

TALE OF TWO CITIES.

BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

257

At length the sun rose so high that it struck a kindly ray, as of hope or protection, directly down upon the old prisoner's head. The favour was too much to bear ; in an instant the barrier of dust and chaff, that had stood surprisingly long, went to the winds, and Saint Antoine had got him !

It was known directly, to the furthest confines of the crowd. Defarge had but sprung over a railing and a table, and folded the miserable wretch in a deadly embrace—Madame Defarge had but followed and turned her hand in one of the ropes with which he was tied—The Vengeance and Jacques Three were not yet up with them, and the men at the windows had not yet swooped into the Hall, like birds of prey from their high perches—when the cry seemed to go up, all over the city, “Bring him out ! Bring him to the lamp !”

Down, and up, and head foremost on the steps of the building ; now, on his knees ; now, on his feet ; now, on his back ; dragged, and struck at, and stifled by the bunches of grass and straw that were thrust into his face by hundreds of hands ; torn, bruised, panting, bleeding, yet always entreating and beseeching for mercy ; now, full of vehement agony of action, with a small clear space about him as the people drew one another back that they might see ; now, a log of dead wood drawn through a forest of legs ; he was hauled to the nearest street corner where one of the fatal lamps swung, and there Madame Defarge let him go—as a cat might have done to a mouse—and silently and composedly looked at him while they made ready, and while he besought her : the women passionately screeching at him all the time, and the men sternly calling out to have him killed with grass in his mouth. Once he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him shrieking ; twice he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him shrieking ; then, the rope was merciful and held him, and his head was soon upon a pike, with grass enough in the mouth for all Saint Antoine to dance at the sight of.