

WOLFNOTE SUMMARY OF...

**CHARLES DICKENS'
A TALE OF TWO CITIES**



CONTEXT

A Tale of Two Cities describes life in England and France during the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Jarvis Lorry is engaged on a secret mission by his employer, Tellson's Bank, to bring back Dr. Manette from France, who has been imprisoned in the Bastille in Paris for eighteen years. With him goes Lucie Manette, the Doctor's daughter, who had believed he was dead until recently. They find Dr. Manette being cared for by the Defarges who are the owners of a Paris wine shop.

Dr. Manette has suffered greatly and works at a shoemaker's bench and barely communicates with Mr. Lorry. However, when Lucie comforts him, there is a spark of recognition.

Five years later on, the Tellson's Bank porter, Jerry Cruncher takes a message to Mr. Lorry who is a witness in the trial of Charles Darnay, who is accused of being a spy. Dr. Manette and Lucie are also witnesses in the case. John Barsad and Roger Cly of treason accuse Darnay, and the verdict seems certain to be one of guilty. Darnay's lawyer, Mr. Stryver contests that Cly and Barsad are the real spies. Sidney Carton, Stryver's assistant, points out that he looks very similar to Darnay and this casts doubt on the positive identification that had been made by the accusers. Darnay is surprisingly, acquitted.

After the trial, Darnay, Carton and Stryver, regularly visit the Manette home, and they all become Lucie's suitors. They are attracted to Lucie's beauty and kind nature. Eventually it is Darnay whose love Lucie returns and the two marry with the Doctor's uneasy blessing.

The Doctor is making progress, but does suffer from the occasional relapse.

The situation in France grows worse as Revolution approaches.

The Marquis St. Evremonde, who is Darnay's cruel uncle, runs down a child with his carriage in a Paris street. He is murdered in his bed shortly afterwards. Darnay is the heir to the title and estate, but he has renounced his family name and works in England as a tutor.

In July 1789 the Bastille is stormed and the Defarges are at the center of the revolutionary movement. Within a few years they have taken control of France and are systematically executing anyone that they view as an enemy of the state. This includes the Evremonde family line.

The Evremonde steward writes to Darnay pleading for assistance as he has been imprisoned. Darnay feels obliged to respond and travels to Paris in secret, but is apprehended, imprisoned and faces execution without trial.

Dr. Manette, Lucie and Lucie and Darnay's daughter, arrive at the Paris office of Tellson's Bank and ask Mr. Lorry to assist in freeing Charles. As a former prisoner of the Bastille, Dr. Manette has some influence with the revolutionaries and secures Darnay's short-term safety. Eventually there is a trial and Darnay is released, only to be seized again shortly afterwards by the cruel Mme. Defarge. Darnay is tried again and the Defarges use a letter written by Dr. Manette in prison, condemning all the Evremondes as the final piece of evidence to confirm Darnay's guilt as an enemy of the state.

Sidney Carton has arrived in Paris and is determined to free Darnay, which will give his life some purpose after years of waste. By pressurizing Barsad, who is now a spy for the revolutionaries, he is able to be smuggled by Barsad into the Bastille to visit Darnay. Carton drugs and changes clothes with Darnay who is taken out by the guards in his place. No one questions Carton's identity because he and Darnay look alike.

Mr. Lorry is able to escape France with Dr. Manette, Darnay, Lucie and young Lucie. Lucie's faithful servant Miss Pross and Jerry Cruncher stay behind to cover their escape. When Mme. Defarge confronts Miss Pross they struggle and Mme. Defarge is killed. Cruncher and Pross also make good their escape.

Carton goes to the guillotine renewed and comforted by the knowledge that his sacrifice will save Lucie, who he loves, and her family.

The Author

Charles Dickens was born in England in 1812 and had a difficult childhood, his family being always short of money. In fact his father spent some time in a Debtors' prison.

It is clear that his unhappy childhood affected his writing in later life and many of his books deal with the injustices upon children such as Great Expectations, Oliver Twist and David Copperfield. Dickens works became very popular during his lifetime mainly because his characterization captured the hearts

and minds of the reading public, and also because they were affordable in that they were published in the form of serials.

His books are full of colorful characters and intriguing plots and was read over and over again giving lasting entertainment.

A Tale of Two Cities was published in 1859 and is a departure from Dickens' normal works, being a historical novel. The novel was written during a traumatic time for Dickens who was divorcing his wife and also had a disagreement with his publishers.

Dickens' biographer George Woodcock, states that due to the disagreement with his publishers, Dickens created his own magazine called 'All the Year Round' and the novel A Tale of Two Cities appeared in this publication.

Dickens had appeared in a play called The Frozen Deep, where a man played by Dickens, sacrifices his own life so that his rival can have the woman they both love. It was this triangle that inspired Dickens to write A Tale of Two Cities.

The reader must remember that Dickens wrote A Tale of Two Cities a hundred years after the French Revolution occurred. Although most of the characters and events are fictitious, some actual historical events appear in the novel.

The book is full of detail and the various storylines are drawn together in the climactic concluding chapters.

Dickens died on 9th June 1870 at the age of 58. He was buried in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey and remains one of England's most popular authors and is read throughout the world in many languages.

Main Characters

Dr. Manette

He was secretly imprisoned in the Bastille for eighteen years, by the twin Evremonde brothers. He suffers mental trauma from his experiences and often lapses into a confused state. His daughter, Lucie, nurses him back to health. During the Revolution he is able to postpone the sentence of death on his son-in-law, Charles Darnay and is regarded as a hero by the revolutionaries. A document that he wrote whilst imprisoned is later used in evidence against Darnay in his trial.

Lucie Manette, later Darnay

She is a beautiful young woman who is the central character and impresses all those around her by her kindness, devotion and compassion. Her character is in direct opposition to Mme. Defarge who is depicted as an unnatural woman entirely consumed by hate and revenge.

Charles Darnay

He is a French aristocrat and heir to the Evremonde estate at the start of the novel. He is opposed to his uncle's evil ways and denounces his name and moves to England where he works as a tutor and marries Lucie Manette. He is put on trial during the Revolution for the crimes of his family.

Sidney Carton

Carton is a lawyer who assists Mr. Stryver, a successful lawyer in London. He leads a wasted life and drinks excessively, but has an uncanny resemblance to Charles Darnay and he uses this twice in the book to save Darnay's life. He sees in Darnay everything he could have achieved himself if he had not been tempted to waste his opportunities. It is his love for Lucie that motivates him to make this ultimate sacrifice.

Mr. Jarvis Lorry

Lorry works for Tellson's Bank and is a loyal friend to the Manette family. He originally brings the Doctor back to London and also assists in bringing the whole family out of France during the Revolution.

Mme. Defarge

She had a disturbing childhood during which time her entire family was killed by the Evremonde brothers. This has made her a hard and vengeful woman who uses the Revolution as a means for exacting her revenge on all aristocrats, but in particular the Evremonde family line. She knits a registry with the names of all those who are condemned. Together with her husband, she owns a wine shop and they are the leaders of a band called the Jacques.

