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A Tale of Two Cities: Part 13

Charles Dickens

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES.

In Three Books.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

BOOK THE SECOND. THE GOLDEN THREAD.

CHAPTER XIV. THE HONEST TRADESMAN.

To the eyes of Mr. Jeremiah Cruncher, sitting on his stool in Fleet-street with his grisly urchin beside him, a vast number and variety of objects in movement were every day presented. Who could sit upon anything in Fleet-street during the busy hours of the day, and not be dazed and deafened by two immense processions, one ever tending westward with the sun, the other ever tending eastward from the sun, both ever tending to the plains beyond the range of red and purple where the sun goes down!

With his straw in his mouth, Mr. Cruncher sat watching the two streams, like the heathen rustic who has for several centuries been on duty watching one stream—saving that Jerry had no expectation of their ever running dry. Nor would it have been an expectation of a hopeful kind, since a small part of his income was derived from the pilotage of timid women (mostly of a full habit and past the middle term of life) from Tellson's side of the tides to the opposite shore. Brief as such companionship was in every separate instance, Mr. Cruncher never failed to become so interested in the lady as to express a strong desire to have the honour of drinking her very good health. And it was from the gifts bestowed upon him towards the execution of this benevolent purpose, that he recruited his finances, as just now observed.

Time was, when a poet sat upon a stool in a public place, and mused in the sight of men. Mr. Cruncher, sitting on a stool in a public place but not being a poet, mused as little as possible, and looked about him.

It fell out that he was thus engaged in a season when crowds were few, and belated women few, and when his affairs in general were so unpropitious as to awaken a strong suspicion in his breast that Mrs. Cruncher must have been "flobbing" in some pointed manner, when an unusual concourse pouring down Fleet-street westward, attracted his attention. Looking that way, Mr. Cruncher made out that some kind of funeral was coming along, and that there was popular objection to this funeral, which engendered uproar.

"Young Jerry," said Mr. Cruncher, turning to his offspring, "it's a buryin'."

"Hooroar, father!" cried Young Jerry.

The young gentleman uttered this exultant sound with mysterious significance. The elder gentleman took the cry so ill, that he watched his opportunity, and smote the young gentleman on the ear.

"What dy'e mean? What are you hooroaring at? What do you want to convey to your own father, you young Rip? This boy is a getting too many for me!" said Mr. Cruncher, surveying him. "Him and his hooroars! Don't let me hear no more of you, or you shall feel some more of me. Dy'e hear?"

"I warn't doing no harm," Young Jerry protested, rubbing his cheek.

"Drop it then," said Mr. Cruncher; "I won't have none of your no harms. Get a top of that there seat, and look at the crowd."

His son obeyed, and the crowd approached; they were bawling and hissing round a dingy hearse and dingy mourning coach, in which mourning coach there was only one mourner, dressed in the dingy trappings that were considered essential to the dignity of the position. The position appeared by no means to please him, however, with an increasing rabble surrounding the coach, deriding him, making grimaces at him, and incessantly groaning and calling out: "Yah! Spies! Tst! Yaha! Spies!" with many compliments too numerous and forcible to repeat.

Funerals had at all times a remarkable attraction for Mr. Cruncher; he always pricked up his senses, and became excited, when a funeral passed Tellson's. Naturally, therefore, a funeral with this uncommon attendance excited him greatly, and he asked of the first man who ran against him:

"What is it, brother? What's it about?"

"I don't know," said the man. "Spies! Yaha! Tst! Spies!"

He asked another man. "Who is it?"

"I don't know," returned the man: clapping his hands to his mouth nevertheless, and vociferating in a surprising heat and with the greatest ardour, "Spies! Yaha! Tst, tst! Spies!"

At length, a person better informed on the merits of the case, tumbled against him;
from this person he learned that the funeral was that of one Roger Cly.

"Was He a spy?" asked Mr. Cruncher.

"Old Bailey spy," returned his informant.

"Yah! Tst! Yah! Old Bailey Sp-i-ies!"

"Why, to be sure!" exclaimed Jerry, recalling the trial at which he had assisted. "I've seen him in the Dead, is he?"

