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A

TALE OF TWO CITIES.

BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. K. BROWNE.

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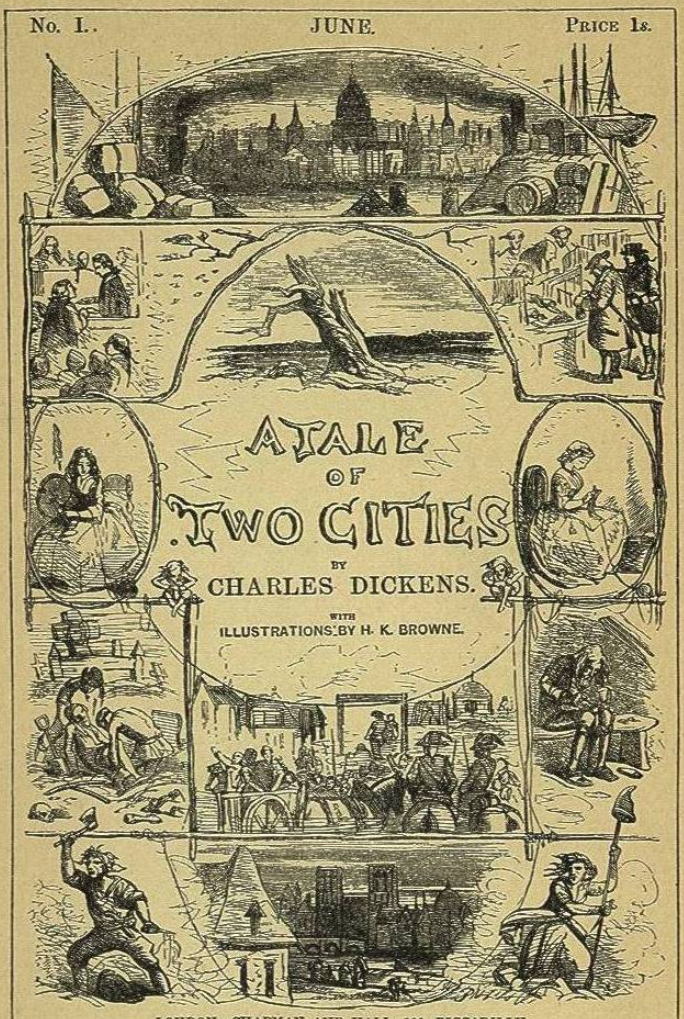

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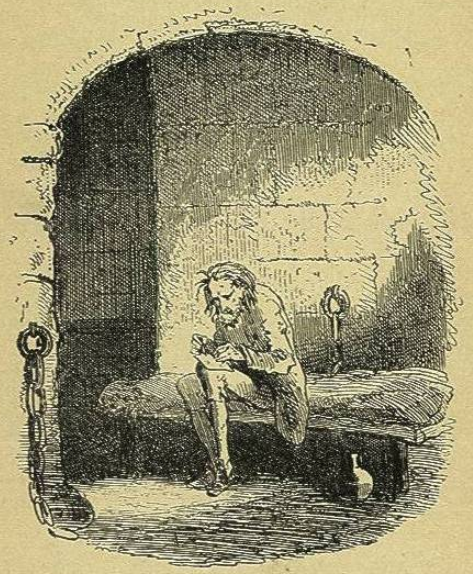

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INTRODUCTION.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES.

THE concluding number of *Little Dorrit* was published in April, 1857, and in January, 1858, Charles Dickens already found himself being drawn towards the beginning of a new book. The process of incubation, so to say, is so closely described in his own letters of this time that the account of it may be given in his own words. On the 27th of January he wrote: —

