene, was Mr. Cruncher's private lodging in Hanging-sword-alley, Whitefriars; the time, half-past seven of the clock on a windy March morning, Anno Domini seventeen hundred and eighty. (Mr. Cruncher himself always spoke the Christian era dated from the invention of a popular game, by a lady who had bestowed her name upon it.)

Mr. Cruncher's apartments were not in a savory neighbourhood, and were but two in number, even if a closet with a single pane of glass in it might be counted as one. But, they were very decently kept. Early as it was, on the windy March morning, Anna Domini seventeen hundred and eighty. (Mr. Cruncher himself always spoke of the year of our Lord as Anna Domines; apparently under the impression that the Christian era dated from the invention of a popular game, by a lady who had bestowed her name upon it.)

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husband and child, would you? Not you!"

and throwing off other sarcastic sparks from the whisking grindstone of his indignation, Mr. Cruncher betook himself to his boot-cleaning and his general preparations for business. In the mean time, his son, whose head was garrisoned with tenderer spikes, and whose young eyes stood close by one another, as his father's did, kept the required watch upon his mother. He greatly disturbed that poor woman at intervals, by darting out of his sleeping closet, where he made his toilet, with a suppressed cry of: "You are going to flop, mother—Halloa, father!" and, after raising this fictitious alarm, darting in again with an unpunctual grin.

His wife explained that she had merely "asked a blessing."

"Now, Aggerawayter! What are you up to? At it agin?"

"Don't do it!" said Mr. Cruncher, looking about, as if he rather expected to see the loaf disappear under the efficacy of his wife's petitions. "I ain't a going to be blest out of house and home. I won't have my wittles blest off my table. Keep still!"

Exceedingly red-eyed and grim, as if he had been up all night at a party which had taken anything but a convivial turn, Jerry Cruncher worried his breakfast rather than ate it, growling over it like a four-footed inmate of a menagerie. Towards nine o'clock he smoothed his ruffled aspect, and, presenting as respectable and business-like an exterior as he could overlay his natural self with, issued forth to the occupation of the day.

It could scarcely be called a trade, in spite of his favourite description of himself as "a honest tradesman." His stock consisted of a wooden stool, made out of a broken-backed chair cut down, which stood Young Jerry, walking at his father's side, carried every morning to beneath the banking-house window that was nearest Temple Bar; where, with the addition of the first handful of straw that could be gleaned from any passing vehicle to keep the cold off the job-man's feet, it formed the encampment for the day. On this post of his, Mr. Cruncher was as well known to Fleet-street and the Temple, as the Bar itself—and was almost as ill-looking.

Encamped at a quarter before nine, in good time to touch his three-cornered hat to the oldest of men as they passed in to Tellson's. Mr. Cruncher, after surveying him in silence until he came to the blotting-paper stage, remarked:

"Is that all, sir?"

"That's all. He wishes to have a messenger at hand. This is to tell him you are there."

As the ancient clerk deliberately folded and superscribed the note, Mr. Cruncher, after scanning the signature, appeased the note, Mr. Lorry, after surveying him in silence until he came to the blotting-paper stage, remarked:

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As the ancient clerk deliberately folded and superscribed the note, Mr. Cruncher, after surveying him in silence until he came to the blotting-paper stage, remarked:

"I suppose they'll be trying Forgeries this morning?"

"Treason!"

"That's quartering," said Jerry. "Barbarous!"

"It is the law," remarked the ancient clerk, turning his surprised spectacles upon him, "It is the law."

"It's hard in the law to spile a man, I think. It's hard enough to kill him, but it's very hard to spile him, sir."
"Not at all," returned the ancient clerk.

"Speak well of the law. Take care of your chest and voice, my good friend, and leave the law to take care of itself. I give you that advice."

"It's the damp, sir, what settles on my chest and voice," said Jerry. "I leave you to judge what a damp way of earning a living is."

"Well, well," said the old clerk; "we all have our various ways of gaining a livelihood. Some of us have damp ways, and some of us have dry ways. Here is the letter. Go along."

Jerry took the letter, and, remarking to himself with less internal deference than he made an outward show of, "You are a lean old one, too," made his bow, informed his man he found himself next to, in passing, of his destination, and went his way.

