1859

A Tale of Two Cities: Part 10

Charles Dickens

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wpi.edu/taleof2cities-w

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.wpi.edu/taleof2cities-w/10

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Novels at Digital WPI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tale of Two Cities (weekly) by an authorized administrator of Digital WPI. For more information, please contact digitalwpi@wpi.edu.
BOOK THE SECOND.  THE GOLDEN THREAD.

CHAPTER IX.  THE GORGON'S HEAD.

IT was a heavy mass of building, that château of Monsieur the Marquis, with a large stone courtyard before it, and two stone sweeps of staircase meeting in a stone terrace before the principal door. A stony business altogether, with heavy stone balustrades, and stone urns, and stone flowers, and stone faces of men, and stone heads of lions, in all directions. As if the Gorgon's head had surveyed it, when it was finished, two centuries ago.

Up the broad flight of shallow steps, Monsieur the Marquis, flambeau preceded, went from his carriage, sufficiently disturbing the darkness to eliciting loud remonstrance from an owl in the roof of the great pile of stable-building away among the trees. All else was so quiet, that the flambeau carried up the steps, and the other flambeau held at the great door, burst as if they were in a close room of state, instead of being in the open night-air. Other sound than the owl's voice there was none, save the falling of a fountain into its stone basin; for, it was one of those dark nights that hold their breath by the hour together, and then heave a long low sigh, and hold their breath again.

The great door clanged behind him, and Monsieur the Marquis crossed a hall, grim with certain old boar spears, swords, and riding-whips, of which many a peasant, gone to his benefactor Death, had felt the weight when his lord was angry.

Avoiding the larger rooms, which were dark and made fast for the night, Monsieur the Marquis, with his flambeau-bearer going on before, went up the staircase to a door in a corridor. This thrown open, admitted him to his own private apartment of three rooms: his bedchamber and two others. High vaulted rooms with cool uncarpeted floors, great dogs upon the hearths for the burning of wood in winter time, and all luxuries befitting the state of a marquis in a luxurious age and country. The fashion of the last Louis but one, of the line that was never to break—the fourteenth Louis—was conspicuous in their rich furniture; but, it was diversified by many objects that were illustrations of old pages in the history of France.

A supper-table was laid for two, in the third of the rooms; a round room, in one of the château's four extinguisher-topped towers; a small lofty room, with its window wide open, and the wooden jalousie-blinds closed, so that the dark night only showed in slight horizontal lines of black, alternating with their broad lines of stone-colour.

"My nephew," said the Marquis, glancing at the supper preparation; "they said he was not arrived."

Nor was he; but, he had been expected with Monseigneur.

"Ah! It is not probable he will arrive tonight; nevertheless, leave the table as it is. I shall be ready in a quarter of an hour."

In a quarter of an hour, Monseigneur was ready, and sat down alone to his sumptuous and choice supper. His chair was opposite to the window, and he had taken his soup, and was raising his glass of Bordeaux to his lips, when he put it down.

"What is that?" he calmly asked, looking with attention at the horizontal lines of black and stone-colour.

"Monseigneur? That?"

"Outside the blinds. Open the blinds."

It was done.

"Well?"

"Monseigneur, it is nothing. The trees and the night are all that are here."

The servant who spoke, had thrown the blinds wide, had looked out into the vacant darkness, and stood, with that blank behind him, looking round for instructions.

"Good," said the imperturbable master.

"Close them again."

That was done too, and the Marquis went on with his supper. He was half way through it when he again stopped with his glass in his hand, hearing the sound of wheels. It came on briskly, and came up to the front of the château.

"Ask who is arrived."

It was the nephew of Monseigneur. He had been some few leagues behind Monseigneur, early in the afternoon. He had diminished the distance rapidly, but not so rapidly as to come up with Monseigneur on the road. He had heard of Monseigneur, at the posting-houses, as being before him.
He was to be told (said Monseigneur) that supper awaited him then and there, and that he was prayed to come to it. In a little while, he came. He had been known in England as Charles Darnay.

Monseigneur received him in a courtly manner, but they did not shake hands.

"You left Paris yesterday, sir?" he said to Monseigneur, as he took his seat at table.

"Yesterday. And you?"

"I come direct."

"From London?"

"Yes."

"You have been a long time coming," said the Marquis, with a smile.

"On the contrary; I come direct."

"Pardon me! I mean, not a long time on the journey; a long time intending the journey."

"I have been detained by——the nephew stopped a moment in his answer——'various business.'"

"Without doubt," said the polished uncle.

"My friend, I told you so," said the uncle, pleasantly.

"But, however that may be," resumed the nephew, glancing at him with deep distrust, "I have come back, sir, as you anticipate, pursuing the object that took me away. It carried me into great and unexpected peril; but it is a sacred object, and if it had carried me to death I hope it would have sustained me."