Miss Pross

She is a forceful English woman who was Lucie's nursemaid and remains her devoted servant and protector. Through her last role, she kills Mme. Defarge.

Jerry Cruncher

He is a messenger for Tellson's Bank and is Jarvis Lorry's bodyguard. He is also a part-time grave robber.

John Barsad or Solomon Pross

In England he was a police spy and later became a spy in revolutionary France. When he is recognized by Miss Pross in France, Carton forces him to assist in saving Darnay.

Book 1 – Recalled to Life

Chapter 1: The Setting

Summary

This book by Charles Dickens contains two of the most famous literary quotes of all time. One appears at the start of the book and the other at the end of the novel.

Dickens begins with the statement that 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom; it was the age of foolishness'.

The cities referred to are London, England and Paris, France and the novel is set in the 1770's when the relationship between Britain and France was strained. The rulers of both these countries were set apart from the common people and they believed that their dynasties would last forever. However, at this time America declared its independence, which was a hint that there were winds of change in the world.

In France there was widespread hunger and poverty, particularly in the cities where inflation was running out of control. The authorities inflicted heavy punishments on their citizens who believed that they were experiencing the very worst of life.

Dickens comments that the people of Paris were near breaking point, and that the floodgates of revolution would be opened if they were pushed too far.

Similar conditions were also experienced in London where there was widespread crime and violence due to the ineffective judicial system. However, the ruling classes were oblivious to the sufferings of their people, failing to realize the potential that angry mobs could have and their ability to produce anarchy.

Interpretation

This first chapter gives the reader the backdrop to the plot and provides a detailed description of the environment that the characters of the book live in. They move between the two cities throughout the novel, each has its own mystery and dangers.

There are two main themes in the novel, resurrection and revolution, the first being dealt with in the early chapters of the book. In fact, Book 1 is called 'Recalled to Life'.

Already Dickens is dealing with duality contained in the first sentence 'best and worst of times'. The reader will also come across 'light and darkness', 'hope and despair' and, of course, 'good and evil'.

The monarchs at this time were George III and Louis XVI who were totally indifferent to the sufferings of their peoples. Out of the two, the French aristocrats were perhaps the more wasteful and decadent, which of course, would lead to the French Revolution. They seemed to take delight in flaunting their opulence in front of the common people.

In England, the monarch's excesses were perhaps more tempered, and the fact that there had been a revolution in America may have forewarned the ruling classes about over-indulgent behavior. Also the people in England were more superstitious and less likely to be angered, simply accepting their lot in life.

Chapters 2 and 3: Recalled to Life

Summary

The tale begins in the London/Dover mail coach making its way to the coast one stormy November night.

Inside the coach are three passengers wrapped up warmly against the elements so that you can barely recognize whom they are. They do not talk to one another and travel almost as if in solitude. They are wary of each other and also of the journey for these are dangerous times, and the land is full of highwaymen who would not hesitate to stop a coach, especially on this route.

They hear a horse approaching at a gallop and the rider is Jerry, a messenger from Tellson's Bank in London, looking for a Mr. Jarvis Lorry an employee of the bank who is one of the passengers. Mr. Lorry reads the message, which states 'Wait at Dover for Mam'selle'. Mr. Lorry tells Jerry to return the

answer 'Recalled to life'. Jerry is bewildered at the reply and gallops back to London while the coach continues on its way to Dover.

Mr. Lorry has a restless sleep reflecting upon his mission, which is to bring someone back from the dead, after being buried for eighteen years. He wonders what this man will look like and what state he will be in.

Interpretation

If you are familiar with the novels of Dickens, you will be aware that they are full of colorful characters who bring diversity and humor to the stories that they are part of.

This novel departs from this formula and most of the characters are serious with no comical overtones, this being a historical tale, having been written around one hundred years after the events portrayed. The power of this book is Dickens' imagery and genius for creating atmosphere through descriptive prose. He already demonstrates this by creating a foreboding atmosphere for those traveling on the coach to Dover.

Although the three men are traveling a long distance together in a confined space they act as though they are in solitude, wrapped up against the cold so that they have no distinguishing features. This concept of mystery and solitude become more and more important as the book progresses.

Again, the reader is given a clear indication what is going to happen, and the statement by Mr. Lorry 'Recalled to life' shows that someone will be brought back from the 'dead'.

Dickens description of the foggy, cold night provides a sense of vulnerability and anxiety. Mr. Lorry is an important character as he provides an actual physical link between Paris and London as his employer has banks in both cities. However, his current business is at present a mystery to the reader, the clue being given is that it appears to be nothing to do with business, but resurrecting a life.

Chapter 4: In Dover

Summary

Mr. Lorry arrives at the Royal George Hotel in Dover and after refreshing himself, spends the day pondering on his mission while he waits for the young woman who is Lucie Manette. She arrives believing that there is some property belonging to her late father in Paris, but Mr. Lorry breaks the news to her that her father is still alive.

He is Dr. Manette who has been imprisoned in the Bastille in Paris for the last eighteen years. The French authorities have recently released him and as he was one of Tellson's Bank's clients, Mr. Lorry has been sent to identify him. It is hoped that Lucie will take the responsibility for caring for her father and bringing him back to health. Lucie is taken aback at this news and she faints.

A large red-haired woman (Miss Pross) runs into the room pushing Mr. Lorry aside and going to the young lady's assistance using smelling salts and cold water to revive her.

Interpretation

The reader discovers that Mr. Lorry is much more than just a businessman, but a very kind man who is deeply troubled by the news he has to break to Lucie.

Mr. Lorry is very apprehensive about his mission, which to him is like digging up a man who has been buried for eighteen years, bringing him back to the real world and to his former life. He hopes that this young lady will be able to help him in his mission when he goes to Paris. Dickens symbolically represents this theme of resurrection by the description of Mr. Lorry awakening in the coach after a dark and restless night. The rising sun that illuminates the world that seemed so foreboding during the stormy night dissolves his troubled dreams.

Dickens suggests that bringing this mysterious man back to life will bring light to the masses that live in darkness in Paris.

Chapter 5: The Wine Shop

Summary

In the Paris suburb of St. Antoine there is a scene of mayhem as a crowd gather in front of a wine shop scooping up wine from a broken cask as it flows down the cobbled street. This is a very poor area of Paris and for many this fortune of free wine is a rare gift. Those that grovel in the wine have red hands, faces and feet and little do they know that in future years it will be blood on them.

Inside the wine shop we find M. and Mme. Defarge who are in conversation with three other men all called Jacques. They are sent upstairs. Mr. Lorry and Lucie enter the shop and M. Defarge too sends them upstairs. They come across the three Jacques peering inside a room through holes in the wall. Defarge unlocks the door where they find a white haired man sitting on a bench making shoes.

Interpretation

The reader does not have to use much imagination to realize that the wine symbolizes blood. This is driven home by the fact that one of the revelers scrawls the word blood on one of the walls of the wine shop and receives a serious reprimand from M. Defarge.