They hanged at Tyburn, in those days, so the street outside Newgate had not obtained one infamous notoriety that has since attached to it. But, the goal was a vile place, in which most kinds of debauchery and villany were practised, and where dire diseases were bred, that came into court with the prisoners, and sometimes rushed straight from the dock at my Lord Chief Justice himself, and pulled him off the bench. It had more than once happened, that the judge in the black cap pronounced his own doom as certainly as the prisoner's, and even died before him. For the rest, the Old Bailey was famous as a kind of deadly inn-yard, from which pale travellers set out continually, in carts and coaches, on a violent passage into the other world: traversing some two miles and a half of public street and road, and shaming few good citizens, if any. So powerful is use, and so desirable to be good use in the beginning. It was famous, too, for the pillory, a wise old institution, that inflicted a punishment of which no one could foresee the extent; also, for the whipping-post, another dear old institution, very humanising and softening to behold in action; also, for extensive transactions in blood-money, another fragment of ancestral wisdom, systematically leading to the most frightful mercenary crimes that could be committed under Heaven. Altogether, the Old Bailey, at that date, was a choice illustration of the precept, that "Whatever is right;" an aphorism that would be as final as the sentence."

"If he's found Guilty, you mean to say?" Jerry added, by way of proviso.

"Oh! they'll find him Guilty," said the other.

"Don't you be afraid of that."

Mr. Cruncher's attention was here diverted to the doorkeeper, whom he saw making his way to Mr. Lorry, with the note in his hand. Mr. Lorry sat at a table, among the gentlemen in wigs: not far from a wigged gentleman, the prisoner's counsel, who had a great bundle of papers before him: and nearly opposite another wigged gentleman with his hands in his pockets, whose whole attention, when Mr. Cruncher looked at him then or afterwards, seemed to be concentrated on the ceiling of the court. After some gruff coughing and rubbing of his chin and signing with his hand, Jerry attracted the notice of Mr. Lorry, who had stood up to look for him, and who quietly nodded, and sat down again.

"What's he got to do with the case?" asked the man he had spoken with.

"Blest if I know," said Jerry.

"What have you got to do with it, then, if a person may inquire?"

"Blest if I know that, either," said Jerry.

The entrance of the Judge, and a consequent great stir and settling-down in the court, stopped the dialogue. Presently, the dock became the central point of interest. Two gaolers, who had been standing there, went out, and the prisoner was brought in, and put to the bar. Everybody present, except the one wigged gentleman who looked at the ceiling, stared at him. All the human breath in the place, rolled at him, like a sea, or a wind, or a fire. Eager faces strained round pillars and corners, to get a sight of him; spectators in back rows stood up, not to miss a hair of him; people on the floor of the court, laid their hands on the shoulders of the people before them, to help themselves, at anybody's cost, to a view of him—stood a-tiptoe, got upon ledges, stood upon next to nothing, to see every inch of him. Conspicuous among these latter, like an animated bit of the spiked wall of Newgate, Jerry stood: aiming at the prisoner the beery breath of a what he had taken as he came along, and discharging it to mingle with the waves of other beer, and...
The accused, who was (and who knew he was) being mentally hanged, beheaded, and quartered, by everybody there, neither flinched from the peril of the accused, nor assumed any theatrical air in it. The sort of interest with which this man was stared and breathed at, was not a sort that elevated humanity. Had he stood in peril of a less horrible sentence—had there been a chance of any one of its savage details being spared—by just so much would he have lost in his fascination. The form that was to be doomed to be so horribly sentence—had there been a chance of any one of its savage details being spared—by just so much would he have lost in his fascination. The sort of interest with which this man was stared and breathed at, was not a sort that elevated humanity. Had he stood in peril of a less horrible sentence—had there been a chance of any one of its savage details being spared—by just so much would he have lost in his fascination. The sort of interest with which this man was stared and breathed at, was not a sort that elevated humanity. Had he stood in peril of a less horrible sentence—had there been a chance of any one of its savage details being spared—by just so much would he have lost in his fascination. The sort of interest with which this man was stared and breathed at, was not a sort that elevated humanity. Had he stood in peril of a less horrible sentence—had there been a chance of any one of its savage details being spared—by just so much would he have lost in his fascination.
direction, recalled them, leaned back in his seat and looked steadily at the man whose life was in his hand, as Mr. Attorney-General rose to spin the rope, grind the axe, and hammer the nails into the scaffold.

