A Tale of Two Cities: Part 17

Charles Dickens

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES.

In Three Books.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

BOOK THE SECOND.

THE GOLDEN THREAD.

CHAPTER XIX. AN OPINION.

Worn out by anxious watching, Mr. Lorry fell asleep at his post. On the tenth morning of his suspense, he was startled by the shining of the sun into the room where a heavy slumber had overtaken him when it was dark night. He rubbed his eyes and roused himself; but he doubted, when he had done so, whether he was not still asleep. For, going to the door of the Doctor's room and looking in, he perceived that the shoemaker's bench and tools were put aside again, and that the Doctor himself sat reading at the window. He was in his usual morning dress, and his face (which Mr. Lorry could distinctly see), though still very pale, was calmly studious and attentive.

Even when he had satisfied himself that he was awake, Mr. Lorry felt giddily uncertain for some few moments whether the late shoemaking might not be a disturbed dream of his own; for, did not his eyes show him his friend before him in his accustomed clothing and aspect, and employed as usual; and was there any sign within their range, that the change of which he had so strong an impression had actually happened?

It was but the inquiry of his first confusion and astonishment, the answer being obvious. If the impression were not produced by a real corresponding, and sufficient cause, how came he, Jarvis Lorry, there? How came he to have fallen asleep, in his clothes, on the sofa in Doctor Manette's consulting-room, and to be debating these points outside the Doctor's bedroom in the early morning?

Within a few minutes, Miss Pross stood whispering at his side. If he had had any particle of doubt left, her talk would of necessity have resolved it; but he was by that time clear-headed, and had none. He advised that they should let the time go by until the regular breakfast-hour, and then meet the Doctor as if nothing unusual had occurred. If he appeared to be in his customary state of mind, Mr. Lorry would then cautiously proceed to seek direction and guidance from the opinion he had been, in his anxiety, so anxious to obtain.

Miss Pross, submitting herself to his judgment, the scheme was worked out with care. Having abundance of time for his usual methodical toilette, Mr. Lorry presented himself at the breakfast-hour in his usual white linen and with his usual next leg. The Doctor was summoned in the usual way, and came to breakfast.

So far as it was possible to comprehend him without overstepping those delicate and gradual approaches which Mr. Lorry felt to be the only safe advance, he at first supposed that his daughter's marriage had taken place yesterday. An incidental allusion, purposely thrown out, to the day of the week, and the day of the month, set him thinking and counting, and evidently made him uneasy. In all other respects, however, he was so composedly himself, that Mr. Lorry determined to have the aid he sought. And that aid was his own.

Therefore, when the breakfast was done and cleared away, and he and the Doctor were left together, Mr. Lorry said, feelingly:

"My dear Manette, I am anxious to have your opinion, in confidence, on a very curious case in which I am deeply interested; that is to say, it is very curious to me; perhaps, to your better information it may be less so."

Glancing at his hands, which were discoloured by his late work, the Doctor looked troubled, and listened attentively. He had already glanced at his hands more than once.

"Doctor Manette," said Mr. Lorry, touching him affectionately on the arm, "the case is the case of a particularly dear friend of mine. Pray give your mind to it, and advise me well for his sake—and above all, for his daughter's—his daughter's, my dear Manette."

"If I understand," said the Doctor, in a subdued tone, "some mental shock—?"

"Yes!"

"Be explicit," said the Doctor. "Spare no detail."

Mr. Lorry saw that they understood one another, and proceeded.

"My dear Manette, it is the case of an old and a prolonged shock, of great acuteness and severity, to the affections, the feelings, the—the—as you express it—the mind. The mind. It is the case of a shock under which the sufferer was borne down, one cannot say for how long, because I believe he cannot calculate the time himself, and there are no other means of getting
at it. It is the case of a shock from which the sufferer recovered, by a process that he cannot trace himself— as I once heard him publicly relate in a striking manner. It is the case of a shock from which he has recovered, so completely, as to be a highly intelligent man, capable of close application of mind, and great exertion of body, and of constantly making fresh additions to his stock of knowledge, which was already very large. But, unfortunately, there has been, " he paused and took a deep breath— "a slight relapse."

