

The Nineteenth Century Novel
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Chapter – 34
Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities Book II: Chapters 22 - 24 (Continued)

Hello and welcome back. In this lecture we are going to finish up Book II, and we are going to see the conflation of the historical or revolutionary plot with the domestic plot in which our key characters are there such as Darnay, Lucy Manette and her father. So we are going to see the coming together of the two plots in this novel in this particular session.

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Now the fire is rising, and the context for the fire is this burning of the chateau which belonged to Marquis Evremonde. And the people are delighted to see that the chateau has been set afire, and what did they do? They put up candles in every dull pane of glass in their homes. And the mender of the roads is the one who was first inspired to do this activity, and he gets the candles in fact from Gabelle the tax collector, the one who is connected to the chateau and who wanted to ring the alarm bells when this fire was set in this palace.

So the narrator says that the mender of the roads, was once so submissive to authority, but now he remarked that the carriages were good to make bonfires with, and that post horses would roast. In fact, this is a threat to Monsieur Gabelle if he refused to oblige with the candle.

So he says that if you do not give us the candles, then we will set fire to the carriages, and we will roast the horses as well. So Gabelle buckles in and offers the men candles with which they light up their home. So it is a symbolic act again; with the burning of the chateau, there is light in these homes.

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Dickens' A tale of Two Cities Book II : Chapters 22

Gabelle

- "Monsieur Gabelle did heavily bar his door, and retire to hold counsel with himself. The result of that conference was that Gabelle again withdrew himself to his house-top behind his stack of chimneys; this time resolved, if his door were broken in (he was a small Southern man of retaliative temperament), to pitch himself head foremost over the parapet, and crush a man or two below."

Gabelle is scared, and reasonably so. So what he does is he "did heavily bar his door, and retire to hold counsel with himself. The result of that conference was that Gabelle again withdrew himself to his house-top behind his stack of chimneys; this time resolved, if his door were broken in (he was a small Southern man of retaliative temperament), to pitch himself head foremost over the parapet, and crush a man or two below."

Gabelle is frightened that the men would turn on him, because he is the tax collector, he was the tax collector for the previous Marquis, and he is closely associated with the chateau. So he goes inside his home, bars his door, in fact he goes to the house top and is taking refuge behind his stack of chimneys, and he has resolved that if the people did break into his home, he is going to throw himself from the top of his home and by this act he would crush to death a man or two. So he is determined to fight.

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Chapter 24: Drawn to the Loadstone Rock

- "Like the fabled rustic who raised the Devil with infinite pains, and was so terrified at the sight of him that he could ask the Enemy no question, but immediately fled; so, Monseigneur, after boldly reading the Lord's Prayer backwards for a great number of years, and performing many other potent spells for compelling the Evil One, no sooner beheld him in his terrors than he took to his noble heels."

Now chapter 24 is titled Drawn to the Loadstone Rock. The question is, what is the Loadstone rock and who is drawn to it? These questions will be answered in the context of Charles Darnay, and so that is the symbolic message that the narrator is giving us in terms of the chapter title. Now this is how the revolution is described by the narrator in this chapter. So the revolution is like a devil that has been brought up by the Monsieur, the Monseigneur. And they did, you know, bring up this devil, and once they see the devil they are frightened. So the revolution is symbolically compared to the devil.

