

CHARLES DICKENS

A TALE OF  
TWO CITIES

A Story of the French Revolution

With an Introduction and  
Classic and Contemporary Criticism

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*An Execution on the Place de la Révolution*  
French School, 18th century  
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Tradition is the extension of Democracy through time; it is the proxy of the dead and the enfranchisement of the unborn.

*Tradition may be defined as the extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father. I, at any rate, cannot separate the two ideas of democracy and tradition.*

—G. K. Chesterton

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## INTRODUCTION

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“Man, by the nature of him, is definable as ‘an incarnated Word’”, wrote Thomas Carlyle in the final paragraph of his masterful, vast, and vastly influential work of history, *The French Revolution*, first published in 1837.<sup>1</sup> It has long been known that Carlyle’s writings generally, and this work in particular, had a great influence on his friend Dickens: “*The French Revolution*—‘Mr. Carlyle’s wonderful book’, as Dickens called it—[exercised] a virtually hypnotic hold on Dickens’s imagination.”<sup>2</sup> Inspired by Carlyle’s work, Dickens produced his own profound historical novel on the French Revolution, *A Tale of Two Cities*, in 1859.

Along with the Italian Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873), and the Russians Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) and Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), Charles Dickens (1812–1870) is arguably the greatest novelist of the nineteenth century. Each of these writers was initially inspired by the liberal reform ideals identified with the American and French Revolutions: all men being “created equal and endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights” and desires for “liberty, equality, and fraternity”. Yet, to speak truly of these things was not easy. The French Revolution, as Burke predicted as early as 1790, developed badly with the onset of the gruesome and sanguinary violence of the Terror of 1792–1793 and terminated politically in the wolfish military despotism of Napoleon. It disfigured French history,

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History*, ed. John D. Rosenberg (New York: Modern Library, 2002), p. 775. This edition has an Introduction by Rosenberg, one of the finest recent scholars of Victorian literature.

<sup>2</sup>John D. Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 37.

and modern history everywhere, with its unleashing of an oscillation between fanatical utopianism and brutal, cynical self-interest and will to power. How then does Dickens speak truly of such things in his novel about the Revolution?

To speak truly, the greatest literary art must be both a mirror and a lamp. As a mirror, it must successfully represent the world, with all its flaws, follies, and vices, with a verisimilitude that the reader recognizes as accurate and thus trusts. Yet this representation, this aspect of "truth", is not enough. The highest literary art must also be a lamp, illuminating and serving goodness and virtue; it must not merely mirror literal truth but must illuminate *moral* truth. Dickens, Manzoni, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy had this view of literary art and eschewed mere "realism" and the cynical aestheticism that grew up, especially in France, in the aftermath of the recurrent defeat of revolutionary, utopian hopes. The fictional worlds of their contemporaries Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, Maupassant, and a host of other modern French and Western writers are saturated with sinister irony, now virtually the note of "avant garde" modern literature in the form of a pervasive "absurdism". Such cynical disillusionment was anathema to Dickens, as is evident in the prevailing Christian ethos of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Dickens made a lifelong critique of the contemptuous treatment by the rich and powerful of the poor and downtrodden, the violation of the chivalric Christian ideal of *noblesse oblige*, but he hated and feared the mob violence that ultimately came to disfigure and permanently characterize the French Revolution.<sup>3</sup> Of the anti-Catholic London mobs of 1780—whose cry he depicts as ignorantly but inevitably turning from "No Popery!" to "No Property!"—he wrote, "Hot and drunken though they were; they had not yet broken all bounds and set all law and government at defiance. Something of their habitual

<sup>3</sup> According to William Doyle, "The publishing sensation of [1989] was Simon Schama's *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, which proclaimed violence as the Revolution's essence" (*Independent* [London], June 10, 2005, p. 28). See also Doyle's excellent *The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

deference to the authority erected by society for its own preservation yet remained among them, and had its majesty been vindicated in time, the [conspiratorial leaders] would have had to digest a bitter disappointment."<sup>4</sup>

In all of his work, directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, Dickens seeks to "vindicate the majesty of authority", the majesty of "decent Godly order" and elementary justice, as opposed to any earthly powers whatever, high or petty, all of which are corruptible, and intermittently corrupted, within human history. As his French Catholic contemporary Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) put it, "The people is always right' . . . is the dogma of the [democratic] republic, just as 'the King can do no wrong' is the religion of monarchic states. . . . What is sure is that neither the one nor the other is true."<sup>5</sup> Earthly powers and political arrangements are only just when in conformity with heavenly authority, and Dickens is fundamentally loyal to the New Testament and to the Christian Natural Law and Natural Rights traditions emergent in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries that enjoined the brotherhood of man beneath the Fatherhood of God and which played so large a role in the framing of the American republic and the statesmanship of Lincoln.