"Dead as water," returned the other, "and can't be too dead. Have 'em out, there! Spies! Pull 'em out, there! Spies!"

The idea was so acceptable in the prevalent absence of any idea, that the crowd caught it up with eagerness, and loudly repeating the suggestion to have 'em out, and to pull 'em out, mobbed the two vehicles so closely that they came to a stop. On the crowd's opening the coach doors, the one mourner scuffled out of himself and was in their hands for a moment; but he was so alert, and made such good use of his time, that in another moment he was scouring away up a by-street, after shedding his cloak, hat, long handkerchief, white pocket-handkerchief, and other symbolical tears.

Thus, the people tore to pieces and scattered far and wide with great enjoyment, while the tradesmen hurriedly shut up their shops; for a crowd in those times stopped at nothing, and perhaps the Guards came, and perhaps they were roughly hustled and maltreated. No transition to the sport of window-breaking, and thence to the plundering of public-houses was far and wide with great enjoyment, while the tradesmen hurriedly shut up their shops; for a crowd in those times stopped at nothing, and perhaps the Guards came, and perhaps they were roughly hustled and maltreated. No transition to the sport of window-breaking, and thence to the plundering of public-houses was far and wide with great enjoyment, while the tradesmen hurriedly shut up their shops; for a crowd in those times stopped at nothing, and perhaps the Guards came, and perhaps they were roughly hustled and maltreated. No transition to the sport of window-breaking, and thence to the plundering of public-houses was far and wide with great enjoyment, while the tradesmen hurriedly shut up their shops; for a crowd in those times stopped at nothing, and perhaps the Guards came, and perhaps they were roughly hustled and maltreated. No transition to the sport of window-breaking, and thence to the plundering of public-houses was far and wide with great enjoyment, while the tradesmen hurriedly shut up their shops; for a crowd in those times stopped at nothing, and perhaps the Guards came, and perhaps they were roughly hustled and maltreated. No transition to the sport of window-breaking, and thence to the plundering of public-houses was far and wide with great enjoyment, while the tradesmen hurriedly shut up their shops; for a crowd in those times stopped at nothing, and perhaps the Guards came, and perhaps they were roughly hustled and maltreated.

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“Yes, Jerry,” repeated Mr. Cruncher, sitting down to tea. “Ah! It is yes, Jerry. That’s about it. You may say yes, Jerry.”

Mr. Cruncher had no particular meaning in these sulky corroboration, but made use of them, as people not unfrequently do, to express general ironical dissatisfaction.

“You and your yes, Jerry,” said Mr. Cruncher, taking a bite out of his bread and butter, and seeming to help it down with a large invisible oyster out of his saucer. “Ah! I think so. I believe you.”

“You are going out tonight?” asked his dejected wife, when he took another bite.

“Yess, I am.”

“May I go with you, father?” asked his son, briskly.

“No, you mayn’t. I’m a going — as your mother knows — a fishing. That’s where I’m going to. Going a fishing.”

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“Never you mind.”

“Shall you bring any fish home, father?”

“Don’t you, I should have short commons to- morrow,” returned that gentleman, shaking his head; “that’s questions enough for you; I’m not going out, till you’ve been long a-bed.”

He devoted himself during the remainder of the evening to keeping a most vigilant watch on Mrs. Cruncher, and sullenly holding her in conversation that she might be prevented from meditating any petitions to his disadvantage. With this view, he urged his son to hold her in conversation also, and led the unfortunate woman a hard life by dwelling on any causes of complaint he could bring against her, rather than he would leave her for a moment to her own reflections. The devotedest person could have rendered no greater homage to the efficacy of an honest prayer than, he did in this instance of misfortune. It was as if a professed unbeliever in ghosts should be frightened by a ghost story.

“And mind you!” said Mr. Cruncher. “No games to-morrow! If I, as a honest tradesman, succeed in providing a pint of meat or two, none of your not touching of this. If I, as a honest tradesman, am able to provide a little beer, none of your declaring on water. When you go to Rome, do as Rome does. Rome will be a ugly customer to you, if you don’t. I’m your Rome, you know.”