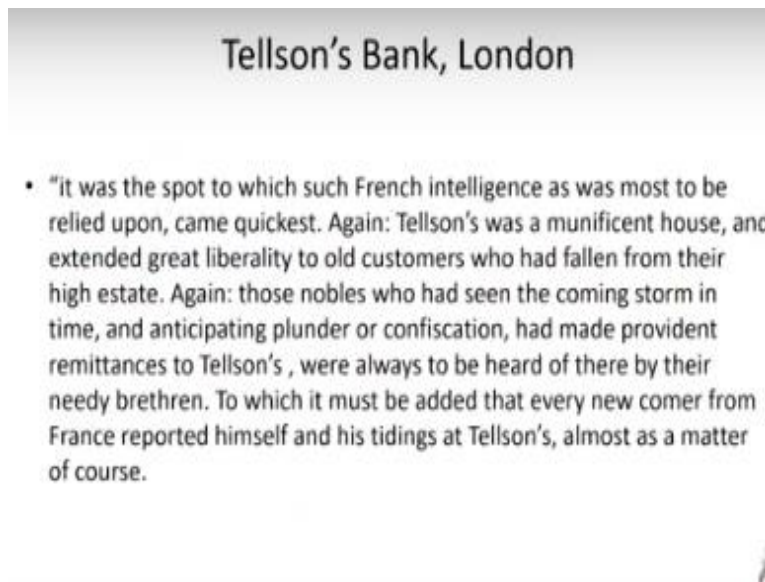
"Like the fabled rustic who raised the devil with infinite pains, and was so terrified at the sight of him that he could ask the Enemy no question but immediately fled." So, like in the fabled is the adjective referring to the fables. Like in the stories of ancient days, the rustic brings up the devil, and once the devil is there he is so scared to ask the devil any question but immediately flees, and that is what the aristocrats do. They flee to England, they take refuge in England. So Monseigneur, and this Monseigneur becomes a representation of the entire aristocracy, nobility, "after boldly reading the Lord's prayer backwards for a great number of years and performing many other potent spells so compelling the Evil One, no sooner beheld him in his terrors than he took to his noble heels."

The narrator is saying that the monseigneur, in other words the aristocracy, has been reading the Lord's prayer backwards, and that will bring the Evil One according to Christian faith. So they

have been doing this, so they are the ones who are responsible for bringing up the devil, but once the evil one is here they just take to his noble heels.

So the message is that the revolution is the act of the nobility, act of the aristocracy, brought upon the country by their bad behaviour, by their harsh ruling, by the cruel administration of the country. And once they see the result of the actions for a period of years they cannot bear to see what they have brought upon themselves and that they are running away from their own country.

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Where do they run to? In England they run to Tellson's bank, and Tellson bank becomes the haven becomes the place that all these aristocrats flock to. They bring their papers, they bring their money, they bring their property to Tellson's bank, and they also they bring their news to this place. So Tellson's was a munificent house, was a generous house, and they "extended greater liberality to old customers who had fallen from their high estate. Again: those nobles who had seen the coming storm in time, and anticipating plunder or confiscation, had made provident remittances to Tellson's, were always to be heard of there by their needy brethren. To which it must be added that every newcomer from France reported himself and his tidings at Tellson's, almost as a matter of course."

So there were people who had moved to England quite early on when they got indications of such radical happenings. Quite early on, say they brought all their property and their money

there. So those people were already there, and there was this fresh arrivals from France because of the revolution. So there were a gathering of French aristocrats in this bank, and going to Tellson was the routine thing to do, it was a matter of course. And Tellson's was a generous house, they did extend a lot of generosity to people who were high up before and now they were fallen on bad times.

So it is a point of information too, information and support. And again Tellson is symbolic of British government itself. So this munificence does indicate the nature of the country too.

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Mr Jarvis Lorry

- “you can have no conception of the difficulty with which our business is transacted, and of the peril in which our books and papers over yonder are involved. The Lord above knows what the compromising consequences would be to numbers of people, if some of our documents were seized or destroyed; and they might be, at any time, you know, for who can say that Paris is not set a-fire to-day, or sacked to-morrow! Now a judicious selection from these with the least possible delay, and the burying of them, or otherwise getting of them out of harm’s way, is within the power (without loss of precious time) of scarcely any one but myself, if any one.”