"Not to death," said the uncle; "it is not necessary to say, to death."

"I doubt, sir," pursued the nephew, "whether, if it had carried me to the utmost brink of death, you would have cared to stop me there."

The deepened marks in the nose, and the lengthening of the fine straight lines in the cruel face, looked ominous as to that; the uncle made a graceless gesture of protest, which was so clearly a slight form of good breeding that it was not reassuring.

"Indeed, sir," pursued the nephew, "for anything I know, you may have expressly worked to give a more suspicious appearance to the suspicious circumstances that surrounded me."

"No, no, no," said the uncle, pleasantly.

"But, however that may be," resumed the nephew, glancing at him with deep distrust, "I know that your diplomacy would stop me by any means, and would know no scruple as to means.""My friend, I told you so," said the uncle, with a fine pulsation in the two marks. "Do me the favour to recal that I told you so, long ago."

"I recall it."

"Thank you," said the Marquis—very sweetly indeed.

His tone lingered in the air, almost like the tone of a musical instrument.

"In effect, sir," pursued the nephew, "I believe it to be at once your bad fortune, and my good fortune, that has kept me out of a prison in France here."

"I do not quite understand," returned the uncle, sipping his coffee. "Dare I ask you to explain?"

"I believe that if you were not in disgrace with the court, and had not been overlooked by that cloud for years past, a letter de cachet would have sent me to some fortress indefinitely."

"It is possible," said the uncle, with great coldness. "For the honour of the family, I could even resolve to inconvenience you to that extent. Pray excuse me!"

"I perceive that, happily for me, the Reception of the day before yesterday was, as usual, a cold one," observed the nephew.

"I would not say happily, my friend," returned the uncle, "with refined politeness; I would not be sure of that. A good opportunity for consideration, surrounded by the advantages of solitude, might influence your destiny to far greater advantage than you influence it for yourself. But it is useless to discuss the question. I am, as you say, at a disadvantage. These little instruments of correction, these gentle aids to the power and honour of families, these slight favours that might so inconmodate you, are only to be obtained now by interest and importunity. They are sought by so many, and they are granted (comparitively) so few! If used not to be so, but France in all such things is changed for the worse. Our not remote ancestors held the right of life and death over the surrounding vulgar. From this room, many such dogs have been taken out to be hanged; in the next room (my bedroom), one fellow, to our knowledge, was poniarded on the spot for professing some insolent delicacy respecting his daughter—his daughter! We have lost many privileges; a new philosophy has become the mode; and in assertion of our station, in these days, might cause us real inconvenience. All very bad, very bad."

The Marquis took a gentle little pinch of snuff, and shook his head; as elegantly despondent as he could becomingly be, of a country still containing himself, that great means of regeneration.

"We have so asserted our station, both in the old time and in the modern time also," said the nephew, gloomily, "that I believe our name to be more detested than any name in France."

"Let us hope so," said the uncle. "Detestation of the high, is the involuntary homage of the low."

"There is not," pursued the nephew in his former tone, "a face I can look at, in all this country round about us, which looks at me with any deference on it: but the dark deference of four and slavery."

"A compliment," said the Marquis, "to the grandeur of the family, merited by the manner in which the family has sustained its grandeur. Ha!"

"And he took another gentle little pinch of snuff, and lightly crossed his legs.

But, when his nephew, leaning an elbow on the table, covered his eyes thoughtfully and dejectedly with his hand, the fine mask looked at him sideways, with a stronger concentration.
of keenness, closeness, and dislike, than was
comparative with its wearer's assumption of in-
difference.
"Repression is the only lasting philosophy.
The dark deference of fear and slavery, my
friend," observed the Marquis, "will keep the
dogs obedient to the whip, as long as this roof,
looking up to it, "shuts out the sky," himself.

That might not be so long as the Marquis
supposed. If a picture of the château as it was
to be a very few years hence, and of fifty like it as
they too were to be a very few years hence, could
have been shown to him that night, he might
have been at a loss to claim his own from the
ghostly, fire-charred, plunder-wrecked ruins. As
for the roof it rousted, he might have found
that shutting out the sky in a new way—to wit,
for ever, from the eyes of the bodies into which
its lead was fired, out of the barrels of a hundred
thousand muskets.

"Meanwhile," said the Marquis, "I will pre-
sure the honour and repose of the family, if
you will not. But you must be fatigued. Shall
we terminate our conference for the night?"

"A moment more."

"An hour, if you please."

"Sir," said the nephew, "we have done wrong,
and are reaping the fruits of wrong."

"We have done wrong?" repeated the Mar-
quise, with an inquiring smile, and delicately
pointing, first to his nephew, then to himself.