Well aware of the incendiary potential of French revolutionary ideology in a rapidly industrializing, urbanizing, and grossly inequitable British social order, Dickens was also keenly conscious of the way the French developments could deflect, discourage, distort, or even defeat the liberal Christian reform movement in Britain and America, to which he was himself so thoroughly and persistently dedicated. Much as he shared and admired Carlyle's friendship, writing, and passionate moral earnestness, Dickens was not a mystical, heterodox Tory, and his reaction to the Revolution was clearer, more religiously

<sup>4</sup> Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, ed. Gordon W. Spence (London: Penguin Books, 1986), pp. 359, 466.

<sup>5</sup> Tocqueville, *Notebooks*, October 25, 1831, in Tocqueville, *Journey to America*, trans. G. Lawrence, ed. J.P. Mayer (New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1960), [www.tocqueville.org/pa2.htm](http://www.tocqueville.org/pa2.htm).

orthodox, and more liberal and hopeful. As Burke saw with visionary clarity very early on, Dickens understood that a poisonous anticlericalism, skepticism, and immoralism had deeply penetrated and cankered the French intelligentsia, aristocratic and bourgeois, in a way altogether dissimilar to the mindset of the educated classes, and the masses, of Britain and America at the same time. In France, Hilaire Belloc wrote, there was a "fixed certitude which permeated the whole of the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the Catholic Faith was dead."<sup>6</sup> Looking back on the period, the Catholic Belloc was as amazed, appalled, and baffled at the murderous anticlerical fury of the Revolution as the mystical Tory Carlyle had been.

Carlyle's great history and Dickens' great novel have intuitions and insights into these dynamics that have an inspired moral clarity, even if neither one of them was consciously aware of the Catholic Natural Law tradition that Burke and his friend Samuel Johnson articulated. The moral liberty of individuals, however conditioned, is an absolute, irreducible datum of history, and Dickens' characters, like Shakespeare's, are permanent exemplifications of this reality.

<sup>6</sup>Hilaire Belloc, *The French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), p. 29. Cf. Christopher Dawson, *The Gods of Revolution: An Analysis of the French Revolution* (1972; New York: Funk and Wagnalls/Minerva, 1975), with a short, but profound, introduction by Arnold Toynbee. As early as 1773, just after a trip to France, including visits to the Parisian salons, the Christian liberal Burke said in his first speech in the British House of Commons, "The most horrid and cruel blow that can be offered to civil society is through atheism", in Edmund Burke, *Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Peter J. Stanlis (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1963), p. 418. Lester G. Crocker's *Nature and Culture: Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1963) shows persuasively why and how scientific "Enlightenment" naturalism ended in a "Nihilist Dissolution". Of the repentant sympathizer with the French Revolution Wordsworth, who returned to Christianity, Lionel Trilling wrote, "Wordsworth's great autobiographical poem *The Prelude* [1806] gives the classic account of the damage done to the mind of the individual . . . by the scientific conception of the mind that prevailed among intellectuals at the time of the French Revolution", in Lionel Trilling, *Mind in the Modern World*, the Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, 1972 (New York: Penguin, 1973), reprinted in Lionel Trilling, *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent: Selected Essays*, ed. Leon Wieseltier (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), p. 483.

The premise of free will in a moral universe, a universe that we can and should *apprehend* and trust, even if we cannot wholly comprehend it in this life, is that form of radical human wisdom that gives both dignity and enduring appeal to Dickens' characters, as to those of Shakespeare. The human person always has some degree of moral free will, and throughout his career Dickens intuitively hated and attacked skeptical, secular, or utilitarian accounts of the human person and human society that denied or derided this inherited Christian conception. The utilitarian conceptions of the French radicals and of Bentham and the Mills in Britain, "the utilitarian citadel", as Chesterton put it, was "heavily bombarded by one lonely and unlettered man of genius", Dickens, who knew that the "fundamental sense of human fraternity can only exist in the presence of positive religion".<sup>7</sup>