Now Mr Jarvis Lorry is entrusted with an interesting job, a difficult job, an adventurous job. And what is that job? He has been asked to go to the French branch of Tellson, which is in Paris, and he is supposed to recover some important documents of his customers so that they can be retained with a lot of security. And this is an extremely difficult job, and Mr Jarvis Lorry is having a conversation with Charles Darnay who does not want him to go to France because these are difficult times, but then these are the reasons that Lorry offers.

He says that “The Lord above knows what the compromise and consequences would be to numbers of people, if some of our documents were seized or destroyed.” So he says that there are a lot of confidential documents that we have in our safekeeping, and if these confidential documents fall into the hands of their opponents, we do not know what will be the consequences.

The consequences might be dreadful. “They might be at any time, you know, for who can say that Paris is not set a fire today or sacked tomorrow.” And there is also this threat that the whole place might be set fire to, just as the chateau was, you know, burnt down. So it is not safe for these documents to lie there unprotected. “Now a judicious selection from these with the least possible delay, and the burying of them, or otherwise getting of them out of harm's way, is within the power of scarcely anyone but myself, if anyone.”

So he says that it is important that I go there and collect the important papers and either bury them or bring them here for safekeeping, and nobody else but myself is able to do this task for the bank. So this is what he says to Jarvis Lorry. So again the idea of secret documents, and the havoc that they would create if found by the wrong people is indicated in the scene. So that is one thematic idea that is uppermost in terms of this excerpt. The other is the need to bury certain documents in order to protect the reputation and the history of certain people is also indicated in this excerpt, and this burying of documents also reminds us of something that was secreted by Defarge from the cell, from the Bastille cell that Alexander Manette occupied for 18 years.

So he did take out some secret document from that place, and he has secreted it. So the idea that secrets are buried so that they can be, you know, unearthed at a later point of time. And this again connects us to the idea of resurrection, the coming up, the unearthing of certain things and ideas and people, and people in terms of the job of Jerry Cruncher also significant.

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The Letter

"Very pressing. To Monsieur heretofore the Marquis St. Evrémonde, of France. Confided to the cares of Messers. Tellson and Co., Bankers, London, England."

A letter is brought to Tellson's bank, and that letter is addressed to the current Marquis Evremonde, and nobody knows where the current marquis is. So this letter is brought to Tellson's bank and Mr Lorry asks around as to who this person might be, and this is what is written on the letter. Very pressing. Very pressing being very important or urgent, to Monsieur heretofore the Marquis St. Evremonde, of France. Confided to the cares of Messers. Tellson and Co., Bankers, London, England.

So this is addressed to the heir to the Marquis Evremonde who was killed by Gaspard, and who is the heir? Charles Darnay is the heir, and nobody knows that not even Mr. Lorry. So this is a secret, and Charles Darnay sees that letter and he knows that that letter is for himself, and he gets the letter and says that he knows this Marquis and he would pass it on to him.

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Darnay's secret

- "On the marriage morning, Dr. Manette had made it his one urgent and express request to Charles Darnay, that the secret of this name should be—unless he, the Doctor, dissolved the obligation—kept inviolate between them. Nobody else knew it to be his name; his own wife had no suspicion of the fact; Mr Lorry could have none."

So this secret is something that we know is kept even from Lucie Manette, and the narrator reminds of that context here. "On the marriage morning, Doctor Manette had made it his one urgent and express request to Charles Darnay, that the secret of his name should be - unless he, the Doctor, dissolved the obligation - kept inviolate between them." Doctor Manette asks Darnay on the day of his marriage not to reveal his real identity to anybody, unless he asks him to keep it inviolate to protect the secret further.

"Nobody else knew it to be his name; his own wife had no suspicion of the fact; Mr. Lorry could have none." So when Mr Lorry gets this letter at the bank, he does not know that this Marquis St Evremonde is in fact Charles Darnay. Charles Darnay is living under a modified name, a kind of a secret name in England. And why is he retaining this new name instead of revealing it to a friend like Lorry? That reason is offered in this particular excerpt. So Mr Lorry does not know that he is this heir and Charles Darnay is associated with this hateful nobility in France. In fact, Lucie herself does not know.