"Our family; our honourable family, whose
honour is of so much account to both of us, in
such different ways. Even in my father's time,
we did a world of wrong, injuring every human
creature who came between us and our pleasure,
whatever it was. Was it need I speak of my
father's time, when it is equally yours? Can I
separate my father's twin-brother, joint inheritor,
and next successor, from himself?"

"Death has done that," said the Marquis.
"And has left me," answered the nephew,
"bound to a system that is frightful to me, re-
sponsble for it, but powerless in it; seeking to
execute the last request of my dear mother's
eyes, which implored me to have mercy and to
redeem; and tortured by seeking assistance and
power in vain."

"Seeking them from me, my nephew," said
the Marquis, touching him on the breast with
his forefinger—they were now standing by the
hearth—"you will for ever seek them in vain,
be assured."

Every fine straight line in the clear white-
ness of his face, was cruelly, craftily, and closely
compressed, while he stood looking quietly at his
nephew, with his snuff-box in his hand. Once
again he touched him on the breast, and, through
to the fine point of a small sword,
with which, in debatable fineness, he ran him through
the body, and said,

"My friend, I will die, perpetuating the system
under which I have lived."

When he had said this, he took a culminating
pinch of snuff, and put his box in his pocket.

"Better to be a rational creature," he added
then, after ringing a small bell on the table,
and accept your natural destiny. But you are
lost, Monseur Charles, I see."

"This property and France are lost to me," said
the nephew, sadly; "I renounce them."

"Are they both yours to renounce? France
may be, but is the property? It is scarcely
worth mentioning; but, is it yet?"

"I had no intention, in the words I used, to
claim it yet. If it passed to me from you, to-
morrow—"

"Which I have the vanity to hope is not
probable."

"—or twenty years hence—"

"You do me too much honour," said the
Marquis; "still, I prefer that supposition."

"—I would abandon it, and live otherwise and
differently. It is little to relinquish. What is
it but a wilderness of misery and ruin?"

"Hah!" said the Marquis, glancing round the
luxurious room.

"To the eye it is fair enough, here; but seen
in its integrity, under the sky and by the day-
light, it is a crumbling tower of waste, mis-
management, extortion, debt, mortgage, oppres-
sion, hunger, nakedness, and suffering."

"Hah!" said the Marquis again, in a well-
satisfied manner.

"If it ever becomes mine, it shall be put into
some hands better qualified to free it slowly (if
such a thing is possible) from the weight that
drags it down, so that the miserable people who
cannot leave it and who have been long wrong
to the last point of endurance, may, in another
generation, suffer less; but it is not for me.
There is a curse on it, and on all this land."

"And you?" said the uncle. "Forgive my
curiosity; do you, under your new philosophy,
graciously intend to live?"

"I must do, to live, what others of my coun-
trymen, even with nobility at their backs, may
have to do some day—work.

"In England, for example?"

"Yes. The family honour, sir, is safe from
me in this country. The family name can suffer
from me in no other, for I bear it in no other."

The ringing of the bell had caused the ad-
joining bedchamber to be lighted. It now
shone brightly, through the door of communication.
The Marquis looked that way, and listened
for the retreating step of his valet.

"England is very attractive to you, seeing
how indifferently you have prospered there," he
observed then, turning his calm face to his nephew
with a smile.

"I have already said, that for my prospering
there, I am sensible I may be indebted to you,
sir. For the rest, it is my Refuge."

"They say, those boastful English, that it is
the Refuge of many. You know a compatriot
who has found a Refuge there? A Doctor?"

"Yes."

"With a daughter?"

"Yes.

"Yes," said the Marquis. "You are fatigued.
Good night!"

As he bent his head in his most courtly
manner, there was a secrecy in his smiling face, and he conveyed an air of mystery to those words, which struck the eyes and ears of his nephew forcibly. At the same time, the thin straight lines of the setting of the eyes, and the thin straight lips, and the markings in the nose, curved with a sarcasm that looked handsomely diabolic.

"Yes," repeated the Marquis. "A Doctor with a daughter. Yes. So commences the new philosophy! You are fatigued. Good night!"

It would have been of as much avail to interrogate any stone face outside the château, as to interrogate that face of his. The nephew looked at him, in vain, in passing on to the door. "Good night!" said the uncle. "I look to the pleasure of seeing you again in the morning. Good night!" Light Monsieur my nephew to his chamber there!—And burn Monsieur my robe, to prepare himself gently for sleep, that hot still night. Rustling about the room, his softly-slippered feet making no noise on the floor, he looked like some enchanted marquis of the impenitently wicked slippered feet making no noise on the floor, he form was either just going off, or just coming forth shivering—chilled, as yet, by the new dead darkness added its own hush to the hushing custom of such creatures hardly ever to say anything that could be seen of it. In the village, the stone faces on the outer walls stared blindly at the black night for three heavy hours; the horses in the stables looked round over their shoulders at the château, nor the running up and down the routine of life, and the return of morning reared impatient to be loosed.