The Doctor, in a low voice, asked, "Of how long duration?"

"Nine days and nights."

"How did it show itself? I infer," glancing at him again, "the recreation of some old pursuit connected with the shock?"

"That is the fact."

"Now, did you ever see him," asked the Doctor, distinctly and collectedly, though in the same low voice, "engaged in that pursuit originally?"

"Once."

"And when the relapse fell on him, was he in most respects—or as he was then— as I once heard him publicly relate, "a highly intelligent man, capable of close application of mind, and great exertion of body, and of constantly making fresh additions to his stock of knowledge, which was already very large. But, unfortunately, there has been,— he paused and took a deep breath— "a slight relapse.""

The Doctor gave him his hand.

"I think, in all respects," said the Doctor, breaking silence on both sides, "to what would you refer this attack?"

"Yes, I believe," returned Doctor Manette, "that there had been a strong and extraordinary revival of the train of thought and remembrance that was the first cause of the malady. Some intense associations of a most distressing nature were vividly recalled, I think. It is probable that there had been a dread lurking in his mind, that those associations would be recalled, say, under certain circumstances—say, on a particular occasion. He tried to prepare himself, in vain; perhaps the effort to prepare himself, made him less able to bear it."

"Would he remember what took place in the relapse?" asked Mr. Lorry, with natural hesitation.

The Doctor looked decidedly round the room, shook his head, and answered, in a low voice, "Not at all."

"Now, as to the future," hinted Mr. Lorry, "As to the future," said the Doctor, reverting to a subject which had burst and passed, I should hope that the worst was over."

"Well, well! That's good comfort. I am thankful!" repeated the Doctor, bending his head with reverence.

"Yes, I am thankful!" repeated the Doctor, bending his head with reverence.

"There are two other points," said Mr. Lorry, "on which I am anxious to be instructed. I do not possess the kind of information necessary; I do not possess the kind of professional knowledge, to the conducting of experiments, to many things. Now, does he do too much?"

"No. It has been kept from her, and I hope will be kept from her. It is known only to myself, and to one other who may be trusted."

"Now, my dear Manette," said Mr. Lorry, at length, among the most considerate and most affectionate ways; "I am a mere man of business, and wish to walk with such intricate and difficult matters. I do not possess the kind of information necessary; I do not possess the kind of professional knowledge, to the conducting of experiments, to many things. Now, does he do too much?"

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"I am thankful!" repeated the Doctor, bending his head with reverence.

"There are two other points," said Mr. Lorry, "on which I am anxious to be instructed. I may go on?"

"You cannot do your friend a better service." The Doctor gave him his hand.

"To the first, then. He is of a studious habit, and unusually energetic; he applies himself with great ardour to the acquisition of professional knowledge, to the conducting of experiments, to many things. Now, does he do too much?"

"I think not. He may be the character of his mind, to be always in singular need of occupation. That may be, in part, natural to it; in part, the result of affliction. The less it was occupied with healthy things, the more it would
be in danger of turning in the unhealthy direction. He may have observed himself, and made the discovery."

"You are sure that he is not under too great a strain?"

"I think I am quite sure of it."

"My dear Manette, if he were overworked now——"

"My dear Lorry, I doubt if that could easily be. There has been a violent stress in one direction, and it needs a counterweight."

"Excuse me, as a persistent man of business. Assuming for a moment, that he were overworked; it would show itself in some renewal of his disorder!"

"I do not think so. I do not think," said Mr. Lorry, clearing his throat, "we will call—— that anything but the one train of association would renew it. I think that, heathenish, nothing but some extraordinary jarring of that chord could renew it. After what has happened, and after his conduct, I find it difficult to imagine any such violent sounding of that string again. I trust, and I almost believe, that the circumstances likely to renew it are exhausted."