To read Dickens is, in the words of C. S. Lewis, "to grow in mental health", because he has capacities that characterize only the greatest of artists in any medium: to "hold the mirror up to nature"; to "instruct by delighting"; to "paint virtue", making us love the good and hate the bad, rejuvenating our sense of justice and moral beauty; to make us "see feelingly" the value, sufferings, and pathos of the lives of others; to commend moral earnestness and refresh hope; "to assert Eternal Providence/ And justify the ways of God to men" (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk. 1, lines 25–26).<sup>8</sup>

Dickens is the greatest of English novelists because, from early to late, he never ceases to praise and serve God through an exuberant, loving profusion of setting, character, and event, a just and charitable scheme of valuations, and a "providential aesthetic" that vindicates justice and charity. As a Christian he sees the life, death, and Resurrection of Christ—the ultimate "incarnated Word" of which Carlyle spoke—as the key to truth, ethics, history, happiness, and the riddle of life.

<sup>7</sup>G.K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913; reprint, London: Butterworth, 1938), pp. 22, 96.

<sup>8</sup>On the "moral imagination" in literature, see the Bibliographical Note at the end of this Introduction.

The doctrine of the resurrection, so central to *A Tale of Two Cities*, is the ultimate claim that we live in a metaphysical and moral as well as a physical universe, that true value ultimately triumphs over inert or brutal fact, that spirit triumphs over flesh, if not here, then hereafter, and a whole series of similar distinctions and convictions: altruism and love over self-interest and envy; justice over indifference, cruelty, and crime; mind over matter; grace over gravity; cosmos over chaos; purpose over chance and necessity. As Chesterton briefly put it in the chapter "On the Alleged Optimism of Charles Dickens" in his great book on him, Dickens had "confidence in the value of existence and the intrinsic victory of virtue [and] that is not optimism but religion."<sup>9</sup> Writing over eighty years later in 1990, a fine, though less devout, biographer, Peter Ackroyd, perceptively argues that for Dickens "life was conflict, it was a 'battle' always . . . not just his own private battle against the world and against the demands of his own divided nature, it was also a struggle in which all the forces of his time were ranged beside him, for it was a struggle to maintain a vision of the coherence of the world, a vision of some central human continuity."<sup>10</sup> Regarding that visionary battle for metaphysical and moral coherence, T.S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling were not wrong to compare Dickens to Dante and Langland, to Shakespeare and Bunyan, and Chesterton was not wrong to conceive him as a modern knight errant, praising God while constantly fighting atheistic dragons and heresies.

"Man, by the nature of him," to return to the words of Carlyle, "is definable as 'an incarnated Word'." The last thing that Dickens wrote on the day of his death, June 8, 1870, was a letter to a clergyman who had criticized him. "I have always striven in my writings", Dickens replied, "to express veneration for the life and lessons of Our Saviour."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>G.K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*, ed. Steven Marcus (1906; New York: Schocken, 1965), p. 264.

<sup>10</sup>Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (1990; abridged edition, London: Vintage, 2002), p. 577.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 571.

### Bibliographical Note

There is a large body of writing on "the moral imagination" in literature, but a few outstanding sources should be recommended, as well as a few works on Dickens and his own background. Martin C. Battestin's *The Providence of Wit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) discusses "Providentialism" in eighteenth-century English literature and particularly in writers and works that had a strong influence on Dickens: the novelists Henry Fielding (after whom Dickens named one of his sons), Oliver Goldsmith, Jonathan Swift, and Laurence Sterne. Thomas Vargish's "Charles Dickens: The Completion of the Providential Aesthetic", chapter 3 in *The Providential Aesthetic in Victorian Fiction* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1985), is very valuable for an understanding of theodicy and religious aims in fiction. More generally on the "moral imagination" in literature, the classic Renaissance Christian aesthetic treatise in English is Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), and there is a good modern edition edited by Geoffrey Shepherd (London: Nelson, 1965). C.S. Lewis' *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1961) is a classic modern treatise on literary aesthetics.