Dickens is predicting that violence will follow on from the hunger and deprivation suffered by the people of Paris. At present they are involved in a lust for wine – this will soon turn into a blood lust.

Dickens describes the wine drinkers as having 'a tigerish smear about the mouth'. The image of a tiger will reappear later in the book.

The oppressed people will lose their humanity in a quest for revenge.

Meanwhile Mr. Lorry's mission becomes clearer in that it is to do with bringing Dr. Manette back to the real world, but then the reader wonders why he was imprisoned in the first place.

Chapter 6: The Shoemaker

Summary

The man making the shoes in the garret of the wine shop is Dr. Manette who is preoccupied with his labor. He has aged and is weakened by his long incarceration and perhaps does not even know that he has been released. When asked his name he responds 'One hundred and five North Tower'. However, when Lucie approaches him there seems to be a spark of recognition, especially when he compares her hair to the two gold hairs he has kept tied in a cloth round his neck, this belonging to Lucie's mother, and when she speaks the voice is familiar and it makes him weep when she embraces him.

M. Defarge and Mr. Lorry help Lucie and Dr. Manette leave the city for their return back to England. Mr. Lorry wonders if the Doctor will be able to recall his former life.

Interpretation

Dickens hints that the life of prisoners in the Bastille was very harsh with beatings and torture as standard practice. After eighteen years of this torment the Doctor has suffered greatly and appears to have lost all sense of reality. Even though he is released from prison he is still in darkness and it is Lucie that brings light to his life through her golden hair and familiar voice. As they embrace, Dickens provides a descriptive passage of the white and gold hair together.

We also meet the Defarges who will be important characters of the tale. M. Defarge is clearly a man of authority reprimanding Gaspard for writing 'blood' on the wall.

At this stage, he is described as good-humored showing kindness and loyalty to Dr. Manette. We will note his development as the story evolves. His presence is only surpassed by that of Mme. DeFarge who says little, but communicates her intent through coughs and facial expressions. She is a much more hardened character and seems disinterested in the plight of the Manettes which angers M. Defarge. She seems content to occupy herself with her dexterous knitting. There is an eerie calm about her and she gives the impression of being a very determined person, dangerous to cross.

Book 2 – The Golden Thread

Chapters 1 and 2: The Old Bailey

Summary

It is now five years since Mr. Lorry brought Dr. Manette and his daughter back to England. Jerry Cruncher is employed as the porter and messenger for the Bank, Tellson's. Before going to work he argues with his wife concerning her constant praying. He believes it to be superstitious and bad for his work. He takes up his usual station at the front of the Bank and is soon called upon to deliver a message. With him is his son, also called Jerry. Young Jerry wonders at the source of the iron rust, which is always on his father's fingers.

He is required to go to the Old Bailey, which is the chief court in London and for the whole of England. There is a trial on at present dealing with Charles Darnay who is accused of treason. When he arrives at the Old Bailey he passes the message to the doorkeeper to be delivered to Mr. Lorry.

The courtroom is crowded, expecting a Guilty verdict, which will be carried out immediately. It is a grizzly sentence, being drawn and quartered in public.

Lucie and Dr. Manette are in attendance as they are witnesses against Darnay. Lucie shows compassion for Darnay and some of the spectators in the court feel sorry for him.

Interpretation

Dickens gives us a description of Tellson's Bank, being primarily involved in the business of death. He describes the building as dark, ugly and cramped, full of a musty odor arising from the shelves of old wooden drawers which keep money, documents and valuables that are placed in Tellson's care.

Three-quarters of the laws in England carry the death penalty and Tellson's literally send people to their deaths, the Bank identifies forgers, counterfeiters and debtors who eventually go to their graves under the harsh Death Penalty.

Jerry Cruncher serves as the messenger of the Bank. He, like many other characters in the book, appears to have a secret. He clearly has a guilty conscience remonstrating with his wife over her constant praying and his son, young Jerry, is also interested in his father's rusty fingers and muddy boots.

Dickens takes this opportunity to condemn the British Legal System symbolizing the Old Bailey as the center of its corruption.

If Charles Darnay is found guilty of Treason, he will face a gruesome death being drawn, half-hanged and disemboweled whilst still alive, beheaded and then cut into pieces.

The court is full of the ghoulish public there to revel in this bloodthirsty entertainment.

Dickens is to show repeatedly that crowds bring out the basest nature in people and that they possess an unstoppable, manic power. It is interesting to note that the sight of Lucie is able to bring out compassion for the prisoner by the crowd, even although this is only temporary.

Chapters 3 and 4: Sidney Carton

Summary

The trial begins with the Attorney General reading a statement concerning the charges of Treason against Darnay. Darnay's lawyer is a Mr. Stryver and he tries to discredit the prosecution's main witnesses, John Barsad and Roger Cly. It is clear that Judge and Jury have already assumed that Darnay is guilty. He is accused of giving information about British troops in the American War of Independence to the French who were the American's allies. Barsad turned Darnay in together with Roger Cly who was Darnay's hired servant. Both seem unreliable, but their testimony is believed.

Darnay was one of the passengers in the carriage to Dover in Chapter 1 and also returned back to England on the same ship as Dr. Manette and Lucie. Lucie testifies in tears that the prisoner aided her and her sick father and that he had jokingly made a remark that George Washington will some day be as famous as George III. This brought shouts of anger from the crowd.

Dr. Manette is unable to remember details of the trip, as he was ill.

The trial is so biased that the Judge will not even allow the defense to make a speech. However, Stryver dramatically calls attention to the resemblance his assistant, Sidney Carton, has to Darnay. This causes great confusion for the witnesses. He states that Darnay is an innocent victim whose confidential family affairs caused him to travel between Paris and London. The jury returns a verdict of Innocent.

Dr. Manette, Lucie, Mr. Lorry and Mr. Stryver celebrate with Darnay on his acquittal.

It is clear that Carton had the idea to confuse the witnesses over the identification of Darnay, and Darnay wants to thank Carton for his timely intervention. Carton shrugs off the thanks, informing Darnay that he does not particularly like him and he leaves the company to go on another drinking

binge. Carton reflects on his physical resemblance to Darnay thinking that he represents all that he could have been.

Interpretation

The first book dealt with the recall to life of Dr. Manette. Here we see another man recalled to life. The reader learns that Darnay is a dead man and the crowd in the court is baying for his blood. Dickens describes the scene as 'a cloud of great blue flies that you would find hovering over a dead body'. Darnay is saved through the intelligence of Sidney Carton who has the appearance of a disreputable looking lawyer who spent most of his time in the courtroom staring at the ceiling. He seems disinterested by what was going on around him just as Mme. Defarge seems more interested in her knitting, but appearances are deceptive.