He spoke with the diffidence of a man who knew how slight a thing would overstep the delicate organisation of the mind, and yet with the confidence of a man who had slowly won his assurance out of personal endurance and distress. It was not for his friend to abate that confidence. He professed himself more relieved and encouraged than he really was, and approached his second and last point. He felt it to be the most difficult of all; but, remembering his old Sunday morning conversation with Miss Pross, while engaged in the commission of their tools, shoes, and leather, were buried in the garden. So wicked do destruction and secrecy appear to him after an uneasy pause, "it is very hard to explain, consistently, the innermost workings of this poor man's mind. He once yearned so frightfully for that occupation, and it was so welcome when it came; no doubt it relieved his mind and encouraged than he really was, and approached his second and last point. He felt it to be the most difficult of all; but, remembering his old Sunday morning conversation with Miss Pross, while engaged in the commission of their tools, shoes, and leather, were buried in the garden. So wicked do destruction and secrecy appear to him after an uneasy pause, "it is very hard to explain, consistently, the innermost workings of this poor man's mind. He once yearned so frightfully for that occupation, and it was so welcome when it came; no doubt it relieved his pain so much, by substituting the perplexity of the fingers for the perplexity of the brain, and by substituting, as he became more practised, the ingenuity of the hands for the ingenuity of the mental torture; that he has never been able to bear the thought of putting it quite out of his reach. Even now, when I believe, he is more hopeful of himself than he has ever been, and even speaks of himself with a kind of confidence, the idea that he might need that old employment, and not find it, gives him a sudden sense of terror, like that which one may fancy strikes to the heart of a lost child."

He looked like his illustration, as he raised his eyes to Mr. Lorry's face.

"But may not—— mind! I ask for information, as a plodding man of business who only deals with such material objects as guineas, shillings, and bank-notes——may not the retention of the thing, involve the retention of the idea? If the thing were gone, my dear Manette, might he not the fear go with it? In short, is it not a concession to the misgiving, to keep the forge?"

There was another silence.

"You see, too," said the Doctor, tremulously, "it is such an old companion."

"I would not keep it," said Mr. Lorry, shaking his head; for he gained in firmness as he saw the Doctor disquieted. "I would recommend him to sacrifice it. I only want your authority. I am sure it does no good. Come! Give me your authority, like a dear good man. For his daughter's sake, my dear Manette!"

Very strange to see what a struggle there was within him!

"In her name, then, let it be done; I sanction it. But, I would not take it away while he was present. Let it be removed when he is not there; let him miss his old companion after an absence."

Mr. Lorry readily engaged for that, and the conference was ended. They passed the day in the country, and the Doctor was quite restored. On the three following days, he remained perfectly well, and on the fourteenth day, he went away to join Lucie and her husband. Mr. Larry hacked the shoemaker's bench to pieces, while Miss Pross held the candle as if she were assisting at a murder—for which, indeed, in her grimness, she was no unsuitable figure! The burning of the body (previously reduced to pieces convenient for the purpose), was commenced without delay in the kitchen fire; and the tools, shoes, and leather, were buried in the garden. So wicked do destruction and secrecy appear to honest minds, that Mr. Lorry and Miss Pross, while engaged in the commission of their deed and in the removal of its traces, almost
felt, and almost looked, like accomplices in a horrible crime.

CHAPTER XX. A PLEA.

When the newly-married pair came home, the first person who appeared, to offer his congratulations, was Sydney Carton. They had not been at home many hours, when he presented himself. He was not improved in habits, or in looks, or in manner; but, there was a certain rugged air of fidelity about him, which was new to the observation of Charles Darnay.

He watched his opportunity of taking Darnay aside into a window, and of speaking to him when no one overheard.

"Mr. Darnay," said Carton, "I wish we might be friends."

"We are already friends, I hope."

"You are good enough to say so, as a fashion of speech; but, I don't mean any fashion of speech. Indeed, when I say I wish we might be friends, I scarcely mean quite that, either."

Charles Darnay—as was natural—asked him, in all good-humour and good-fellowship, what he did mean?