GOOD QUALITIES OF GOUT.

WHEN I say gout, I don't mean rheumatism. A variety of endeavours have been made to define the difference between gout and rheumatism. Thus: Gout is rich man's rheumatism, and rheumatism is poor man's gout; which in good only as a figure of speech. Another: Put your toe in a vice; turn the screw till you can bear the pain no longer; that's rheumatism. Give the screw one turn more; that's gout. In every respect, gout takes precedence. Just as, grammatically speaking, the masculine gender is "more worthy" than the feminine, and the feminine more worthy than the neuter (I should think so!) so is gout more worthy than rheumatism, and rheumatism more worthy than the low, vagabond pains and aches which John Kramble the corpulent would identify by calling them His.

Rheumatic gout may be assumed to be no real gout at all, but either pure rheumatism or rheumatic fever. There is no such thing as gouty rheumatism; which is simply a contradiction and a black man to be fellow-lodgers in the same house, and rheumatism to be co-resident in the same body. It is possible, however, for gout and rheumatism to be co-resident in the same patient, just as it is possible for a white man and a black man to be fellow-lodgers in the same boarding-house, on this side of the Atlantic. Gout is strictly confined to the joints; rheumatism has no objection to a sojourn amongst the muscles. For instance, it will play tricks with your intercostal (mid-rib) muscles, frightening you with false terrors of heart disease. Gout comes to a regular crisis: it has its rise, its culminating point, and its decline and fall: it is over, descends with dignity to his bottom of the sea. Rheumatism does not mind up or down, backward or forward; may advance or retreat capriciously; may have no notion what it is to be in the stocks, closed to you; and consequently enlarges your views of life. You have heard of the village stocks (once a national institution); but you have never seen nor felt one. Gout will bring his boot to a variety of new sensations and new ideas which otherwise would be closed to you; and consequently enlarges your views of life. You have heard of the torture-boots of the Inquisitors and others, but you have never seen nor felt one. Gout will bring his boot and draw it up tight as far as your knee; next, he will drive in some heated wedges, tapping them constantly with a nice little hammer, to prevent your forgetting they are there, till at last you lose your dignity, and shout aloud. When the performance is over, and Gout's boot is taken off, your late experiment suggests the remark, "I could not have believed

on the ground. Rheumatism is the vile Old Man of the Sea, who insidiously instalts himself upon your shoulder, and who never looses his hold entirely, although he may relax it from time to time. Gout is a mighty but inscrutable genius, who occasionally opens the flood-gates of his wrath; but who, as soon as the tempest is over, descends with dignity to his retreat at the bottom of the sea.

When Xerxes offered a reward for a new pleasure, it is a pity he did not first think of asking his physicians to give him a taste of the twlinfive he would have found its departure duly preceded by its arrival and its stay—the most agreeable sensation he ever felt in his life. For gout is a gentlemanly and accommodating visitor, not dangerous upon the whole; you may enjoy the advantage of his company often and often, without apprehension of any untoward result. It cannot be denied that unlocked-for accidents will now and then occur; but they are the exceptions rather than the rule. They are treacherous and shabby tricks which Death maliciously plays off on Gout to put him out of favour with the sons of men. Many and many people are in the habit of receiving Gout in their houses, all their lives long, till he becomes quite an old and respected acquaintance (to despise him is impossible), and yet receive their death-stroke from some other enemy. They die, not of Gout's ill-treatment, but because Gout cannot come to their rescue and drive out the new intruder, who has broken into the premises with malice prepost. Count the total number of fits of the gout which come off in Europe in twenty-five years with the actual deaths with which Gout stands really and truly chargeable during the same period, and the proportion is reduced to an infinitesimal fraction: to all but snow-white innocence.

Gout introduces you to a variety of new sensations and new ideas which otherwise would be closed to you; and consequently enlarges your views of life. You have heard of the village stocks (once a national institution); but you have no notion what it is to be in the stocks. Gout will enlighten your ignorance, by laying you flat on your back so that you could not sit for your life if the house caught fire. He will then put your feet into his own private stocks (made of burning iron). As a further improvement, he will set on a few of his private pack of wild dogs with red-hot teeth, to gnaw at your toes till you exclaim, "Don't talk to me of the village stocks as a punishment! They were nothing to this.”

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