For Dickens specifically, Stephen Wall's 1970 Penguin Critical Anthology *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Hammondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1970) is still indispensable and can be supplemented by Paul Schlicke, ed., *The Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Andrew Sanders' volume in the Oxford "Authors in Context" series, *Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press World's Classics, 2003). On *A Tale of Two Cities*, Sanders has also edited *The Companion to "A Tale of Two Cities"* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988). For Dickens' Christian philanthropism, see Norris Pope, *Dickens and Charity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978). Peter Ackroyd's excellent 1990 biography of Dickens has now been supplemented by Michael Slater's exhaustive *Charles Dickens* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009). A standard reference source for

Dickens' whole body of work is *The Dickens Index*, ed. Nicolas Bentley et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). "The Charles Dickens Special Issue" of *The Chesterton Review* 11, no. 4 (November 1985), is valuable for the links between Dickens and Chesterton, whom many authoritative writers on Dickens, including Eliot, Ackroyd, V.S. Pritchett, Steven Marcus, and Slater, think is his best, most sympathetic critic. See Chesterton's own two volumes on Dickens: *Charles Dickens*, ed. Steven Marcus (1906; New York: Schocken, 1965), and *Chesterton on Dickens*, ed. Michael Slater (1911; London: Dent Everyman, 1992); his *Victorian Age in Literature* (1913; reprint, London: Butterworth, 1938); and also Joseph Pearce, *Wisdom and Innocence: A Life of G. K. Chesterton* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996).

Standard websites on Dickens include those of the Dickens Project at the University of California (<http://dickens.ucsc.edu>) and the Dickens Fellowship (<http://www.dickens.fellowship.btinternet.co.uk>). The periodical *The Dickensian* has been published in London consecutively since 1905.

## The Text of A TALE OF TWO CITIES



BOOK THE FIRST

*Recalled to Life*

## CHAPTER 1

### The Period

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

There were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face, on the throne of England; there were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face, on the throne of France.<sup>1</sup> In both countries it was clearer than crystal to the lords of the State preserves of loaves and fishes, that things in general were settled for ever.

It was the year of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five. Spiritual revelations were conceded to England at that favoured period, as at this. Mrs. Southcott<sup>2</sup> had recently attained her five-and-twentieth blessed birthday, of whom a prophetic private in the Life Guards had heralded the sublime appearance by announcing that arrangements were made for the swallowing up of London and Westminster. Even the Cock-lane ghost had been laid only a round dozen of years, after rapping out its messages, as the spirits of this very year last past

<sup>1</sup> *There were . . . on the throne of France:* King George III and Queen Charlotte of Great Britain and King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette of France.

<sup>2</sup> *Mrs. Southcott:* Joanna Southcott (1750–1814) was a millenarian Protestant who began publishing her rhymed, apocalyptic prophecies around 1800.

(supernaturally deficient in originality) rapped out theirs. Mere messages in the earthly order of events had lately come to the English Crown and People, from a congress of British subjects in America: which, strange to relate, have proved more important to the human race<sup>3</sup> than any communications yet received through any of the chickens of the Cock-lane brood.

France, less favoured on the whole as to matters spiritual than her sister of the shield and trident, rolled with exceeding smoothness down hill, making paper money and spending it. Under the guidance of her Christian pastors, she entertained herself, besides, with such humane achievements as sentencing a youth to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and his body burned alive,<sup>4</sup> because he had not kneeled down in the rain to do honour to a dirty procession of monks which passed within his view, at a distance of some fifty or sixty yards. It is likely enough that, rooted in the woods of France and Norway, there were growing trees, when that sufferer was put to death, already marked by the woodman, Fate, to come down and be sawn into boards, to make a certain movable framework with a sack and a knife in it,<sup>5</sup> terrible in history. It is likely enough that in the rough outhouses of some tillers of the heavy lands adjacent to Paris, there were sheltered from the weather that very day, rude carts, bespattered with rustic mire, snuffed about by pigs, and roosted in by poultry, which the Farmer, Death, had already set apart to be his tumbrils<sup>6</sup> of the

<sup>3</sup> *congress of British subjects in America . . . more important to the human race*: The first Continental Congress of the American colonies (1774) would lead to an American "Revolution" (1775-1783) very different from the French one (1789-1799).

<sup>4</sup> *sentencing a youth . . . burned alive*: Cruel punishments and the frequent use of the death penalty for many offenses were objects of the criticism of Dickens and other contemporary humanitarians.

<sup>5</sup> *movable framework with a sack and a knife in it*: the guillotine, which would come to be identified with the French Revolutionary Terror of 1793-1794 and with the indiscriminate violence of the Revolution generally.

<sup>6</sup> *tumbrils*: carts used to take the condemned through the streets of Paris to their execution.