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Monseigneur on the next Evrémonde heir



The people who are milling about, the French aristocrats who are milling about in Tellson's bank, do not know either the Charles Darnay is the new Marquis, and they talk about him in awful terms. They say that he is the de generate successor, Darnay is the degenerate successor to the previous Marquis who was murdered by Gaspard, and they call him as a craven man, a really abject person, a horrible man who abandoned his position as the Marquis.

And this is very ironic because all these people who throw calumny on Charles Darnay, all these people who condemn, especially the aristocrats, have themselves abandoned their posts. They are also runaways, and they are here to protect their lives here in England.

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AMONG THE TALKERS
Among the talkers was Stryver, of the King's Bench Bar, . . . broaching to Monseigneur his devices for blowing the people up, and exterminating them from the face of the earth (p 112) by Fred Barnard. 1874.



And this is the scene illustrated by Fred Barnard in 1874, and we have this comic character Stryver here, this is Mr. Stryver. So among the talkers was Stryver, of the King's Bench Bar, he is an advocate if you remember, broaching to Monseigneur his devices for blowing the people up, and to exterminating them from the face of the earth. So Stryver is talking to these aristocrats who have run away from France, and he says that he has brilliant ideas to kill, to decimate, to destroy the people, the peasants who are behind the French revolution. And he also condemns the Marquis, Stryver condemns the Marquis who has run away from France to England.

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Mr Stryver's opinion

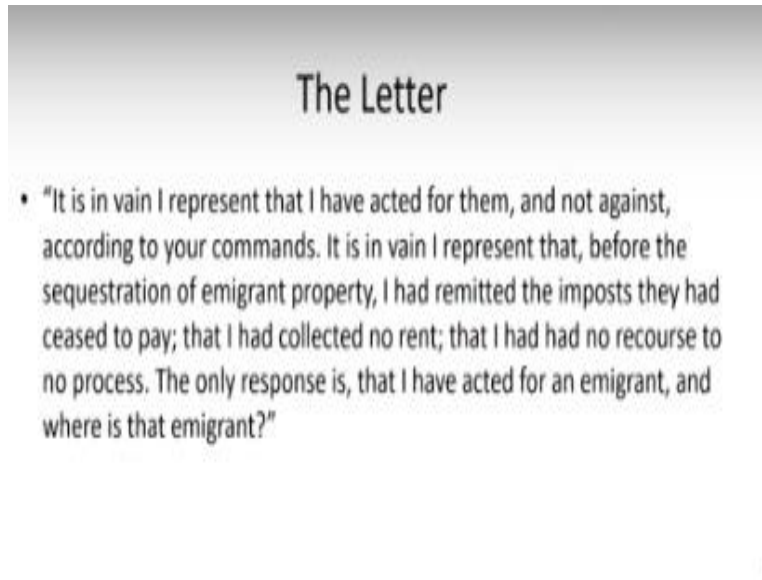
- "Here is a fellow, who, infected by the most pestilent and blasphemous code of devilry that ever was known, abandoned his property to the vilest scum of the earth that ever did murder by wholesale, and you ask me why I am sorry that a man who instructs youth knows him? Well, but I'll answer you. I am sorry because I believe there is contamination in such a scoundrel. That's why."

And when Darnay says please do not talk ill about the man, Stryver is not very happy, and he says that "here is a fellow, who, infected by the most pestilent and blasphemous code of devilry that was ever known, abandoned his property to the vilest scum of the earth that ever did murder by wholesale, and you ask me why I am sorry that a man who instructs youth knows him? Well, but I will answer you. I am sorry because I believe there is contamination in such a scoundrel. That is why."