Dickens again writes about duality using the characters of Sidney Carton and Charles Darnay. Apart from their physical similarities they are contradictions. Carton is ill mannered, scruffy and a heavy drinker, whilst Darnay is polite, calm and a gentleman. Carton realizes that he could have been like Darnay, but due to his bad habits, he has fallen from what he could have been. He now has no chance of having a happy life with someone like Lucie; therefore, Darnay is a source of annoyance to Carton as he reminds him of the life he has lost. The reader finds Carton more interesting because he is a rogue, witty, entertaining and has many facets, unlike Darnay who is almost boring.

Chapters 5 and 6: Echoing footsteps

Summary

Carton awakes in a tavern and walks to Stryver's Chambers to do some work. Carton and Stryver both attended school together in Paris, but they have had different fortunes since then, Stryver moving to the top of his profession while Carton remains in his shadow. They discuss Lucie Manette who Stryver admires, but whom Carton dismisses as a golden-haired doll. With dawn breaking Carton heads home wondering how much richer his life might have been if he had practiced self-denial and perseverance. When he arrives home at this empty room he breaks down in tears.

Four months have passed since the trial and Lorry, Darnay and Carton become regular visitors to the Manettes where Miss Pross is still Lucie's companion, having previously been her nursemaid. Miss Pross is concerned at the number of suitors Lucie has received, none of which are worthy of her. In fact it is only Lorry, Darnay and Carton.

Darnay tells a story of how a prisoner in the Tower of London had written on the walls of his cell, the word 'Dig'. Apparently year's later workmen had found papers in a leather case. This immediately brings an alarming reaction from Dr. Manette. Clearly Darnay has struck a nerve.

The position of the Manette's house is such that they can hear the sounds of footsteps that are quite far off, and on this particular still evening, with the rain falling, these footsteps seem louder than usual.

Lucie shares a fancy that 'the echoes of all the footsteps are coming by-and-by into our lives'. Carton comments that the footsteps symbolize a great crowd that will one day come for our lives.

Interpretation

Dickens continues to develop Carton's character in these chapters showing that he has failed to live up to his potential, being undoubtedly more intelligent than Stryver. The events of the trial have rekindled feelings of disappointment in Carton. He is taken with Lucie Manette and although he does not show this publicly, he knows that because of the choices he has made she will be out of his reach.

Reference is made again to the Doctor's imprisonment, the reasons for which are still a mystery, but Dickens hints that he too has buried something in his cell, which at one stage was the only words he would say, i.e. the location of his cell in the Bastille.

The book is called The Golden Thread and Lucie is becoming more and more important in the novel. She will end up being its central character.

Dickens states that 'everything turned upon her and revolved around her', suggesting that her sphere of influence reaches far beyond her father and will affect others in the book. She possesses the quality to bring out the best in people and inspires them to be more than what they are. Her father has become much more than a shoemaking prisoner and Mr. Lorry has become more than just a businessman. The two main characters she will influence are Darnay and Carton. These will be more dramatic.

Dickens has created a book full of ugliness, squalor and violence, but Lucie holds the beacon of innocence and humanity throughout the book. She is, therefore, the golden thread that runs through it, hence the title of the second book.

Chapters 7 and 8: The Marquis

Summary

A French Lord holds a showcase Extravaganza where all the important aristocrats attend. The host snubs the Marquis St. Evremonde and he leaves the reception angrily, ordering his driver to race through the Paris streets. He accidentally runs over a child whose father is Gaspard. He tosses the grief-stricken father a coin and Defarge emerges from the crowd to comfort Gaspard. He throws the coin back into the carriage as it speeds away.

The Marquis travels to his country estate where he stops at the village he owns, near his home. A road mender claims he saw a man riding underneath the carriage, who, when it stopped, ran away.

The Marquis tells Gabelle, the town official, to be on the lookout for the mystery man. The Marquis travels on to his chateau hoping to meet his nephew M. Charles who is traveling from England.

Interpretation

Dickens takes this opportunity to show the lengths that the French aristocracy goes to in leading an excessive lifestyle at the expense of the common people. They place themselves at the center of the world even corrupting quotations from the Bible by substituting the word 'Lord' with 'Monseigneur'. Dickens describes them as leprosy on the common people of France. The incident with the child illustrates the total disregard that the aristocracy has for the citizens of Paris. The Marquis believes he can pay for the child's life like a piece of merchandise. He is revealed as a heartless overlord. There is a silent challenge by the common people in the street suggesting that their tolerance is at breaking point.

Dickens describes the bleak landscape that the Marquis rides through which is an example of the irresponsible habits that the ruling class have, that they are starving the land as well as the people. The setting sun bathes the Marquis in a crimson light symbolically covering him in blood. The reader is left to imagine what blood this signifies, whether it is the death of the child, or his own death – it is uncertain.

Chapter 9: A Revolutionary Act

Summary

Charles Darnay, the Marquis' nephew arrives, saying that he wishes to renounce all ties to the family and to France. The Marquis shows his dislike for his nephew, who equally despises his uncle, so much so that he is in fear of the very name of Evremonde. Before they part, the Marquis asks about his relationship with Dr. Manette and Lucie and smiles mysteriously. The next day, the Marquis is found stabbed, with a note saying 'Drive him fast to his tomb. This, from Jacques'. This is one of the first acts of the Revolution, which will be in full flow in a few years time.

Interpretation

It is here that the plot thickens as the reader finds out that Darnay's real name is Evremonde, hated by the revolutionary movement, but he has renounced the evil acts of his uncle and, therefore, the family name, but the reader can sense that it might not be so easy for him to escape the mob.

Dickens uses the knitting of Mme. Defarge to represent the spinning of fate or destiny. However, it will be made clear that this knitting has also a more practical use. Mme. Defarge is recording the names in her knitting of all those that are to suffer once the Revolution takes control. The list of names has no end, but we know that Evremonde is on that list. When she is asked what she is knitting, she replies 'shrouds'.

Chapters 10, 11 and 12: Happier times

Summary

It is a year further on from the assassination of the Marquis and Darnay has settled down to a quiet life in England teaching French language and literature. He is in love with Luce and decides to reveal his feelings to Dr. Manette. He feels bound to tell the Doctor his true identity, but he stops him, saying he should reveal this on the morning of his wedding to Lucie. That evening, Lucie finds the Doctor hammering at his shoemaker's bench. He has suffered a minor relapse.

That same night, Stryver tells Carton that he has decided to marry Lucie. Although she is not rich she will be able to care for him. Stryver decides to tell Lucie the next day, but at Tellson's Bank he discusses his plans with Mr. Lorry and he suggests that he should go first to see if his suit would be accepted. Stryver agrees to this. Lucie turns down the proposal.

Interpretation

Dickens has indicated that the Evremonde family has something to do with the Doctor's imprisonment and secrets. No doubt, the Doctor suspects who Darnay is, but he does not wish to face this prospect, when even the thought of it causes a relapse.

Again, Dickens uses duality in that the meeting between Stryver and Carton mirrors the previous scene with Darnay and Dr. Manette. Darnay was sincere and respectful in his approach with the Doctor, but Stryver is obnoxious and pompous airing his misguided views on marriage. Clearly Darnay's desire to wed Lucie is romantic, whereas Stryver's is practical.