"Growing inclinations of a fitful and undefined sort are upon me sometimes to fall to work on a new book. Then I think I had better not worry my worried mind yet awhile. Then I think it would be of no use if I did, for I couldn't settle to one occupation. And that's all." Later, he wrote: "If I can discipline my thoughts into the channel of a story, I have made up my mind to get to work on one: always supposing that I find myself, on the trial, able to do well. Nothing whatever will do me the least 'good' in the way of shaking the strong possession of change impending over us that every day makes stronger; but if I could work on with some approach to steadiness, through the summer, the anxious toil of a new book would have its neck well broken before beginning to publish, next October or November. Sometimes I think I may continue to work; sometimes, I think not. What do you say to the title, *One of these Days?*" This title did not improve on acquaintance, and, after six weeks, he wrote again: "What do you think of *this* name for my story — *Buried Alive?* Does it seem too grim? or, *The Thread of Gold?* or, *The Doctor of Beauvais?*"

It was not until the 11th of March, 1859, that he was able to write: "This is merely to certify that I have got exactly the name for the story that is wanted; exactly what will fit the opening to a T, — *A Tale of Two Cities.* Also, that I have struck out a rather original and bold idea. That is, at the end of each month to publish the monthly part in the green cover, with the two illustrations, at the

old shilling. . . . My American ambassador pays a thousand pounds for the first year, for the privilege of republishing in America one day after we publish here. Not bad?" In July, he wrote: "I have been getting on in health very slowly and through irksome botheration enough. But I think I am round the corner. This cause — and the heat — has tended to my doing no more than hold my ground, my old month's advance, with the *Tale of Two Cities*. The small portions thereof drive me frantic; but I think the tale must have taken a strong hold. The run upon our monthly parts is surprising, and last month we sold 35,000 back numbers. A note I have had from Carlyle about it has given me especial pleasure." In later years, by the way, Charles Dickens used to say that, while he was engaged on the preliminary work on the *Tale of Two Cities*, he asked Carlyle for the loan of a few such authorities as might be useful for his purpose, and promptly received from the historian of the French Revolution two cartloads of books!

Equally clear and equally interesting is the description of the objects Charles Dickens had in view, and of his methods of carrying them into effect, which is also contained in many letters which were written during the progress of the book, and which may also be quoted here. To Mr. Forster he wrote on the 25th of August, 1859: "I have written and begged the *All the Year Round* publisher to send you directly four weeks' proofs beyond the current number, that are in type. I hope you will like them. Nothing but the interest of the subject, and the pleasure of striving with the difficulty of the forms of treatment, nothing in the mere way of money, I mean, could repay the time and trouble of the incessant condensation. But I set myself the little task of making a *picturesque* story, rising in every chapter with characters true to nature, but whom the story itself should express, more than they should express themselves, by dialogue. I mean, in other words, that I have fancied a story of incident might be written, in place of the bestiality[1] that *is* written under that pretence, pounding the characters out in its own mortar, and beating their own

[1] *Sic in orig.* Mr. Forster, quoting this letter in his *Life*, altered this rather strong expression to "odious stuff," for what reason, or with what authority, it is not easy to see. The biographer's undoubted right to omit, in the exercise of his discretion, does not by any means justify the actual alteration of words and expressions.

interests out of them. If you could have read the story all at once, I hope you wouldn't have stopped half way."

The following extracts from a letter to Bulwer, dated the 5th of June, 1860, are also full of interest: —

"I am very much interested and gratified by your letter concerning *A Tale of Two Cities*. I do not quite agree with you on two points, but that is no deduction from my pleasure.

"In the first place, although the surrender of the feudal privileges (on a motion seconded by a nobleman of great rank) was the occasion of a sentimental scene, I see no reason to doubt, but on the contrary, many reasons to believe, that some of these privileges had been used to the frightful oppression of the peasant, quite as near to the time of the Revolution as the doctor's narrative, which, you will remember, dates long before the Terror. And surely when the new philosophy was the talk of the *salons* and the slang of the hour, it is not unreasonable or unallowable to suppose a nobleman wedded to the old cruel ideas, and representing the time going out, as his nephew represents the time coming in; as to the condition of the peasant in France generally at that day, I take it that if anything be certain on earth it is certain that it was intolerable. No *ex post facto* inquiries and provings by figures will hold water, surely, against the tremendous testimony of men living at the time.