"Upon my life," said Carton, smiling, "I find that easier to comprehend in my own mind, than to convey to yours. However, let me try. You remember a certain famous occasion when I was more drunk than—than usual?"

"I remember a certain famous occasion when you forced me to confess that you had been drinking."

"I remember it too. The curse of those occasions is heavy upon me, for I always remember them. I hope it may be taken into account one day, when all days are at an end for me!—Don't be alarmed; I am not going to preach."

"I am not at all alarmed. Earnestness in you, is anything but alarming to me."

"Ah!" said Carton, with a careless wave of his hand, as if he waved that away. "On the drunken occasion in question (one of a large number, as you know), I was insufferable about liking you, and not liking you. I wish you would forget it."

"I forgot it long ago."

"Fashion of speech again! But, Mr. Darnay, oblivion is not so easy to me, as you represent it to be to you. I have by no means forgotten it, and a light answer does not help me to forget it."

"If it was a light answer," returned Darnay, "I beg your forgiveness for it. I had no other object than to turn a slight thing, which, to my surprise, seems to trouble you too much, aside. I declare to you, on the faith of a gentleman, that I have long dismissed it from my mind. Good Heaven, what was there to dismiss! I have had nothing more important to remember, in the great service you rendered me that day?"

"As to the great service," said Carton, "I am bound to say to you, when you speak of it in that way, that it was mere professional claptrap. I don't know that I cared what became of you, when I rendered it. Mind! I say when I rendered it; I am speaking of the past."

"You make light of the obligation," returned Darnay, "but I will not quarrel with your light answer."

"Genuine truth, Mr. Darnay, trust me! I have gone aside from my purpose; I was speaking about our being friends. Now, you know me; you know I am incapable of all the higher and better flights of men. If you doubt it, ask Stryver, and he'll tell you so."

"I prefer to form my own opinion, without the aid of his."

"Well! At any rate you know me as a dissolute dog, who has never done any good, and never will."

"I don't know that you 'never will.'"

"But I do, and you must take my word for it. Well! If you could endure to have such a worthless fellow, and a fellow of such infamous reputation, coming and going at odd times, I should ask that I might be permitted to come and go as a privileged person here; that I might be regarded as an useless (and I would add, if it were not for the resemblance idiosyncratic between you and me, an unmercenary) piece of furniture, tolerated for its old service and taken no notice of. I doubt if I should abuse the permission. It is a hundred to one if I should avail myself of it four times in a year. It would satisfy me, I dare say, to know that I had it."

"Will you try?"

"That is another way of saying that I am placed on the footing I have indicated. I thank you, Darnay. I may use that freedom with your name?"

"I think so, Carton, by this time."

They shook hands upon it, and Sydney turned away. Within a minute afterwards, he was, to all outward appearance, as unsubstantial as ever.

When he was gone, and in the course of an evening passed with Miss Pross, the Doctor, and Mr. Lorry, Charles Darnay was thoughtful to-night, not bitterly or meaning to bear hard upon him, but as anybody might who saw him as he showed himself.

He had no idea that this could dwell in the thoughts of his fair young wife; but, when he afterwards joined her in their own rooms, he found her waiting for him with the old pretty lifting of the forehead strongly marked.

"We are thoughtful to-night!" said Darnay, drawing his arm about her.

"Yes, dearest Charles," with her hands on his breast, and the inquiring and attentive expression fixed upon him; "we are rather thoughtful to-night; for we have something on our mind to-night."

"What is it, my Lucie?"

"Will you promise not to press one question on me, if I beg you not to ask it?"

"I will promise? What will I not promise to my Love?"
What, indeed, with his hand putting aside the golden hair from the cheek, and his other hand against the heart that beat for him! I think, Charles, poor Mr. Carton deserves more consideration and respect than you expressed for him to-night.

"Indeed, my own? Why so?"

"That is what you are not to ask me. But I think—I know—he does."

"If you know it, it is enough. What would you have me do, my Life?"

