A Tale of Two Cities: Part 24

Charles Dickens
of fervour or intoxication, known, without doubt, to have led some persons to brave the guillotine unnecessarily, and to die by it, was not mere boastfulness, but a wild infection of the wildly shaken public mind. In seasons of pestilence, some of us will have a secret attraction to the disease—a terrible passing inclination to die of it. And all of us have like wonders hidden in our breasts, only needing circumstances to evoke them.

The passage to the Conciergerie was short and dark; the night in its vermin-haunted cells was long and cold. Next day, fifteen prisoners were put to the bar before Charles Darnay's name was called. All the fifteen were condemned, and the trials of the whole occupied an hour and a half.

"Charles Evremonde, called Darnay," was at length arraigned. His Judges sat upon the Bench in feathered hats; but the rough red cap and tricolored cockade was the head-dress otherwise prevailing. Looking at the Jury and the turbulent audience, he might have thought that the usual order of things was reversed, and that the felons were trying the honest men. The lowest, cruelest, and worst populace of a city, never without its quantity of low, cruel, and bad, were the directing spirits of the scene: noisily commenting, applauding, disapproving, anticipating, and precipitating the result, without a check. Of the men, the greater part were armed in various ways; of the women, some wore knives, some daggers, some ate and drank as they looked on, many knitted. Among these last, was one, with a spare piece of knitting under her arm as she worked. She was in a front row, by the side of a man whom he had never seen since his arrival at the Barrier, but whom he directly remembered as Defarge. He noticed that she once or twice whispered in his ear, and that she seemed to be his wife; but, what he most noticed in the two figures was, that although they were posted as close to himself as they could be, they never looked towards him. They seemed to be waiting for something with a dogged determination, and they looked at the Jury, but at nothing else. Under the President sat Doctor Manette, in his usual quiet dress. As well as the prisoner could see, he and Mr. Lorry were the only men there, unconnected with the Tribunal, who wore their usual clothes, and had not assumed the coarse garb of the Camagnole.
Charles Evremonde, called Darnay, was accused by the public prosecutor as an aristocrat and an emigrant, whose life was forfeit to the Republic, under the decree which punished all emigrants on pain of Death. It was nothing that the decree bore date since his return to France. There he was, and there was the decree; he had been taken in France, and his head was demanded.

"Take off his head!" cried the audience.

"An enemy to the Republic!"

The President rang his bell to silence those cries, and asked the prisoner whether it was not true that he had lived many years in England?

Undoubtedly it was.

Was he not an emigrant then? What did he call himself?

Not an emigrant, he hoped, within the sense and spirit of the law.

Why not? the President desired to know.

Because he had voluntarily relinquished a title that was distasteful to him, and a station that was distasteful to him, and had left his country that was distasteful to him, and had prepared every inch of it to live by his own industry in England, rather than on the industry of the overladen people of France.

What proof had he of this?

He handed in the names of two witnesses: Théophile Gabelle, and Alexandre Manette.

But he had married in England? the President reminded him.

True, but not an English woman.

A citizeness of France?

Yes. By birth.

Her name and family?

"Lucie Manette, only daughter of Doctor Manette, the good physician who sits there."

This answer had a happy effect upon the audience. Cries in exaltation of the well-known good physician rent the hall. So capriciously were the people moved, that tears immediately rolled down several ferocious countenances which had been glaring at the prisoner a moment before, as if with impatience to pluck him out into the streets and kill him.

On these few steps of his dangerous way, Charles Darnay had set his foot according to Doctor Manette's reiterated instructions. The same cautious counsel directed every step that lay before him, and had prepared every inch of his road.

The President asked why he had returned to France when he did, and not sooner?

He had not returned sooner, he replied, simply because he had no means of living in France, save those he had resigned; whereas, in England, he was lived by giving instruction in the French language and literature. He had returned when he did, on the pressing and written entreaty of a French citizen, who represented these circumstances to which of motives such extraordinary scenes were referable; it is probable, to a blending of all the three, with the second predominating. No sooner was the acquisitive pronounced, than tears were shed as freely as blood at another time, and such fraternal...
braces were bestowed upon the prisoner by as many of both sexes as could rush at him, that after his long and unwholesome confinement he was in danger of fainting from exhaustion; none the less because he knew very well, that the very same people, carried by another current, would have rushed at him with the very same intensity, to read him to pieces and strung him over the streets.

His removal, to make way for other accused persons who were to be tried, rescued him from these cares and for the moment. Five were to be tried together, next, as enemies of the Republic, forsaking as they had not assisted it by word or deed. So quick was the Tribunal to compensate itself and the nation for a chance lost, that these five were drawn up to him before he left the place, condemned to die within twenty-four hours. The first of them told him so, with the customary prison sign of Death—a raised finger—and they all added in words, "Long live the Republic!"