Mr. Lorry prevents Stryver from offending Lucie directly and uses his diplomacy in dealing with the subject taking control of a potentially stressful situation. Mr. Lorry is shown to be a strong character and this will prove invaluable later on in the novel.

Chapters 13 and 14: Resurrection

Summary

Carton is consumed by his feelings for Lucie and although his position is hopeless he decides to confide in Lucie. She tries to encourage him to redeem his life, but Carton states that it is too late and that he will only descend lower. However, he wants her to know how deeply he loves her and that he will do all in his power to protect her and anyone she loves.

Jerry Cruncher is in his usual position outside Tellson's Bank when a funeral passes by. It belongs to Roger Cly, one of the spies who testified against Darnay. The crowd is yelling 'spies' and they overwhelm the hearse and the one mourner flees the scene. The mob decide this is an excuse to have a party and they proceed down the street to the cemetery bearing the coffin ensuring that Roger Cly is given an unceremonious burial. The mob is not content with mocking the dead, but proceed to ransack some businesses until the police break the scene up. Later that night Cruncher leaves his house and his son, Young Jerry, decides to follow him. He discovers that his father is a body snatcher and will sell Cly's body to physicians for dissection. Young Jerry asks his father what he is doing and he responds by saying that he is 'Resurrection Man'.

Interpretation

Again we have examples of resurrection in these two chapters, but these are failed, for despite Lucie's efforts she cannot resurrect Carton from his downward decay, and Cruncher merely resurrects dead bodies for money for their dissection.

Chapters 15 and 16: Knitting

Summary

The road mender who spotted the man under the Marquis' coach goes to Defarge's wine shop to tell them that Gaspard, who has been in hiding, has been captured, jailed and hanged with his corpse left dangling in the village fountain. They take the road mender to see the splendor of the court and to cheer at the nobles. They do this on a regular basis to lull the aristocrats into a false sense of security.

Defarge learns that there is a new spy in the area called John Barsad who is trying to find out about any revolutionary movement. He comes to the Defarge's wine shop and questions them about Gaspard. They know nothing, but Mme. Defarge knits the name 'Barsad' into her shroud. Barsad advises them that Lucie Manette is engaged to marry Charles Darnay, the nephew of the Marquis St. Evremonde. Defarge remarks that he hopes destiny will keep Lucie and Darnay away from France. Mme. Defarge knits Darnay's name next to Barsad's.

Interpretation

The cycle of violence in France is escalating illustrated by the gruesome death of Gaspard.

Although Defarge had bravely made a petition to the King to spare Gaspard, this was rejected. Mme. Defarge condemns the entire Evremonde family, which now includes the name of Darnay.

Defarge shows himself so far to be a man who values fairness and justice in stark contrast to his wife who wishes to see the complete extermination of all those in power and those related to them. She is only concerned with revenge and death. Defarge seems frustrated that there seems to be no real change in their situation and wonders if the Revolution will ever come. However, Mme. Defarge remains unswerving in her commitment to the cause.

The Revolution is the Defarge's child. They have no children of their own and all their resources are directed towards the Revolution, but unlike any other mother, Mme. Defarge is not working towards life, but towards death.

Chapters 17, 18 and 19: The Wedding

Summary

On the eve of Lucie's wedding, she and her father discuss the forthcoming events and Lucie assures her father that her love for Darnay will not interfere with their relationship. He tells her that when he was in prison he would think about the child he had never known, and wondered what her fate would be. He is grateful for the happiness she has brought into his life.

As arranged, on the morning of the wedding, Darnay and the Doctor have their private discussion.

Lucie and Darnay depart on their two-week honeymoon.

Dr. Manette is subdued and Mr. Lorry and Miss Pross take care of him. Mr. Lorry says that he has some important business to take care of, but he will return soon. However, the Doctor suffers a relapse that lasts for ten days. After this time he acts as if nothing has happened and Mr. Lorry suggests that they should dispose of his bench and tools, and the Doctor agrees saying that he does not expect to have any further relapses. The Doctor leaves to join Lucie and Darnay on their trip.

Interpretation

The future looks bright for the Manettes filled with the promise of love and children.

The Doctor too has been successful in keeping the extent of his sorrows and hardships from his daughter so as not to taint her future. This is in contrast to the future that the Defarges look forward to which is one of vengeance and violence.

The Doctor is fortunate that he has overcome the need for revenge thanks to the care he has received from Lucie.

The reader cannot be content in the Manettes' happiness because we know that the Defarges have identified Darnay and have vowed to destroy the entire Evremonde line including any children that result from Lucie and Darnay's marriage.

A Tale of Two Cities differs from the other novels of Dickens in respect that the characters lack depth and complexity with the exception of Dr. Manette. The passage describing his conversation with Mr. Lorry in Chapter 19 reveals the diversity of Manette's character ranging from a doting father, to a capable professional, to a vulnerable victim. He seems convinced that he is over the relapses and this is confirmed by his agreement for the bench and tools to be disposed of, these being the symbols of the refuge he would go to in order to escape reality in prison.

Chapters 20, 21 and 22: Bloodletting

Summary

Soon after the return of Lucie and Darnay, Carton visits them wishing to make amends with Darnay regarding his rudeness at the trial. They agree to become friends allowing Carton to visit the family on occasions.

The year is now 1789 and the Darnay's have had two children, a daughter named Lucie and a son who lived only a short time.

Carton still visits the family and is very fond of young Lucie. He continues to work for Stryver who has also married.

Mr. Lorry and the rest at Tellson's Bank are concerned at the unrest in France and Lorry has to make numerous trips to the branch in Paris where the nobility are investing their property with the so-called secure English Bank.

On 14th July the Bastille is stormed and the Governor is beaten to death and Mme. Defarge cuts off his head. The people manage to rescue seven prisoners from the Bastille and they put the heads of seven guards on pikes. Once inside the Bastille, Defarge grabs a guard and demands to be taken to 105 North Tower where Dr. Manette was incarcerated. Defarge makes a thorough search of the cell.

A week later the Revolutionaries learn that Foulon, a hated official who had staged his own death, is still alive and has been captured. Foulon is reputed to have said that the starving people should eat grass. Mme. Defarge leads a mob to the hotel where Foulon is being held. There, she stuffs his mouth full of grass and hangs him from a lamppost. When he eventually dies they behead him and put his head on a pike. They also capture Foulon's son-in-law placing his head and heart on pikes. The mob is happy and hopeful for the future.

Interpretation

Carton wishes to become a friend of Lucie and Darnay after their marriage. Perhaps he realizes that he may be of use to them in the future. Darnay still regards Carton as 'a problem of carelessness and recklessness'. In the end Darnay receives a suggestion of Carton's good heart through Lucie's vision of him.

This is a book of stark contrasts, especially the calm life in London compared with the upheavals in St. Antoine.

As a result of his regular visits to the Paris office, Mr. Lorry has become aware of the rising tide of unrest.