"I would ask you, dearest, to be very generous with him always, and very lenient on his faults when he is not by. I would ask you to believe that he has a heart he very, very, seldom reveals, and that there are deep wounds in it. My dear, I have seen it bleeding.

"It is a painful reflection to me," said Charles Darnay, quite astounded, "that I should have done him any wrong. I never thought this of him."

"My husband, it is so. I fear he is not to be reclaimed; there is scarcely a hope that anything in his character or fortunes is repairable now. But, I am sure that he is capable of good things, gentle things, even magnanimous things."

She looked so beautiful, in the purity of her faith in this lost man, that her husband could have looked at her as she was, for hours. "And, O my dearest Love!" she urged, clinging nearer to him, laying her head upon his breast, and raising her eyes to his, "remember how strong we are in our happiness, and how weak he is in his misery!"

The supplication touched him home. "I will always remember it, dear Heart! I will remember it as long as I live."

He bent over the golden head, and put the rose lips to his, and folded her in his arms. "If one forlorn wanderer then pacing the dark streets, could have heard her innocent disclosures, and could have seen the drops of pity kissed away by her husband from the soft blue eyes so loving of that husband, he might have cried to the night—and the words would not have parted from his lips for the first time—"God bless her for her sweet compassion!"

**SHIPS AND CREWS.**

*What is the Naval Question?*

It comprises all sorts of inquiries in one, and that one is really this: Can Great Britain be, at sea, in these days, what she was in old days? Make that all clear, and your work is done. She can, on one condition—that no energy nor expense be spared in carrying out the object. No one can reasonably doubt this, whatsoever views he may bring to the consideration of the question, and with whatever preconceived opinions he may have entertained all about the Position and Policy from the excellent work of "A Naval Peer," from the book by Mr. Hans Busk, or from other recent authorities.

How Britain came to be such a maritime power as she has been and is? It is not an affair of race only, nor of insular position only; but of these two fundamental things working upon each other, and both worked upon by our political history. Some will tell you that commerce created our navy; but what created our commerce? and how long would our commerce have lasted if we had not been able to protect it by force? Originally, of course, it must have been something in our blood that fitted us for the sea; but this would not have produced our greatness alone. The Saxons seem never to have kept a navy till the Danes forced it upon them. The Norman invasion was unopposed in the Channel, but it led to the Cinque Ports being established, and to a constant communication between England and Normandy very favourable to naval progress. The Plantagenet wars with France had the same effect; and, in these days, we were as victorious at sea as in later times. Now it is worth notice that what we call seamanship has changed its character quite as much as other things, and that if steam is one change more, we ought to remember the consoling as well as the alarming side of the fact. Steam, they tell us, is an affair of science. Very true. But so was it an affair of science when the old rough hand-to-hand fighting, between huge galleys, was exchanged for the evolutions of squadrons under Blake and Nelson. It was a French Jesuit—L'Hoste—who was one of the earliest and best writers on naval tactics. But we, too, became masters in the tactics, and why not now in the new tactics?

It is steam war versus old war that makes the great feature of the new generation, and undoubtedly deserves the most careful inquiry. Still, let us remember that success in war depends at bottom on moral and physical superiority, and that the conditions under which this is exercised, though of great, are only of secondary importance.

Certainly the rapidity of the change is a conspicuous feature in it. So late as fifteen or twenty years ago, there was not a screw liner known, and the steamers were all paddle steamers. Our ideal of a line-of-battle ship was one of Sir William Symonds's vessels built for sailing, and beautiful to behold. Now, there are not much above a dozen effective sailingliners in the navy, and they are chiefly used as guard and receiving ships. The best are converted into screws; all new liners are built for screws; and, when a great battle comes, it will be fought with screws. This Spring, England and France had some thirty-five of them afloat each, and both are still building steadily.

"Steam"—this is the regular saying—"has bridged the Channel." The exact amount of truth here is, that it has made it easier to bridge. But there are the pales and piers to lay down, and our fleet must be disposed of before that is possible. All talk of invasion is based on the supposition that the Channel is cleared of our squadrons before the army is brought across. That secured, steam has shortened the