Then he began grumbling again:

“With your flying tricks and your unfeeling conduct. Look at your boy: he is your’n, ain’t he? He’s as thin, as a lath. Do you call yourself a mother, and not know that a mother’s first duty is to blow her boy out?”

This touched Young Jerry on a tender place; who adjured his mother to perform her first duty, and, whatever else she did or neglected, above all things to lay especial stress on the discharge of that maternal function so effectually and delicately indicated by his other parent.

Thus the evening wore away with the Cruncher family, until Young Jerry was ordered to bed, and his mother, laid under similar injunctions, obeyed them. Mr. Cruncher beguiled the earlier watches of the night with solitary pipes, and did not start upon his excursion until nearly one o’clock. Towards that small and ghostly hour, he rose up from his chair, took a key out of his pocket, opened a locked cupboard, and brought forth a sack, a crowbar of convenient size, a rope and chain, and other fishing-tackle of that nature. Disposing these articles about him in a skilful manner, he bestowed a parting defiance on Mrs. Cruncher, extinguished the light, and went out.

Young Jerry, who had only made a field of undressing when he went to bed, was not long after his father. Under cover of the darkness, he followed out of the room, followed down the stairs, followed down the court, followed out into the streets. He was in no uneasiness concerning his getting into the house again, for it was full of lodgers, and the door stood ajar till the small hours.

Impelled by a laudable ambition to study the art and mystery of his father’s honest calling, Young Jerry, keeping as close to house-fronts, walls, and doorways, as his eyes were close to one another, held his honoured parent in view. The honoured parent steering Northward, had not gone far, when he was joined by another disciple of Izaak Walton, and the two trudged on together.

Within half an hour from the first starting, they were beyond the winking lamps, and the more than winking watchmen, and were out upon a lonely road. Another fisherman was picked up here — and that so silently, that if Young Jerry had been superstitious, he might have supposed the second follower of the gentle craft to have, all of a sudden, split himself into two.

The three went on, and Young Jerry went on, until the three stopped under a bank overhanging the road. Upon the top of the bank was a low brick wall surmounted by an iron railing. In the shadow of bank and wall, the three dropped out of the road, and up a blind lane, of which the wall — there, risen to some eight or ten feet high—formed one side. Crouching down in a corner, peeping up the lane, the next object that Young Jerry saw, was the form of his honoured parent, pretty well defined against a watery and crooked moon, maimly scaling an iron gate. He was soon over, and then the second fisherman got over, and then the third. They all dropped softly on the ground within the gate, and lay there a little — listening perhaps. Then, they moved away on their hands and knees.

It was now Young Jerry’s turn to approach the gate: which he did, holding his breath. Crouching down again in a corner there, and looking in, he made out the three fishermen creeping through some rank grass; and all the gravestones in the churchyard — it was a large churchyard that they were in — looking on like
ghosts in white, while the church tower itself
looked on like the ghost of a monstrous giant.
They did not creep far, before they stopped and
stood upright. And then they began to fish.
They fished with a spade, at first. Presently
the honoured parent appeared to be adjusting
some instrument like a great corkscrew. What-
ever tools they worked with, they worked hard,
until the awful striking of the church clock so
terrified Young Jerry, that he made off, with his
hair as stiff as his father's.