The five had had, it is true, no audience to lengthen their proceedings; for when he and Doctor Manette emerged from the gate, there was a great crowd about it, in which there seemed to be every face he had seen in Court—except two, for which he looked in vain. On his coming out, the concourse made at him snow, weeping, embracing, and shouting, all by turns. Reddening the snowy streets with the blood of the innocent; involving the least offence to the people, set himself, his promise was redeemed, he had made his removal, to make way for other accused persons. Him, he was recompensed for his suffering, for asmuch as they had not assisted it by word or deed, they all reverently bowed their heads and hearts. When she was again in his arms, he said to her:

"And now speak to your father, dearest. No other man in all this France could have done what he has done for me."

She laid her head upon her father's breast as she had laid his poor head on her own breast, long, long ago. He was happy in the return he had made her, he was recompensed for his suffering, he was proud of his strength.

"You must not be weak, my darling," he remonstrated; "don't tremble so. I have saved him."

CHAPTER VII. A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

"I have saved him." It was not another of the dreams in which he had often come back; he was really here. And yet his wife trembled, and a vague but heavy fear was upon her.

All the air around was so thick and dark, the people were so passionately revengeful and fitful, the innocent were so constantly put to death on vague suspicion and black malice, it was so impossible to forget that many as blameless as her husband and as dear to others as he was to her, every day shared the fate from which he had been clutched, that her heart could not be as lightened of its load as she felt it ought to be. The shadows of the wintry afternoon were beginning to fall, and even now the dreadful carts were rolling through the streets. Her mind pursued them, looking for him among the Condemned; and then she clung closer to his real presence and trembled more.

Her father, cheering her, showed a compassionate superiority to this woman's weakness, which was wonderful to see. No garret, no shoemaking, no One Hundred and Five, North Tower, now! He had accomplished the task he had set himself, his promise was redeemed, he had saved Charles. Let them all lean upon him.

Their housekeeping was of a very frugal kind; not only because that was the safest way of life, involving the least offence to the people, but because they were not rich, and Charles, throughout his imprisonment, had had to pay heavily for his bad food, and for his guard, and towards the living of the poorer prisoners. Partially on this account, and partly to avoid a domestic spy, they kept no servant;
the citizen and citizeness who acted as porters at the court-yard gate, rendered them occasional service; and Jerry (almost wholly transferred to them by Mr. Lorry) had become their daily retainer, and had his bed there every night.

It was an ordinance of the Republic One and Indivisible of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death, that on the door or doorpost of every house, the name of every inmate must be legibly inscribed in letters of a certain size, at a certain convenient height from the ground. Mr. Jerry Cruncher's name, therefore, duly embellished the doorpost down below; and, as the afternoon shadows deepened, the owner of that name himself appeared, from overlooking a painter whom Doctor Manette had employed to add to the list the name of Charles Evrémonde, called Darnay.

In the universal fear and distrust that darkened the time, all the usual harmless ways of life were changed. In the Doctor's little house, as in very many others, the articles of daily consumption that were wanted, were purchased everywhere, in small quantities and at various small shops. To avoid attracting notice, and to give as little occasion as possible for talk and cavy, was the general desire.

For some months past, Miss Pross and Mr. Cruncher had discharged the office of purveyors; the former carrying the money; the latter, the basket. Every afternoon at about the time when the public lamps were lighted, they fared forth on this duty, and made and brought home such purchases as were needful. Although Miss Pross, through her long association with a French family, might have known as much of their language as of her own, if she had had a mind, she had no mind in that direction; consequently she knew no more of "that nonsense" (as she was pleased to call it), than Mr. Cruncher did. So her manner of marketing was to plump a noun-substantive at the head of a shopkeeper without any introduction in the nature of an article, and, if it happened not to be the name of the thing she wanted, to look round for that thing, lay hold of it, and hold on by it until the bargain was concluded. She always made a bargain for it, by holding up, as a statement of its just price, one finger less than the merchant held up, whatever his number might be.

"Now, Mr. Cruncher," said Miss Pross, whose eyes were red with felicity; "if you are ready, I am.

Jerry humbly professed himself at Miss Pross's service. He had worn all his rust off long ago, but nothing would file his spiky head down.

"There's all manner of things wanted," said Miss Pross, "and we shall have a precious time of it. We want wine, among the rest. Nice toasts these Redheads will be drinking, wherever we buy it."

"It will be much the same to your knowledge, miss, I should think," retorted Jerry, "whether they drink your health or the Old Un's."

"Who's he?" said Miss Pross.

Mr. Cruncher, with some difficulty, explained himself as meaning "Old Nick's."

"Ha!" said Miss Pross. "It doesn't need an interpreter to explain the meaning of those creatures. They have but one, and its Midnight Murder, and Mischief."

"Hush, dear! Pray, pray, be cautious!" cried Lucie.

"Yes, yes, yes, I'll be cautious," said Miss Pross; "but I may say among ourselves, that if hope there will be no oniony and tobaccoey sniffings in the form of embraces going on in the streets. Now, Ladybird, never you sit from that fire till I come back! Take care of that dear husband you have recovered, and don't move your pretty head from his shoulder as you have it now, till you see me again! May I ask a question, Doctor Manette, before I go?"