"There is a curious book printed at Amsterdam, written to make out no case whatever, and tiresome enough in its literal dictionary-like minuteness, scattered up and down the pages of which is full authority for my marquis. This is Mercier's *Tableau de Paris*. Rousseau is the authority for the peasant's shutting up his house when he had a bit of meat. The tax-taker was the authority for the wretched creature's impoverishment.

"I am not clear, and I never have been clear, respecting that canon of fiction which forbids the interposition of accident in such a case as Madame Defarge's death. Where the accident is inseparable from the passion and emotion of the character, where it is strictly consistent with the whole design, and arises out of some culminating proceeding on the part of the character which the whole story has led up to, it seems to me to become, as it were, an act of divine justice. And when I use Miss Pross (though this is quite another question) to bring about that catastrophe, I have the positive intention of making that half-comic intervention a part of the desperate woman's failure, and of opposing that mean death — instead of a desperate one in the streets, which she wouldn't have minded — to the dignity of Carton's wrong or right; this *was* the design and seemed to be in the fitness of things."

Mr. Forster, oddly enough, quotes a letter "in reply to some objections, of which the principal were a doubt if the

feudal cruelties came sufficiently within the date of the action to justify his use of them, and some question as to the manner of disposing of the chief revolutionary agent in the plot," which varies in so few respects from this letter to Bulwer as to make it clear that it is, in fact, the same thing; while the differences are quite sufficient, here and there, to raise the question whether Mr. Forster may not once more have been using to excess his discretion in the way of alteration. Possibly, however, he quoted from a draft of the letter, and not from the document itself.

The first number of *All the Year Round*, which was dated the 30th of April, 1859, contained the opening chapters of *A Tale of Two Cities*, and its conclusion was published in number thirty-one, dated the 26th of November in the same year. Of the monthly parts — which contained frontispiece, vignette title-page, and fourteen illustrations by Hablot K. Browne — the first was dated June, 1859, and the last (parts seven and eight being bound together) was published in December of that year. The complete book, bound in cloth, was published at nine shillings. The monthly parts were contained in green wrappers with a design by Hablot Browne, which, it must be admitted, was not one of that artist's happiest efforts. It is characteristic, by the way, of the difficulties in the way of arriving at accuracy in matters of fact from books that Mr. Dexter, one of the best known of the bibliographers of Charles Dickens, describes the wrapper as "blue." The colour has faded considerably, it is true, and has become difficult to identify with certainty; but, in one of the letters I have quoted above, the author himself describes it as green, and green it no doubt was, originally, whatever it may have become in some copies in course of time. These eight monthly parts have grown very scarce in their original state, and figure among the "fancy" prices of Dickens's collectors.

Facsimiles of the wrapper, frontispiece, and vignette title-page are given at the beginning; and while it may be noted that the *Tale of Two Cities* was the last of Charles Dickens's books which was illustrated by Hablot Browne, it may be added, without disparagement of the distinguished artists who succeeded him, that no one — except, in two or three instances, George Cruikshank — has ever succeeded quite so well as "Phiz" in catching what may be called the true Dickens tone of the books.

The dedication was as follows: —

THIS TALE IS INSCRIBED
TO
THE LORD JOHN RUSSELL
IN REMEMBRANCE
OF
MANY PUBLIC SERVICES
AND
PRIVATE KINDNESSES.

The Preface ran as follows: —

When I was acting, with my children and friends, in Mr. Wilkie Collins's drama of *The Frozen Deep*, I first conceived the main idea of this story. A strong desire was upon me then, to embody it in my own person; and I traced out in my fancy, the state of mind of which it would necessitate the presentation to an observant spectator, with particular care and interest.

As the idea became familiar to me, it gradually shaped itself into its present form. Throughout its execution, it has had complete possession of me; I have so far verified what is done and suffered in these pages, as that I have certainly done and suffered it all myself.

Whenever any reference (however slight) is made here to the condition of the French people before or during the Revolution, it is truly made on the faith of the most trustworthy witnesses. It has been one of my hopes to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to the philosophy of Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book.

Tavistock House, London,
November, 1859.