But, his long-cherished desire to know more
about these matters, not only stopped him in his
running away, but lured him back again. They
were still fishing perseveringly, when he peeped in
at the gate for the second time; but, now they
seemed to have got a bite. There was a screw-
ing and complaining sound down below, and
their bent figures were strained, as if by a weight.
By slow degrees the weight broke away the
earth upon it, and came to the surface. Young
Jerry very well knew what it would be; but,
when he saw it, and saw his honoured parent
about to wrench it open, he was so frightened,
that when the boy got to his own door he
had reason for being half dead. And even then
that when the boy got to his own door he
would not have stopped then, for anything
less necessary than breath, it being a spectral
sort of race that he ran, and one highly desirable
to get to the end of. He had a strong idea that
the coffin he had seen was running after him;
and, pictured as hopping on behind him, bolt
upright upon its narrow end, always on the
point of overtaking him and hopping on at his
side—perhaps taking his arm—it was a pursuer
of anything else. Mr. Cruncher was out of
spirits, and out of temper, and kept an iron pot-
lid by him as a projectile for the correction of
his son's-Kite without tail and wings. It hid in door-
comings hopping out of them like a dropsical
boy's-Kite without tail and wings. It got into shadows on
the roadway to avoid dark alleys, fearful of its
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to stum. It was an inconsistent and ubiquitous
fight too, for, while it was making the whole
night behind him dreadful, he darted out into the
roadway to avoid dark alleys, fearful of its
coming hopping out of them like a dropsical
boy's-Kite without tail and wings. It hid in door-
ways too, rubbing its horrible shoulders against
doors, and drawing them up to its cars, as if it
were laughing. It got into shadows on the
road, and lay cunningly on its back to trip him up.
All this time, it was incessantly hopping on behind and gaining on him, so
that when the boy got to his own door he
had reason for being half dead. And even then
it would not leave him, but followed him up-stairs
with a bump on every stair, scrambled into bed
with him, and bumped down, dead and heavy,
on his breast when he fell asleep.

From his oppressed slumber, Young Jerry in
his closet was awakened, after daybreak and
before sunrise, by the presence of his father in
the family room. Something had gone wrong
with him; at least, so Young Jerry inferred, from
the circumstances of his holding Mrs. Cruncher
by the ears, and knocking the back of her head
against the headboard of the bed.

"I told you I would," said Mr. Cruncher,
"and I did."

"Jerry, Jerry, Jerry!" his wife implored.
"You oppose yourself to the profit of the
business," said Jerry, "and me and my partners
suffer. You were to honour and obey; why the
devil don't you?"

"I try to be a good wife, Jerry," the poor
woman protested, with tears.

"Is it being a good wife to oppose your hus-
band's business? Is it honouring your husband
to dis honour his business? Is it obeying your
husband to disobey him on the vital subject of
his business?"

"You hadn't taken to the dreadful business
then, Jerry."

"It's enough for you," retorted Mr. Cruncher,
"to be the wife of a honest tradesman, and not
to occupy your female mind with calculations
when he took to his trade or when he didn't.
A honouring and obeying wife would let his
trade alone altogether. Call yourself a reli-
gious woman? If you're a religious woman,
give me an irrational one! You have no more
sense of duty than the bed of this here
Thames river has of a pile, and similarly
must be knocked into you."

The altercation was conducted in a low tone
of voice, and terminated in the honest trades-
man's kicking in his day-soiled boots, and
lying down at his length on the floor. Like
taking a timid peep at him lying on his back,
his rusty hands under his head for a pillow,
his son lay down too, and fell asleep again.

There was no fish for breakfast, and not man
of anything to eat. Mr. Cruncher was out of
stomach, and washed at the usual hour, and set off with
his rusty hands under his head for a pillow,
his son lay down too, and fell asleep again.

Young Jerry, walking with the stool under
his arm at his father's side along about crown-
ed Fleet-street, was a very different Young
Jerry from him of the previous night, running
home through darkness and solitude from his
grim pursuer. His cunning was fresh with the
time, and out of temper, and kept an iron pot-
"I thought you knew everything, father,"
said the artless boy.

"Hem! Well," returned Mr. Cruncher, going
on again, and lifting off his hat to give his spikes
free play, "he's a tradesman."

"What's his goods, father?" asked the brisk
Young Jerry.

"His goods," said Mr. Cruncher, after turn-
ing it over in his mind, "is a branch of Scientific
goods."

"Persons' bodies, ain't it, father?" asked the
lively boy.

"I believe it is something of that sort," said
Mr. Cruncher.
"Oh, father, I should so like to be a Resurrection-Man when I'm quite growed up!"

Mr. Cruncher was soothed, but shook his head in a dubious and moral way. "It depends upon how you develop your talents. Be careful of what you develop and never to say no more than you can help to nobody, and there's no felling at the present time what you may not come to be fit for." As Young Jerry, thus encouraged, went on a few yards in advance, to plant the stool in the shadow of the Bar, Mr. Cruncher added to himself: "Jerry, you honest tradesman, there's hopes yet that boy will yet be a blessing to you, and a remuneration to you for his mother!"