Revolution. But that Woodman and that Farmer, though they work unceasingly, work silently, and no one heard them as they went about with muffled tread: the rather, forasmuch as to entertain any suspicion that they were awake, was to be atheistical and traitorous.

In England, there was scarcely an amount of order and protection to justify much national boasting. Daring burglaries by armed men, and highway robberies, took place in the capital itself every night; families were publicly cautioned not to go out of town without removing their furniture to upholsterers' warehouses for security; the highwayman in the dark was a City tradesman in the light, and, being recognised and challenged by his fellow-tradesman whom he stopped in his character of "the Captain," gallantly shot him through the head and rode away; the mail was waylaid by seven robbers, and the guard shot three dead, and then got shot dead himself by the other four, "in consequence of the failure of his ammunition": after which the mail was robbed in peace; that magnificent potentate, the Lord Mayor of London, was made to stand and deliver on Turnham Green, by one highwayman, who despoiled the illustrious creature in sight of all his retinue; prisoners in London gaols fought battles with their turnkeys, and the majesty of the law fired blunderbusses in among them, loaded with rounds of shot and ball; thieves snipped off diamond crosses from the necks of noble lords at Court drawing-rooms; musketeers went into St. Giles's, to search for contraband goods, and the mob fired on the musketeers, and the musketeers fired on the mob; and nobody thought any of these occurrences much out of the common way. In the midst of them, the hangman, ever busy and ever worse than useless, was in constant requisition; now, stringing up long rows of miscellaneous criminals; now, hanging a housebreaker on Saturday who had been taken on Tuesday; now, burning people in the hand at Newgate by the dozen, and now burning pamphlets at the door of Westminster Hall; to-day, taking the life of an atrocious murderer, and to-morrow

of a wretched pilferer who had robbed a farmer's boy of sixpence.<sup>7</sup>

All these things, and a thousand like them, came to pass in and close upon the dear old year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five. Environed by them, while the Woodman and the Farmer worked unheeded, those two of the large jaws, and those other two of the plain and the fair faces, trod with stir enough, and carried their divine rights with a high hand. Thus did the year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five conduct their Greatnesses, and myriads of small creatures—the creatures of this chronicle among the rest—along the roads that lay before them.

<sup>7</sup> taking the life of an atrocious murderer . . . robbed a farmer's boy of sixpence: The inequity of laws and punishments is stressed, and England is not conceived as vastly superior to France at the same period.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Mail

It was the Dover road that lay, on a Friday night late in November, before the first of the persons with whom this history has business. The Dover road lay, as to him, beyond the Dover mail, as it lumbered up Shooter's Hill. He walked up-hill in the mire by the side of the mail, as the rest of the passengers did; not because they had the least relish for walking exercise, under the circumstances, but because the hill, and the harness, and the mud, and the mail, were all so heavy, that the horses had three times already come to a stop, besides once drawing the coach across the road, with the mutinous intent of taking it back to Blackheath. Reins and whip and coachman and guard, however, in combination, had read that article of war which forbade a purpose otherwise strongly in favour of the argument, that some brute animals are endued with Reason; and the team had capitulated and returned to their duty.

With drooping heads and tremulous tails, they mashed their way through the thick mud, floundering and stumbling between whiles as if they were falling to pieces at the larger joints. As often as the driver rested them and brought them to a stand, with a wary "Wo-ho! so-ho then!" the near leader violently shook his head and everything upon it—like an unusually emphatic horse, denying that the coach could be got up the hill. Whenever the leader made this rattle, the passenger started, as a nervous passenger might, and was disturbed in mind.

There was a steaming mist in all the hollows, and it had roamed in its forlornness up the hill, like an evil spirit, seeking rest and finding none. A clammy and intensely cold mist, it made its slow way through the air in ripples that visibly followed and overspread one another, as the waves of an

unwholesome sea might do. It was dense enough to shut out everything from the light of the coach-lamps but these its own workings, and a few yards of road; and the reek of the labouring horses steamed into it, as if they had made it all.