"I think you may take that liberty," the Doctor answered, smiling.

"For gracious' sake, don't talk about Liberty; we have quite enough of that," said Miss Pross.

"Hush, dear! Again? Lucie remonstrated.

"Well, my sweet," said Miss Pross, nodding her head emphatically, "the short and the long of it is, that I am a subject of His Gracious Majesty King George the Third; Miss Pross curtseyed at the name; and as such, my maxim is, Confound their politics, frustrate their knavish tricks, on him or our hopes we fix, God save the King!"

Mr. Cruncher, in an access of loyalty, gloatingly repeated the words after Miss Pross, like somebody at church.

"I am glad you have so much of the Englishman in you, though I wish you had never taken that cold in your voice," said Miss Pross, approvingly. "But the question, Doctor Manette. Is there?—it was the good creature's way to affect to make light of anything that was a great anxiety with them all, and to come at it in this chance manner,—"is there any prospect yet, of our getting out of this place?"

"I fear not yet. It would be dangerous for Charles yet."

"Height-he-hum!" said Miss Pross, cheerfully representing a sigh as she glanced at her darling's golden hair in the light of the fire, "then we must have patience and wait: that's all. We must hold up our heads and fight low, as my brother Solomon used to say. Now, Mr. Cruncher!—Don't you move, Ladybird?"

They went out, leaving Lucie, and her husband, her father, and the child, by a bright fire. Mr. Lorry was expected back presently from the Banking House. Miss Pross had lighted the lamp, but had put it aside in a corner, that they might enjoy the firelight undisturbed. Little Lucie sat by her grandfather, and the child by his knee, and the Fairy who had opened a prison-wall and let out a captive who had once done the Fairy a service..."
All was subdued and quiet, and Lucie was more at ease than she had been.

"What is that?" she cried, all at once, "my dear?" said her father, stopping in his story, and laying his hand on hers, "command yourself. What a disorders state you are in! The least thing—nothing—startles you. You, your father's daughter?"

"I thought, my father," said Lucie, excusing herself, with a pale face and in a faltering voice, "that I heard strange feet upon the stairs."

"My love, the staircase is as still as Death." As he said the word, a blow was struck upon the door.

"O father, father. What can this be! Hide Charles. Save him!"

"My child," said the Doctor, rising and laying his hand upon her shoulder, "I save him. What weakness is this, my dear! Let me go to the door."

He took the lamp in his hand, crossed the two intervening outer rooms, and opened it. A rude clattering of feet over the floors, and four rough men in red caps, armed with sabres and pistols, entered the room.

"The Citizen Evremonde, called Darnay," said the first.

"Who seeks him?" answered Darnay.

"Tell me how and why am I again a prisoner?"

Dr. Manette, whom this visitation had so stung, by his hand upon her shoulder, "I save him."

"One word," the Doctor entreated. "Will you tell me who denounced him?"

"Yes!"

"It is against rule," answered the first; "but you can ask Him of Saint Antoine here."

The Doctor turned his eyes upon that man who moved uneasily on his feet, pulled his beard a little, and at length said:

"Well! Truly it is against rule. But he is denounced—and gravely—by the Citizen and Citizeness Defarge. And by one other." "What other?"

"Do you ask, Citizen Doctor?"

"Yes!

"Then," said he of Saint Antoine, with a strange look, "you will be answered to-morrow. Now, I am dumb!"

ABOARD THE TRAINING SHIP.

H.M.S. Britannia is now the scene of a very important experiment in naval education. On board that stately three-decker (superseded for sea-going purposes by the "screws" of the new era) all the youngsters appointed to her Majesty's Navy go through the preliminary instruction which is to fit them for active service. The experiment is new; and, before observing its method of working, let us glance at the state of things which it is intended to supersede.

Under the old régime, and during the ascendency of what may be called the Rebow Tradition, naval education—in the modern sense—was a thing unknown. Active service was an education in itself in those days, when science was young, when literature was little regarded, and when practical seamanship and simple gunnery constituted the main requirements of naval life. A boy entering upon this career was expected to know little, and knew little accordingly. What he did learn was acquired by experience, and experience was constantly enriched by war. Excepting here and there a great man like Lord Collingwood, who was prompted by the instinct of a fine genius to make himself accomplished on a liberal scale, the old school of naval officers were non-scientific, and we may add without offence, illiterate. The practical results of astronomy, and the sciences which are the old rule of thumb; and they were contented, for the simple reason, that the age really required no more. If the island was guarded, and the seas ruled, what more did they want? What more would the country have? Thunder the fine old Commodore Trunnion, in whom our great-grandfathers took such delight, and who were so far from being painfully sensitive of their deficiency in all but practical technical knowledge, that they rather despised everything that lay out of its range. In their eyes, the sea did not exist for the sake of the