So the immediate context for this retort by Stryver is that Charles says he knows the Marquis, the heir to Evremonde's property, and Stryver says that he has abandoned his property in France to people who do murder wholesale. So he has given up his position to these peasantry who are radicals, who commit heinous crimes, mass crimes, and he says that I am sorry to know that you a man who instructs children, young people, know this new heir to Marquis Evremonde. I

believe there is contamination, he says that you might be contaminated by such an association with this scoundrel. So he calls the heir to Marquis Evremonde a scoundrel.

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Now what is in this letter? And this letter is from Gabelle, and if you remember, Gabelle is the tax collector, he is an employee of Marquis Evremonde, and he is also a man who has done service for Charles Darnay, who has acted upon his orders. So the letter is written by him, Gabelle, to Darnay. It says, "It is in vain I represent that I have acted for them, and not against, according to your commands. It is in vain I represent that, before the sequestration of emigrant property, I had remitted the imposts they had ceased to pay; that I had collected no rent, that I had had no recourse to no process. The only response is, that I have acted for an emigrant and where is that emigrant?"

The letter says that I am innocent, I just did what you asked me to do. I acted under your command, Darnay's commands, and what was that command? To collect no rent, not to accuse the people, not to make complaints against the people. And he says that even though I did not commit any crime against the people, I am condemned because I acted for an emigrant, and that emigrant is Darnay, because he is not in France but in England. And where is that emigrant? Where is Darnay is the question that both Gabelle and the people ask.

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Drawn to the Loadstone Rock



And Gabelle begs, he begs to Darnay saying that "I have been true to you. Oh Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, I pray you to be true to me." So Gabelle's letter is crucial here. It is that, you know, weapon that the narrator, that Dickens uses to kind of impel, tempt, force Darnay to travel from England back to this hotbed, this revolutionary France, where he will be kind of embroiled in further complications and he will end up in prison.

So Gabelle is that, you know, narrative element, that figure that brings Darnay from England back to France. So what is the context again for Darnay? The narrator wants us to remember that "he had oppressed no man, he had imprisoned no man, and he was so far from having harshly exacted payment of his dues, that he had relinquished them of his own will, thrown himself on a world with no favour in it, won his private place there and earned his own bread."

Darnay is absolutely blameless. He did not commit any crime against anybody. He has not imprisoned anybody, he did not exact any kind of payment from the people under him, he had given up his own authority and he had come to England where he has obtained a private place as a tutor, and he has a started to earn his own bread by his own labour. So Darnay is blameless yet he is accused of being an emigrant and Gabelle wants him back, so do the people.

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Drawn to the Loadstone Rock

- "His resolution was made. He must go to Paris.
- Yes. The Loadstone Rock was drawing him, and he must sail on, until he struck. He knew of no rock; he saw hardly any danger."
- A loadstone is a magnet, specifically one consisting of magnetic oxide of iron. The word "load-stone," meaning literally "way-stone," comes from the use of magnets in marine navigation (*Oxford English Dictionary*); figuratively, a loadstone is an object that attracts.

So Darnay has made up his mind, "His resolution was made. He must go to Paris. Yes. The Loadstone Rock was drawing him and he must sail on, until he struck. He knew of no rock, he hardly saw any danger." So Darnay decides to go back home in order to release Gabelle from his imprisonment, and he indirectly, the narrator indirectly says that the loadstone rock was tempting him. What is the load stone rock?

It is a magnet, specifically one consisting of magnetic oxide of iron. So the word Loadstone literally means way stone, and it comes from the use of magnets in marine navigation. So figuratively, a load stone is an object that attracts, and here in this context France, revolutionary France is the one that is attracting Darnay, tempting Darnay back home, and he is going to hit against it and find himself in great trouble.

Even though Darnay is unaware that he is heading towards any danger. So Darnay is innocent in this regard, he thinks that his job is simple, just go home save his servant and then come back again. But things are not as simple as they seem and the narrator gives us this warning symbolically through this metaphoric usage of the Loadstone Rock. Thank you for watching I

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