The violence in Paris described by Dickens is a mixture of fiction and fact. Foulon was an actual person and was killed in the way Dickens describes. Dickens correctly depicts the mob as having no mercy, an irresistible force consuming all in its path.

Dickens has woven the storming of the Bastille into the story where he names the Defarges as the main ringleaders. Again it is historical fact that the Revolutionaries killed and beheaded seven guards together with the Governor DeLaunay. Defarge was responsible for the tactical aspects of the attack with Mme. Defarge, leading the women in their horrendous display of bloodletting. Dickens describes the mob as 'a whirlpool of boiling waters, a raging sea and a howling universe of passion and contention'.

Chapters 23 and 24: Evremonde Chateau

Summary

Despite the pleas from the servants at the chateau, the local villagers burn it down and they threaten Gabelle, the village officer.

A further three years pass and the French Revolution have successfully removed the ruling classes. Many of the French aristocracy have fled to England and Tellson's Bank is the main source for obtaining information from France.

A letter addressed to the Marquis St. Evremonde surfaces and Darnay learns of this. He reads the letter and it has come from Gabelle who has been imprisoned for acting as Darnay's steward indirectly. Darnay feels guilty about Gabelle's imprisonment and decides to respond to his pleas for help. Naively he believes that he can reason with the Revolutionary forces and decides to depart for France alone. He arranges for a letter to go to Lucie and her father explaining the situation.

Interpretation

The Revolution spreads to the countryside and the chateau is burned to the ground and the mob is led by four members of the Jacquerie who Dickens names as East, West, North and South, for they will continue their crusade against the aristocrats in all four directions of the compass.

Darnay is the epitome of justice and duty and he feels a responsibility to try and rescue Gabelle who was a loyal servant to the family. He is unaware of the dangers he will face and that he appears on Mme. Defarge's register. He believes he will be treated as a common man.

Again, Dickens uses the resurrection theme for Darnay's attempts to resurrect Gabelle draw him into danger. He is, in fact, effectively burying himself alive.

Book 3 – The Track of a Storm

Chapter 1: Drawn into the Web

Summary

Charles Darnay journeys to Paris and in every village along the way he meets bands of revolutionaries who condemn him as an aristocrat being an immigrant. He is allowed to continue only because he shows them the letter from Gabelle.

In Paris he learns that he has been declared a prisoner 'in secret' by a prison tribunal, and he is taken to La Force prison. Defarge escorts Darnay to prison and he asks that Mr. Lorry is notified, but Defarge refuses. He is kept in solitary confinement and he is reminded of Dr. Manette's similar plight.

Interpretation

It is clear that Darnay has been drawn into the center of a web and his position looks hopeless. The true genius of Dickens comes to the fore now in this book. The previous numerous insignificant storylines start to merge and the reader starts to appreciate how the plot has been masterfully structured.

Darnay's journey again shows duality in that it mirrors Mr. Lorry's trip to France in Book 1. Both men travel secretly in an endeavor to free an innocent man from prison. However, this trip by Darnay differs in that Defarge imprisons him, where he assisted Mr. Lorry at the start of the book. Darnay is imprisoned in secret, which means he has no hope of a trial or of contacting his family. It seems he is to be 'buried alive.'

Chapter 2: La Force

Summary

Lucie and Dr. Manette burst into Mr. Lorry's room in the Paris branch of Tellson's Bank. They tell him that the revolutionaries have imprisoned Charles and Mr. Lorry calms Lucie and she goes to rest in another room. Mr. Lorry informs Dr. Manette that the mob is butchering prisoners in the La Force prison.

Dr. Manette is famous in that he has survived eighteen years in the Bastille and has some influence over the revolutionaries so he leaves to try and save Darnay's life.

Interpretation

The Doctor has almost a godlike reputation amongst the revolutionaries because he has survived the ravages of the Bastille. His years as a prisoner have become a source of strength rather than weakness at this time.

Dickens describes the mob in the La Force prison as like savages and demons that work in an atmosphere of 'gore and fire'.

Chapter 3: Caught in the web

Summary

Mr. Lorry is concerned that Lucie and her child could also be in danger and their presence in the bank could also endanger this institution. He, therefore, finds them an apartment nearby and charges Jerry Cruncher to protect them. There has been no word from Dr. Manette.

Defarge meets Mr. Lorry and has a letter from the Doctor that states that Darnay is safe for the moment. He also has a note from Darnay for Lucie and he takes it to her accompanied by Mr. Lorry. Mme. Defarge and the grocer's wife, who is called the Vengeance, join them. The women wish to see Lucie and her child so that they can be identified and put under their protection. Lucie thanks Mme. Defarge and begs her to help Darnay. She is cold to Lucie's pleas.

When Miss Pross and young Lucie present themselves to Mme. Defarge all her attention is focused on young Lucie, hardly noticing Miss Pross.

Interpretation

Matters seem hopeful at the start of this chapter until the menacing figure of Mme. Defarge enters the scene. The reader is clearly aware that Lucie and her daughter will soon be knitted into the register.

Here we have two extremes of womanhood – Lucie who is represented as the ideal woman, demonstrated in her high morals, kind heart and her success as a wife and mother, in stark contrast to Mme. Defarge who is a wholly unnatural woman devoting her life to hatred and vengeance. She clearly totally underestimates the power that Lucie has, which comes from her loyalty and love for her family.

Chapter 4: The calm before the storm

Summary

Four days elapse and finally Dr. Manette returns from the prison. He has tried to influence the court tribunal to release his son-in-law, but all he has achieved is his safety for the time being. He describes the situation as very volatile saying that the mob is acting erratically. Prisoners are condemned or freed at a whim. Both decisions bring elation from the mob.

The Doctors reputation spreads as time passes, but after fifteen months there has been no change in the situation.

Interpretation

Dickens has kept links with the historical past by having Darnay imprisoned in September 1792 when around fourteen hundred prisoners were killed at that time. It is clear that without the Doctor's influence Darnay would have been killed straight away.

The reader is prepared for the final conflict between love and hate.

The tension grips the reader due to the excellent story telling of Dickens.

Dickens also makes a comment about the loss of Christian faith by the population in Paris at the time. The new Government stated that the only religion in France was that of Liberty and Equality, denouncing the Catholic religion. They renamed the Notre Dame Cathedral as the Temple of Reason and the people now worshipped the guillotine instead of the cross.

The executioner is nicknamed Samson, illustrating that they are living by the vengeful law of the Old Testament – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Chapter 5: The Woodcutter

Summary

Lucie visits the prison every day and waits for two hours in the courtyard hoping that Darnay can spot her.

The road mender from Evremonde village is now the woodcutter at the prison. He intimidates Lucie by pretending to cut off her head and that of her daughter.

Dr. Manette tells Lucie to blow a kiss to Darnay because he is watching her.

At last Darnay's trial is scheduled for the next day.