Two other passengers, besides the one, were plodding up the hill by the side of the mail. All three were wrapped to the cheek-bones and over the ears, and wore jack-boots. Not one of the three could have said, from anything he saw, what either of the other two was like; and each was hidden under almost as many wrappers from the eyes of the mind, as from the eyes of the body, of his two companions. In those days, travellers were very shy of being confidential on a short notice, for anybody on the road might be a robber or in league with robbers. As to the latter, when every posting-house and ale-house could produce somebody in "the Captain's" pay, ranging from the landlord to the lowest stable nondescript, it was the likeliest thing upon the cards. So the guard of the Dover mail thought to himself, that Friday night in November, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five, lumbering up Shooter's Hill, as he stood on his own particular perch behind the mail, beating his feet, and keeping an eye and a hand on the arm-chest before him, where a loaded blunderbuss lay at the top of six or eight loaded horse-pistols, deposited on a substratum of cutlass.

The Dover mail was in its usual genial position that the guard suspected the passengers, the passengers suspected one another and the guard, they all suspected everybody else, and the coachman was sure of nothing but the horses; as to which cattle he could with a clear conscience have taken his oath on the two Testaments that they were not fit for the journey.

"Wo-ho!" said the coachman. "So, then! One more pull and you're at the top and be damned to you, for I have had trouble enough to get you to it!—Joe!"

"Halloa!" the guard replied.

"What o'clock do you make it, Joe?"

"Ten minutes, good, past eleven."

"My blood!" ejaculated the vexed coachman, "and not atop of Shooter's yet! Tst! Yah! Get on with you!"

The emphatic horse, cut short by the whip in a most decided negative, made a decided scramble for it, and the three other horses followed suit. Once more, the Dover mail struggled on, with the jack-boots of its passengers squashing along by its side. They had stopped when the coach stopped, and they kept close company with it. If any one of the three had had the hardihood to propose to another to walk on a little ahead into the mist and darkness, he would have put himself in a fair way of getting shot instantly as a highwayman.

The last burst carried the mail to the summit of the hill. The horses stopped to breathe again, and the guard got down to skid the wheel<sup>1</sup> for the descent, and open the coach-door to let the passengers in.

"Tst! Joe!" cried the coachman in a warning voice, looking down from his box.

"What do you say, Tom?"

They both listened.

"I say a horse at a canter coming up, Joe."

"I say a horse at a gallop, Tom," returned the guard, leaving his hold of the door, and mounting nimbly to his place. "Gentlemen! In the king's name, all of you!"

With this hurried adjuration, he cocked his blunderbuss, and stood on the offensive. The passenger booked by this history, was on the coach-step, getting in; the two other passengers were close behind him, and about to follow. He remained on the step, half in the coach and half out of it; they remained in the road below him. They all looked from the coachman to the guard, and from the guard to the coachman, and listened. The coachman looked back and the guard looked back, and even the emphatic leader pricked up his ears and looked back, without contradicting.

The stillness consequent on the cessation of the rumbling and labouring of the coach, added to the stillness of the night, made it very quiet indeed. The panting of the horses communicated a tremulous motion to the coach, as if it were in a

<sup>1</sup> skid the wheel: apply the brake.

state of agitation. The hearts of the passengers beat loud enough perhaps to be heard; but at any rate, the quiet pause was audibly expressive of people out of breath, and holding the breath, and having the pulses quickened by expectation.

The sound of a horse at a gallop came fast and furiously up the hill.

"So-ho!" the guard sang out, as loud as he could roar. "Yo there! Stand! I shall fire!"

The pace was suddenly checked, and, with much splashing and floundering, a man's voice called from the mist, "Is that the Dover mail?"

"Never you mind what it is!" the guard retorted. "What are you?"

"Is that the Dover mail?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I want a passenger, if it is."

"What passenger?"

"Mr. Jarvis Lorry."

Our booked passenger showed in a moment that it was his name. The guard, the coachman, and the two other passengers eyed him distrustfully.

"Keep where you are," the guard called to the voice in the mist, "because, if I should make a mistake, it could never be set right in your lifetime. Gentleman of the name of Lorry answer straight."

"What is the matter?" asked the passenger, then, with mildly quavering speech. "Who wants me? Is it Jerry?"

("I don't like Jerry's voice, if it is Jerry," growled the guard to himself. "He's hoarser than suits me, is Jerry.")

"Yes, Mr. Lorry."

"What is the matter?"

"A despatch sent you from over yonder. T. and Co."

"I know this messenger, guard," said Mr. Lorry, getting down into the road—assisted from behind more swiftly than politely by the other two passengers, who immediately scrambled into the coach, shut the door, and pulled up the window. "He may come close; there's nothing wrong."

"I hope there ain't, but I can't make so 'Nation<sup>2</sup> sure of that," said the guard, in gruff soliloquy. "Hallo you!"