The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot. The château awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at the Cross-foot.
as they sow chance seeds? Whether or no, the mender of roads ran on the sultry morning, as if for his life, down the hill, knee-high in dust, and never stopped till he got to the fountain. All the people of the village were at the fountain, standing about in their depressed manner, and whispering softly, but showing no other emotions than grim curiosity and surprise. The led cows, hastily brought in and tethered to anything that would hold them, were looking stupidly, or were lying down chewing the cud of nothing particularly repaying their trouble, which they had picked up in their interrupted saunter. Some of the people of the château, and some of those of the posting-house, and all the taxing authorities, were armed more or less, and were crowded on the other side of the little street in a purposeless way, that was highly fraught with nothing. Already, the mender of roads had penetrated into the midst of a group of fifty particular friends, and was smiting himself in the breast with his blue cap. What did all this portend, and what portended the swift hoisting-up of Monsieur Gabelle behind a servant on horseback, and the conveying away of the said Gabelle (double-laden though the horse was), at a gallop, like a new version of the Greek tale of Leomons?

It portended that there was one stone face too many, up at the château. The Gorgon had surveyed the building again in the night, and had added the one stone face wanting; the stone face for which it had waited through about two hundred years. It lay back on the pillow of Monsieur the Marquis. It was like a fine mask, suddenly startled, made angry, and petrified. Driven home into the heart of the stone figure attached to it, was a knife. Round its hilt was a frill of paper, on which was scrawled:

"Drive him fast to his tomb. This, from Jacques."

**REVOLUTION AT FLORENCE, EXACTLY DESCRIBED.**

I. THE PREPARATION.

In Italy, war means hope; and, at the beginning of the present year the celebrated words of the French Emperor to the Austrian Ambassador raised Italian hopes to seething point. Young men of all classes began to flock towards Piedmont in the hope of taking part in the contest, which was now considered certain, and which, it was hoped, would be a war of Italian independence. Many of these young men belonged to the upper and middle classes; but the majority were, of course, from the largest class; that which has no possessions but its labour. And, for the purpose of assisting them to perform the journey, a committee of Tuscan gentlemen was formed. No volunteers were accepted by this committee who did not present certificates, showing that the bearer had never offended against the law. Such certificates are ordinarily granted by the proper authorities in Tuscany to any asking for them. But they cost five Pauls—rather more than two shillings—and these five Pauls the volunteer, applying for aid, was expected to have paid for himself, as an earnest of the bona fide seriousness of his intention. Then the necessary means of reaching Genoa were supplied. The Grand-Ducal Government also granted passports for Piedmont to all who asked them, without any difficulty. Moreover, papers which have been found in the office of the late Minister of the Interior show, that the Grand-Duke had been for some time past accurately informed of the state of the country by the various provincial governors. It was in no wise discredited that the entire country was ripe for revolution if alliance with Piedmont, in the coming war, could be no other wise attained.

This exodus of volunteers continued on an ever-increasing scale; and one or two incidents occurred which show clearly enough the leaning of the military, as well as of the popular mind. A number of friends had accompanied one of the volunteers of good social standing to the railway station, and bade him adieu with shouting and other hearty and noisy demonstrations of feeling. Among these was a lieutenant in the service of the Grand-Duke Leopold. He was brought to court-martial for this manifestation of his sentiments, and acquitted. Again, a few days before the actual breaking out of the war, a body, some twenty soldiers, deserted, and got away with all their arms and accoutrements to Piedmont.

From the beginning of the war there was a greater degree of intimacy between the citizens and the soldiers might have been observed than usual, both in the rank of officers and of privates. Those who are acquainted with the habits of life in the cities of Italy, will understand how spontaneously and easily this would be brought about. No special appointments, no invitations to this or the other house, would be necessary. The universally frequented café would furnish an ever-ready place of meeting. A cup of coffee, an ice, or a “ponche,” taken together, would be sufficient to perfect a mutual understanding; and—in a small city where everybody knows everybody, and everybody sees everybody at this or the other café every day—a very short duration of this sort of companionship sufficed to make the military and civil body perfectly well understand and reciprocate their political opinions and aspirations.

The same thing was going on in precisely the same manner among the privates. The habits of life differ much less in the different classes of society in Italy than in our more formal, stiffer, and richer selves. The artisans and journeymen of the city were taking their coffee, and their ices, and their “ponches,” with the privates; and, in answer to my searching inquiries on this point, it was confessed (readily enough) that, after such fets of reason and flows of soul, it did often occur that a party of private soldiers were told by the waiter that their reckoning had been mysteriously paid. Those who know Italy and its native habits well, will be aware how common this little