**THE TRACK OF WAR.**

One moonlight night in the middle of the month of June in this present year, I found myself on the top of Mont Cenis, trudging along ahead of the diligence, in company with a band of extremely hirsute French soldiers, bound for the Italian wars. These gentlemen constituted the first symptoms I had encountered of the strife now raging in Italy, and it was only on falling into their company that it occurred to me that I was now, for the fourth time in my life, without intending it, on the traces of war.

What upon earth took me to Schleswig-Holstein at the only time (during the fight with Denmark) when those provinces could not be peaceably examined, I cannot remember, but I have a distinct recollection of learning from General Willisen that everybody there being supposed to be "in earnest," it was imperative that I should either take my musket and fight for something or other, or evacuate Rendsburg without delay. As the general's first suggestion was not even accompanied by the "twenty sous," which, combined with the ecstasy of marching to a popular tune, should, according to Sergeant Belcore, possess irresistible charms, I adopted the second alternative. As little do I remember wherefore I should have selected Varna, and the stagnant pools of their company that it occurred to me that I was now, for the fourth time in my life, without intending it, on the traces of war.

Thus, as I have said, for the fourth time on this moonlight night, I found myself at Toulouse, strolling on the Corso, so marked a man that he attracts a crowd, who follow him in a diminishing tail, terminating in a small boy with cherries and ballads. The hotels are half empty, the theatres half closed; that is to say, open thrice a week (soldiers and children half-price), and then confining themselves to purely occasional pieces, whereas "GI Austriaci in Italia, Commedia, and L'interessantissimo Dramma, I due Zuavi, seen the favorites, while the young poetry of the nation makes itself heard in chamber recitations, and the street chorus comes swelling up with peculiar fervour:

Di di latto, di di guai,
Sarà quello, o buon Giulal,
Che in Piemonte arriverai.
Ma gia sento un suon di tromba!
Il cannone gia rimbomba!
Ah, Giulal!—d'apri la tomba!

Excepting that every third man has a newspaper, or bulletin, in his hand, there is no visible token of public anxiety. The wave of war has rolled away and away to the plains of Lombardy, carrying with it every grain of apprehension and uncertainty. This great page of human story is fairly turned: the results are for another page. One thing, at least, may be accepted as certain: the name of Italy is inscribed—the God of Nations grant—for ever in the records of the free.

Passing one of the hospitals, I meet my friend Dr. Pound. He has been visiting the wounded Austrians, who, to the number of three hundred, are distributed, with French and Sardinians, among the general hospitals. Most of the former (Dr. Pound adds) are wounded in the back; but let that be no reflection on their courage. Their enemies, to a man, admit that they fought admirably—"perfectly." They stand well, and even if broken, can be rallied; but the bewildering rush of the French infantry is too much for them. The bayonets once crossed, all is over. They resist cavalry better. An Austrian square is thought to be a popular song, should, according to Sergeant Belcore, possess irresistible charms, I adopted the second alternative. As little do I remember wherefore I should have selected Varna, and the stagnant pools of their company that it occurred to me that I was now, for the fourth time in my life, without intending it, on the traces of war.

To remain in Turin is impossible. A visit or two, an agreeable evening at the house of the accomplished gentleman by whose hands—under seven successive home-governments—British interests have been ably administered here, and armed with a safe-conduct (due to his good offices) commanding the bearer, "caldamente," I have been visiting the wounded Austrians, who, to the number of three hundred, are distributed, with French and Sardinians, among the general hospitals. Most of the former (Dr. Pound adds) are wounded in the back; but let that be no reflection on their courage. Their enemies, to a man, admit that they fought admirably—"perfectly." They stand well, and even if broken, can be rallied; but the bewildering rush of the French infantry is too much for them. The bayonets once crossed, all is over. They resist cavalry better. An Austrian square is thought to be a popular song, should, according to Sergeant Belcore, possess irresistible charms, I adopted the second alternative. As little do I remember wherefore I should have selected Varna, and the stagnant pools of their company that it occurred to me that I was now, for the fourth time in my life, without intending it, on the traces of war.

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