"Well! And hallo you!" said Jerry, more hoarsely than before.

"Come on at a footpace! d'ye mind me? And if you've got holsters to that saddle o' yourn, don't let me see your hand go nigh 'em. For I'm a devil at a quick mistake, and when I make one it takes the form of Lead. So now let's look at you."

The figures of a horse and rider came slowly through the eddying mist, and came to the side of the mail, where the passenger stood. The rider stooped, and, casting up his eyes at the guard, handed the passenger a small folded paper. The rider's horse was blown, and both horse and rider were covered with mud, from the hoofs of the horse to the hat of the man.

"Guard!" said the passenger, in a tone of quiet business confidence.

The watchful guard, with his right hand at the stock of his raised blunderbuss, his left at the barrel, and his eye on the horseman, answered curtly, "Sir."

"There is nothing to apprehend. I belong to Tellson's Bank. You must know Tellson's Bank in London. I am going to Paris on business. A crown to drink. I may read this?"

"If so be as you're quick, sir."

He opened it in the light of the coach-lamp on that side and read—first to himself and then aloud: "'Wait at Dover for Mam'selle.' It's not long, you see, guard. Jerry, say that my answer was, RECALLED TO LIFE."

Jerry started in his saddle. "That's a Blazing strange answer, too," said he, at his hoarsest.

"Take that message back, and they will know that I received this, as well as if I wrote. Make the best of your way. Good night."

With those words the passenger opened the coach-door and got in; not at all assisted by his fellow-passengers, who had expeditiously secreted their watches and purses in their boots, and were now making a general pretence of being asleep. With

<sup>2</sup>Nation: probably short for "damnation", a curse.

no more definite purpose than to escape the hazard of originating any other kind of action.

The coach lumbered on again, with heavier wreaths of mist closing round it as it began the descent. The guard soon replaced his blunderbuss in his arm-chest, and, having looked to the rest of its contents, and having looked to the supplementary pistols that he wore in his belt, looked to a smaller chest beneath his seat, in which there were a few smith's tools, a couple of torches, and a tinder-box. For he was furnished with that completeness that if the coach-lamps had been blown and stormed out, which did occasionally happen, he had only to shut himself up inside, keep the flint and steel sparks well off the straw, and get a light with tolerable safety and ease (if he were lucky) in five minutes.

"Tom!" softly over the coach-roof.

"Hallo, Joe."

"Did you hear the message?"

"I did, Joe."

"What did you make of it, Tom?"

"Nothing at all, Joe."

"That's a coincidence, too," the guard mused, "for I made the same of it myself."

Jerry, left alone in the mist and darkness, dismounted meanwhile, not only to ease his spent horse, but to wipe the mud from his face, and shake the wet out of his hat-brim, which might be capable of holding about half a gallon. After standing with the bridle over his heavily-splashed arm, until the wheels of the mail were no longer within hearing and the night was quite still again, he turned to walk down the hill.

"After that there gallop from Temple Bar, old lady, I won't trust your fore-legs till I get you on the level," said this hoarse messenger, glancing at his mare. "'Recalled to life.' That's a Blazing strange message. Much of that wouldn't do for you, Jerry! I say, Jerry! You'd be in a Blazing bad way, if recalling to life was to come into fashion, Jerry!"

## CHAPTER 3

### The Night Shadows

A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it! Something of the awfulness, even of Death itself, is referable to this. No more can I turn the leaves of this dear book that I loved, and vainly hope in time to read it all. No more can I look into the depths of this unfathomable water, wherein, as momentary lights glanced into it, I have had glimpses of buried treasure and other things submerged. It was appointed that the book should shut with a spring, for ever and for ever, when I had read but a page. It was appointed that the water should be locked in an eternal frost, when the light was playing on its surface, and I stood in ignorance on the shore. My friend is dead, my neighbour is dead, my love, the darling of my soul, is dead; it is the inexorable consolidation and perpetuation of the secret that was always in that individuality, and which I shall carry in mine to my life's end. In any of the burial-places of this city through which I pass, is there a sleeper more inscrutable than its busy inhabitants are, in their innermost personality, to me, or than I am to them?

As to this, his natural and not to be alienated inheritance, the messenger on horseback had exactly the same possessions as the King, the first Minister of State, or the richest merchant in London. So with the three passengers shut up in the narrow compass of one lumbering old mail-coach; they were