Interpretation

Lucie stands as a beacon of love and compassion amongst the revolutionaries who are mean and ugly. She seems to gain strength from the daily ordeal of visiting her husband. Her admirable behavior evokes shame amongst the revolutionaries and in particular the woodcutter whose efforts to intimidate her fail.

Chapter 6: The Trial

Summary

Darnay defends himself in the court and makes a well-planned and well-rehearsed defense of himself. Both Dr. Manette and Mr. Lorry testify on his behalf. The spectators are impressed, and cheer wildly when the jury acquits him. He is reunited with Lucie and his daughter who are proud of what he has accomplished.

Interpretation

Dickens describes the relief felt by Lucie at her husband's acquittal. When she puts her head on her father's breast this brings the reader full circle from when the rolls were reversed early in Book 1.

Yet again there has been another resurrection and Darnay has emerged from his cell of death. Mme. Defarge sat in the front row of the court and has indelibly recorded Darnay's name in her register. She still casts a shadow over the family's happiness.

Chapter 7: New Trial

Summary

Lucie is still fearful regarding her husband's safety and it is not long before Darnay is seized again with accusations from three people, the Defarges and one other anonymous person. The trial will take place next day.

Interpretation

Dickens reveals that it is Mme. Defarge that has the true power of life and death in Paris despite what the courts decree. You will recall that she released Foulon and then snatched him back again, behaving like a cat with a mouse. She has done this again with Darnay. He has been released to rejoin his family so that he can truly appreciate what he will lose when he faces certain death.

Mme. Defarge reveals the true depths of the ruthlessness and cruelty.

Chapter 8: A hand of cards

Summary

Miss Pross and Jerry Cruncher are on a shopping expedition and they enter a wine shop where she discovers her brother Solomon Pross and she lets out a scream.

Jerry Cruncher recognizes the man, but he can't quite place him.

Solomon tells her to be quiet and they all leave the shop.

They meet up with Sidney Carton who has recently arrived in Paris and he identifies Solomon as John Barsad, the spy from Darnay's trial in England. Carton threatens Barsad because he knows that he is a prison informer. Carton says that he will denounce him to the French authorities as an English spy unless he co-operates with them. Carton also reveals that Roger Cly is not dead, his coffin was empty and that he too is in Paris working as a spy. Barsad gives in and agrees to give Carton what he wants, and that is access to the prison.

Interpretation

Throughout the novel, Dickens has provided seemingly unrelated pieces of information and these pieces now start to fit together to provide a full picture of the plot and web of intrigue. The important factor is Carton's power over Barsad, without which the tale could not be convincingly concluded. This is why this book is so successful and stands the test of being read over and over again and also stands the test of time.

Chapter 9: The third witness

Summary

Carton and Barsad leave in order to discuss Carton's plan.

Mr. Lorry expresses outrage at the revelation that Jerry Cruncher was a part-time grave robber saying that he will be dismissed from Tellson's Bank. Jerry says that he will make up for his previous transgressions and become a regular gravedigger, and requests that his son takes his place at the bank. Carton returns saying that he will be able to secure access to Darnay in his cell. He adds that a long life wasted would be a miserable one and he leaves to wander the streets mulling over the biblical passage that reads 'I am the resurrection and the life'.

Next day Carton goes to the new trial and the jury includes three of the loathsome Jacques. The prosecutor opens the trial by stating that the three accusers are the Defarges and Dr. Manette. Defarge explains that he has retrieved a paper from the Doctor's old cell in the Bastille and this contains the denouncement of Darnay.

Interpretation

It is clear that Carton has made some serious decision regarding himself and Darnay, but Dickens keeps this hidden for the time being. Again the resurrection theme comes to the fore. It is interesting that Mr. Lorry has become a father figure for Carton.

All that the reader can be sure of is that Carton has prepared himself to die.

Yet again another thread of the plot is woven into the picture i.e. the paper being found in Manette's cell.

Chapter 10: The denouncement

Summary

We now learn the story of Dr. Manette's paper found in the Bastille.

In 1757, Dr. Manette was called to a country house outside Paris by two noblemen. They were twins. He was asked to care for a delirious young peasant woman and her dying brother. The brother tells the Doctor that the noblemen had raped the woman and caused the death of the woman's husband and father. The man took his younger sister to safety and then returned to try and rescue his older sister from the twin noblemen. He was stabbed by one of the twins and when he died he cursed the brothers and their family line. The peasant woman also died shortly afterwards and the Doctor was instructed to remain silent about the incident. The Doctor decided to write a letter to the court concerning these episodes revealing that the brothers' names were Evremonde. The surviving younger sister was Mme. Defarge. The Doctor had personally delivered the letter, but the Evremonde brothers had seen it and arranged for the Doctor's kidnap and imprisonment. After the document had been read in the courtroom, the spectators called for Darnay's death and this would be performed on the following day.

Interpretation

The reader has wondered throughout the novel what the Doctor's secret was. Now that the secret is out, the climax of the book has been reached. The Doctor has moved from being Darnay's savior to being his denouncer and it is his handwriting that has condemned his son-in-law to death.

Various other things are also explained, i.e. Mme. Defarge's bitterness towards the Evremonde line can now be fully understood. She wishes revenge for the annihilation of her family line and the reader is in no doubt that Lucie and her child will be the next victim of her campaign.

Again we see duality in the form of the Evremonde twin brother. Both are evil and they feed off one another in their excesses.

Chapter 11: Dusk

Summary

Lucie is devastated at the verdict and the Doctor cries out in anguish, wringing his hands in frustration. Lucie faints and Carton carries her to the waiting coach.

Back at their lodgings, young Lucie begs Carton to help her parents. Lucie is still unconscious when Carton takes his leave by gently kissing her and saying 'a life you love'. He also urges Dr. Manette to try and influence the judges one more time.

Interpretation

The courtroom scenes are full of Victorian melodrama and in this day and age, they seem too sweet and the dialogue dated. The exchanges between the characters seem almost comical, full of saccharine endearments and devout sentimentality. One wonders if Dickens is using some sort of comic relief, as recent events in the novel have been depressing.

Carton's final statement to the unconscious Lucie 'a life you love' recalls his previous words to her when he told her 'there is a man who would give his life to keep a life you love beside you'.

Chapter 12: Plans for escape

Summary

Carton goes to the Defarge wine shop in order to make himself known to the local citizens. Mme. Defarge notices the resemblance between Carton and Darnay, but Carton pretends that he knows very little French.

The Vengeance and the three Jacques discuss what they should do about Lucie, her daughter and Dr. Manette. Mme. Defarge of course wants them all to be exterminated, but Defarge believes the killings should be limited. Carton returns to Mr. Lorry to warn him of the danger and to have a carriage ready for everybody at 2.00 p.m. the following day.

Interpretation

It is clear that Mme. Defarge suffered a traumatic childhood at the hands of the Evremonde family. She wants to wipe out the entire family including the innocent wife and daughter. Defarge himself thinks there should be a limit to the killing.