The original manuscript of *A Tale of Two Cities* is at South Kensington.

The dramatic interest of *A Tale of Two Cities* was so strong, and its stage possibilities so tempting, that it is not surprising that the idea of founding a play on the book should have occurred to its author, but it is a little strange that he should have looked to the French Theatre for its production. That he did so, seriously enough, is evidenced

by the following letters addressed to Regnier, the distinguished actor of the Comédie Française.

GAD'S HILL PLACE, HIGHAM BY ROCHESTER, KENT,
Saturday, Oct. 15th, 1859.

MY DEAR REGNIER,

You will receive by railway parcel the proofsheets of a story of mine, that has been for some time in progress in my weekly journal, and that will be published in a complete volume about the middle of November. Nobody but Forster has yet seen the latter portions of it, or will see them until they are published. I want you to read it for two reasons. Firstly, because I hope it is the best story I have written. Secondly, because it treats of a very remarkable time in France; and I should very much like to know what you think of its being dramatised for a French theatre. If you should think it likely to be done, I should be glad to take some steps towards having it well done. The story is an extraordinary success here, and I think the end of it is certain to make a still greater sensation.

Don't trouble yourself to write to me, *mon ami*, until you shall have had time to read the proofs. Remember they are *proofs*, and *private;* the latter chapters will not be before the public for five or six weeks to come.

With kind regards to Madame Regnier, in which my daughters and their aunt unite,

Believe me, ever faithfully yours.

P.S. — The story (I dare say you have not seen any of it yet) is called *A Tale of Two Cities*.

TAVISTOCK HOUSE, TAVISTOCK SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.
Wednesday, Nov. 16th, 1859.

MY DEAR REGNIER,

I send you ten thousand thanks for your kind and explicit letter. What I particularly wished to ascertain from you was whether it is likely the Censor would allow such a piece to be played in Paris. In the case of its being likely, then I wished to have the piece as well done as possible, and would even have proposed to come to Paris to see it rehearsed. But I very much doubted whether the general subject would not be objectionable to the Government, and what you write with so much sagacity and with such care convinced me at once that its representation would be prohibited. Therefore I altogether abandon and relinquish the idea. But I am just as heartily and cordially obliged to you for your interest and friendship, as if the book had been turned into a play five hundred times. I again thank you ten thousand times, and am quite sure that you are right. I only hope you will forgive my causing you so much trouble, after your hard work. . . .

I am ever your attached and faithful friend.

Although Charles Dickens seems, after this, altogether to have given up any idea of dramatising the book himself, he threw himself by-and-bye with the utmost ardour into the rehearsals of the play, in a prologue and two acts, which Tom Taylor arranged, and which was most successfully produced at the Lyceum Theatre, London, on Monday, the 30th of January, 1860, under the management of Madame Celeste. How much of the play which was eventually acted was Tom Taylor's, and how much of it was due to the suggestions and alterations of the original author who, in the words of the playbill, "in the kindest manner superintended the production of the piece," is not made clear by the play itself as published in No. 661 of Lacy's Acting Edition. But I know — for I attended several of the rehearsals — that if the play had been his "very own," my father could not have worked harder at it. He had his reward in the great success of the drama, which was greatly assisted by the admirable performances of Walter Lacy as the Marquis de St. Evrémonde, and of Madame Celeste as Madame Defarge — the latter one of the most effective and lifelike pictures from the Dickens dramatic gallery that I can recall to my recollection.

Several other versions of the story have occupied the stage from time to time, but I have not been able to find that any of them have been published, except one, in a prologue and three acts, adapted by Henry I. Rivers. This, which was embellished with a portrait of Madame Celeste — not in the least like her, by the way — was comprised in Davidson's Actable Drama, in continuation of Cumberland's plays, published by Davidson, Peter's Hill, London. It is, perhaps, principally worthy of note by reason of the extreme ingenuity with which the author succeeded in destroying all the point of the story, by doing away with Carton's self-sacrifice and guillotining Barsad to save Darnay — a perfect triumph of absurdity.

CHARLES DICKENS
THE YOUNGER.