

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

by Charles Dickens

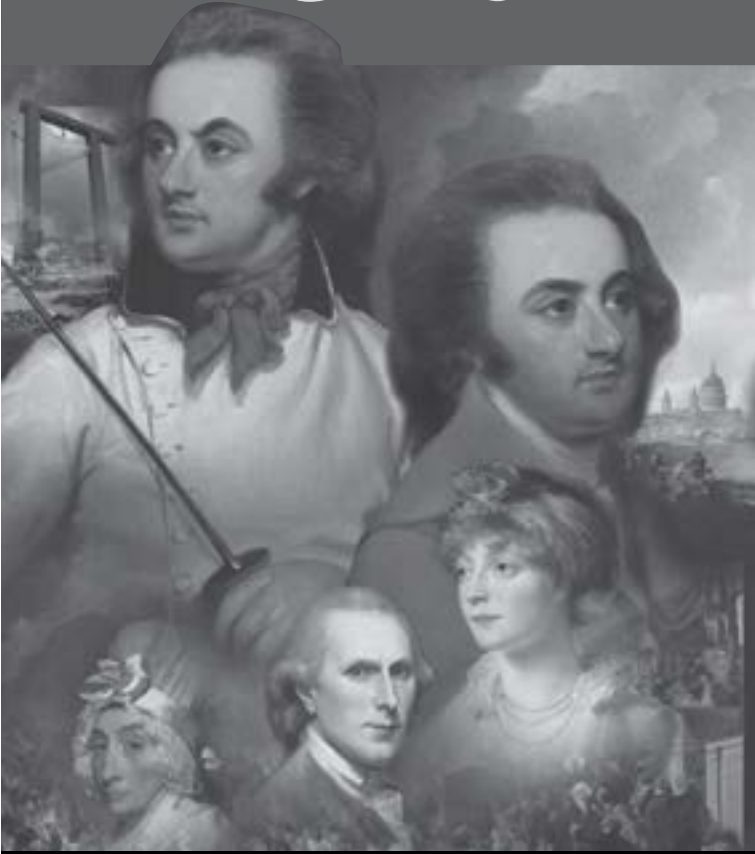


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UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES

A TALE OF TWO CITIES



Charles Dickens



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Notes

What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England, on February 7, 1812. He came from a poor family and often went hungry; at the age of twelve, when the rest of his family was placed in a debtors' prison, he was forced to take work in a bootblack factory. Upon his father's release, he returned to school, but left at the age of fifteen to begin a career as a newspaperman. Both the terrible experiences of his childhood and the close observation that he developed as a journalist contributed heavily to his writing.

When one of his first works, *Sketches by Boz*, was serialized in a magazine, Dickens began to gain recognition as a writer of note; *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist*, which followed soon after, secured him a reputation as a literary genius. His personal life, however, was not happy. His marriage to Catherine Hogarth was troubled, and, though he and his wife had ten children, they separated in 1858. Charles Dickens died of a stroke in 1870.

Dickens' sharply drawn, often sympathetic characters bring his works to life, and his sympathetic treatment of the Victorian underclass still resonates today. He has given us some of our best-loved characters and stories: *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, Scrooge and Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol*, Pip in *Great Expectations*, and of course, the unforgettable inhabitants of *A Tale of Two Cities*.



BOOK THE FIRST
RECALLED TO LIFE

C H A P T E R I

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. 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

[†]Terms marked in the text with (†) can be looked up in the Glossary for additional information.

at this. Mrs. Southcott[†] 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 (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 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 downhill, 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, 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, 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 tumbrels of the 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.

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.[†]



C H A P T E R 2 I I

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 uphill 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.[‡]

GLOSSARY

PREFACE

Wilkie Collins – an English writer (1824 - 1889)

the Revolution – the French Revolution, which was fought from 1789 to 1799. Though it began because of financial trouble in the government, it soon led to a violent uprising by citizens. During this uprising, called the Reign of Terror, King Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, were guillotined. Napoleon Bonaparte became ruler of France after the Revolution.

Mr. Carlyle – a Scottish writer, Thomas Carlyle (1795 - 1881). One of his best-known books, written in 1837, is called *The French Revolution*.

BOOK THE FIRST. “RECALLED TO LIFE”

CHAPTER I

“**It was the best of times...of comparison only.**” – In one of the most famous opening lines in all of English literature, Dickens uses parallelism, paradox, juxtaposition, and contrasting images to emphasize the confusion, chaos, and upheaval of the time period. Not only are England and France contrasted, but so are the wealthy and the underclass of both societies. Additionally, even though Dickens wrote *A Tale of Two Cities* in the 19th century and we read it in the 21st, the phrase...*the period was so far like the present period...* applies equally well to both eras.

Mrs. Southcott – a reference to Joanna Southcott, who lived in England from 1750 to 1814. She declared herself a prophet, and many people believed her to be one.

English Crown – the rule of King George III and his wife, Queen Charlotte, in England. King George III’s rule extended from 1760 to 1820.

“**Mere messages...yet received...**” – a reference to the American Continental Congress of 1775, which sent a list of complaints to the English Parliament. Dickens believed this document to be important because it spelled out the needs for human rights and detailed the unfair burdens the nobility put on the ordinary man.

Newgate – a famous old prison in London which held outside executions. It was torn down in 1902.

“**two of the large jaws**” – describing the French and English kings, Louis XVI and George III

“**two of the plain and the fair faces**” – describing the French and English Queens, Marie Antoinette and Queen Charlotte

divine rights – the belief that the right to rule comes directly from God and that monarchs are answerable to no one but God. Because kings and queens ruled with God’s authority, their decisions could not be questioned. Therefore, anyone who disobeyed or rebelled against a monarch’s ruling was essentially violating God’s law. The rule of divine

VOCABULARY

PREFACE

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BOOK THE FIRST. “RECALLED TO LIFE”

CHAPTER I

atheistical – in denial of God’s existence
 blunderbusses – short muskets
 contraband – illegal goods
 epoch – an era
 gaols – the British spelling of *jails*
 heralded – signaled
 illustrious – distinguished, important
 incredulity – disbelief
 mire – mud
 musketeers – soldiers who use muskets
 myriads – innumerable
 pincers – a metal hand tool for removing nails, similar to pliers
 potentate – a ruler
 prophetic – foretelling
 requisition – necessity; a call for service
 retinue – personal attendants
 sublime – noble
 superlative – highest or best
 trident – a spear with three prongs
 tumbrels – crude, open farmers’ carts used to transport prisoners
 turnkeys – prison guards
 wrappers – woolen scarves used for warmth

CHAPTER II

adjuration – earnest appeal
 Blazing – a mild curse
 canter – a horse’s smooth gait
 capitulated – surrendered
 cessation – a stopping
 curtly – quickly, rudely
 cutlass – a short, heavy sword
 eddying – swirling
 emphatic – assertive
 genial – sociable
 hardihood – courage
 mutinous – rebellious