The Defarges have different uses for the Revolution. The husband clearly sees it as an instrument of change to bring improvement to the masses, but the wife regards the Revolution as a tool to aid her in her retribution of the Evremonde line.

Chapter 13: The Execution

Summary

Darnay has written letters to his family and at 1.00 p.m. in the afternoon Carton enters his cell. He has obtained a drug from a pharmacy and he drugs Darnay. Two guards who believe that Darnay is Carton carry him out of the prison and Carton is taken to a larger cell where fifty-two prisoners await execution.

Only one person notices the swap and that is a meek seamstress who asks if Carton will hold her hand on the way to the guillotine.

Meanwhile, the coach containing Mr. Lorry, the Doctor, Lucie and daughter, and Darnay leaves Paris. Darnay is still unconscious. They make their escape out of France.

Interpretation

Again the theme of doubles appears in the book.

Carton uses his resemblance to Darnay to save his life for a second time, but the difference is that Carton will lose his life as a result.

Initially the reader may think that the sacrifice is made out of his love for Lucie and her child, but clearly Dickens has made the point that Darnay was everything that Carton could have been, so in a way, he is resurrecting his own life through Darnay. He has also planned and managed the whole escape himself, when the others could only stand by helplessly. This gives him self-satisfaction in that when pushed to it, he has great abilities.

Chapter 14: The knitting is complete

Summary

Mme. Defarge is now going to denounce Lucie and her daughter and Dr. Manette that very evening and she goes to Lucie's residence hoping and knowing that she will find Lucie grieving, which is an offence in the Republic as no grief is to be shown for those convicted of treason.

Mme. Defarge enters the apartment to find only Miss Pross, who pretends that the family is within, behind the closed door. The two cannot understand each other's languages, but they know immediately that they are enemies. Mme. Defarge calls out to Lucie and then when there is no reply she suspects that they have already fled. She attempts to leave the room, but Miss Pross blocks her way. Mme. Defarge pulls out a gun, but Miss Pross strikes it aside and the gun goes off killing Mme. Defarge and permanently deafening Miss Pross.

She leaves the apartment and meets with Jerry Cruncher and they make their escape.

Interpretation

There is yet another twist in the tale in that one of the central characters is killed by a relatively minor character, but you will recall that Dickens made it clear that Miss Pross was the protector of Lucie, describing her as a wild looking woman.

The argument between the two women is the culmination of Miss Pross' single-minded devotion to Lucie and Mme. Defarge's determination to exterminate her. Both these women have dedicated their lives to this family, but with different purposes in mind.

The conflict, of course, is also between love and hate, but love can only win when it is as strong as hatred.

Carton also has defeated Mme. Defarge's hate by organizing Darnay's escape.

The sacrifices are that Miss Pross loses her hearing, and Carton loses his life.

Chapter 15: The ultimate sacrifice

Summary

The carts carrying the fifty-two prisoners trundle through the Paris streets and the people crowd round to see Evremonde go to his death.

Carton ignores the yelling throng and focuses on the seamstress. He comforts her and recalls the resurrection passage from the Bible.

The Vengeance is concerned at the absence of Mme. Defarge.

As he mounts the steps towards the guillotine, Carton has a vision where he foresees long and happy lives for Mr. Lorry, Dr. Manette and the Darnay family, all of who will remember him lovingly. He also pictures Lucie and Darnay having a son, whom they call Carton.

The book ends with the famous line 'It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known'.

Interpretation

The book finishes with Dickens emphasis on the important themes aired previously. The Revolution was a result of years of subjugation and opulence enjoyed by the aristocracy.

Again we have dualism between the carts carrying the fifty-two prisoners to their death paralleled to the carriages of the aristocracy mentioned at the beginning.

Death often leads to resurrection, and Dickens uses this theme to conclude the book with a vision of hope.

The Revolution in France will eventually wear itself out and the people of France will be resurrected from the depths of evil.

Carton comforts the seamstress saying that she will find everlasting life together with the other innocents killed at the hands of the mob. He also obtains comfort by the thought that in a sense he will be resurrected through his namesake i.e. the Darnay's son.

Questions for Study with ideas for answers.

Q: Dickens uses duality throughout the novel. Apart from the obvious Darnay/Carton resemblance, give examples of similar dualities for characters and events.

Ideas: *Lucie Manette/Mme. Defarge* are opposites. Lucie represents the ideal, natural woman, daughter, wife, mother whereas Mme. Defarge is wholly unnatural being vengeful, mother of the Revolution, not giving life, but giving death, and without scruples.

The Evremonde twins are the same. They are both evil and feed on each other's depravity making them double the force.

Stryver & Carton/Darnay & Dr. Manette - meetings re wishing to marry Lucie. These two scenes are mirror images of each other in that Stryver's reasons for wishing to marry Lucie are purely practical and misguided whereas Darnay is clearly in love with Lucie and he respects her.

London/Paris. Both these cities have extremes of wealth and poverty, but the excesses of the rich are more extravagant in Paris where the aristocrats feel totally secure in their way of life and cannot envisage any change. In London the Law is used to greater effect in keeping the lower classes subdued where three-quarters of offences carry the death penalty. The rich do not broadcast their affluence to the same degree that the French aristocracy does and this may be due to the fact that the fight for independence in America has tempered their exuberance.

Carriages/carts. At the start of Book 1 the aristocrats would drive recklessly through the city streets and on one occasion the Evremonde coach killed a child. At the end of Book 3 the aristocrats are taken through the city streets in carts to the guillotine to face their execution.

Q: The theme of resurrection runs through the entire novel. Give examples.

Ideas: Mr. Lorry resurrects Dr. Manette after eighteen years of living death in the Bastille.

Jerry Cruncher resurrects dead bodies from their graves to the slabs of dissecting doctors.

Roger Cly fakes his own funeral and is resurrected as a prison spy in revolutionary France.

Charles Darnay is firstly resurrected in London by Sidney Carton and then secondly in Paris again by Sidney Carton who makes the ultimate sacrifice.

Sidney Carton's wasted life is resurrected by his selfless act of substituting himself to face execution in place of Darnay. He goes to his death with the satisfaction of knowing that his life now has meaning, comforted by the Biblical quote 'I am the resurrection and the life'.

Q: Some of Dickens' phrases encapsulate for the reader all the information that is required on a specific theme in the book and these have become famous quotations. Give examples of some of these.

Ideas: '*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness*'. The narrator makes this statement and in doing so sets the scene for this entire period of history. The reader is in no doubt what is going to follow. There will be good and bad times for the heroes and heroines of this story.

'I have sometimes sat alone here of an evening, listening, until I have made the echoes out to be the echoes of all the footsteps that are coming by-and-by into our lives'. Lucie Manette makes this remark whilst living in London and it is a premonition she has that soon her life and that of her future family will be filled with turmoil. The echoes of footsteps are those that she will hear close-by when she will find herself in revolution-torn France.

'It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known'. Carton has finally triumphed over his wasted life by making this final sacrificial act, which gives him peace of mind knowing how much good will come out of his death.