XV

THE nervous distress had gone—with extraordinary suddenness; and a curiously unruffled calm filled her mind. Nothing matters. This is not *all.*

She was a deeply religious woman, but quite unorthodox in the letter of her faith. There might be as many rituals as there are social communities, a different altar for every day of the year; but, however you dressed the eternal glory and the limitless power in garments taken from the poor wardrobe of man's imagination, the veritable God was unchanged, unchanging. And her toleration of the diverse opinions of others enabled her to worship as comfortably under the high-vaulted magnificence of a Catholic cathedral as within the narrow shabbiness of a Wesleyan chapel. The perfume of swinging censers did not cloud her brain, nor the ugliness of whitewashed walls grieve her eyes—any consecrated place of prayer was good enough to pray in.

But for the sake of old associations, by reason of its familiar homeliness, its air of solidity without pomp, and a simplicity that yet is not undignified, she loved this parish church of St. Saviour's; and it was here, sitting through the long undecorated service, that mental equanimity was most strangely if temporarily restored to her. Although not participating, she stayed for the celebration of the communion; and while the mystic, symbolic rites were performed, she neither prayed nor meditated. For

her it was a blank pause,—no thought,—nothing; but nevertheless she became aware of a deepening perception of rest and peace, and the feeling that she had been uplifted—raised to a spiritual height from which she could look down on the common pains of earth, and see their intrinsically trivial character.

Our life, be it what it may, does not end here. This is not all. Something wider, more massive, infinitely grander, is coming to us, if we will wait patiently.

She sat motionless until all the congregation had dispersed; and when she left the church, there was an expression of gravity on her face and a sense of contentment in her heart. At the sight of some children romping by the churchyard railings, she smiled. A boy pushed a girl with mirthful vigorousness, and she spoke to him gently.

"Don't be rough, little boy. Take care, and don't hurt her—even in play."

Then she gave the children "silver sixpences to buy sweeties," and went slowly down the court. She could think kindly and benignantly of all the world. There was not a tinge of bitterness remaining when she thought of her husband.

As she lay in bed one morning after a night of dreamless sleep, a chance word dropped by Yates set her lazily thinking of the last date on which she had suffered from those normal and not accidental fluctuations of energy that are produced by periodically recurrent causes. Beginning to count the weeks, she fancied that some error of memory was confusing her—time of late had moved with such heavy feet; what seemed long was really short in the story of her days. Then she began

to count the days, trying to make fixed points, and laboriously filling the gaps that intervened. Then she stopped counting and thinking.

Yates had gone out of the room, and she lay quite still, with relaxed limbs and slackened respiration.

And her mind seemed dull and void, though wonder stirred and thrilled. It was like dawn in a hill-girt valley—black darkness mingling with silver mist; shadows growing thin, but not retreating; the ribbed sides of the mountains very slowly becoming more and more solidly stupendous, but refusing to disclose the details of their form or colour, although, beyond the vast ramparts with which they aid the night, the sun is surely rising. Not till the sun bursts in fire above the eastern wall does the day begin.

So, with flooding golden light, the splendid hope came to her.

She waited for a few more days. There was no mistake; she knew that she had counted correctly; but she pretended to herself that she must allow a wide margin to cover the contingency of miscalculation.

Then she spoke of the facts to Yates, after extracting a solemn vow of secrecy. Yates said they could draw only one conclusion from the facts; it was impossible to doubt—but they would know for certain next time. They must count again; and, after allowing another wide margin, settle the approaching date which would infallibly confirm their hopes or cruelly dissipate them.

For a little while longer, then, she must keep her splendid secret.

Her heart was overflowing with a joy such as she had thought she could never feel again. And with the warm

stream of bliss there were gushing fountains of gratitude. She will forgive her husband everything, because he has crowned her life with this ineffable glory.

It justifies her marriage; in a manner more perfect than she had dared to imagine, it gives her back her youth. All mothers at the cradle have one age—the age of motherhood. And irresistibly it will win his respect and love—some love must come for the mother of his babe.

Although she was waiting with so much anxiety until the second significant epoch should be passed, she found that time glided by her now easily and swiftly. Yates—the wise old spinster—assuming in a more marked degree that air of matronly authority that she had worn before the wedding, told her of the vital importance of taking good rest, good nourishment, and good cheerful views regarding the future.

So she often lay upon the sofa in her room—resting—smiling and dreaming. She had no real doubt now. It was miraculous, glorious, true. She thought of the many symptoms that she had noticed but never considered, so that the revelation of their meaning brought the same glad surprise as to a young and innocent bride. She might have guessed. The dreadful instability of nerves; longings for the widest outlet to physical effort, alternating with weak horrors of the slightest task; and, above all, the facile tears always springing to her eyes—these things, in one who by habit was firm of purpose and who wept with difficulty, should have been promptly recognised as unfailing signs of her condition. Lesser signs, too, had not been wanting—the vagrant fancies, the mental ups and downs which correspond with the changed states of the body; and she groped in the dim past, comparing her recent sensations and reveries with those

experienced twenty-three years ago, before the birth of Enid. She might have guessed. . . . But truly perhaps she had been too humble of spirit ever to prepare herself for the admission of so proud a thought. Even in the brightly coloured dreams from which realities had so rudely awakened her, she was not advancing towards so triumphant an apotheosis.

But no morning sickness! Not yet. It will begin later this time—for the second child; and it will not be so bad. That first time—when poor Enid was coming into the world—she was but a slip of a girl; depressed by heavy care; worn out by the watchings and nursings of her mother's illness. But now everything was and would be different. She possessed robust and long-established health; her husband was a magnificently strong man; their child would be a most noble gorgeous creature.

And each time that she thought thus of the child's father, the fountain springs of her intense gratitude rose and gushed higher and broader. She was only vaguely conscious of the extent of the revulsion of her feelings where he was concerned. The change seemed so natural and so little mysterious that she did not measure it. With the awakening of the new hopes, there had arisen a new love for him—a love purged of all impurities.

This was the real love—wide-reaching sympathy, infinite tenderness; the love that can understand all and forgive all; the instinct of protection blending with the instinct of submission; the maternal feeling extending beyond the unborn child to its creator—making them both her children.

One day when he said he wanted to ask her a favour, she told him, before he added another word, that she felt sure she would grant the favour. She was reading, in

the drawing-room; and she slipped the book under the cushion of the sofa, and looked up at him with an expectant smile.

Then, showing some slight embarrassment, he explained that he had been "outrunning the constable."

All the arrangements of the partnership were formally settled; nothing had been overlooked by clever Mr. Prentice; everything was cut and dried; certain proportionately fixed sums were to be passed from time to time to the private credit of each partner; and then at the appointed seasons, when the true profits of the firm had been ascertained, amounts making up the balance of earned income would be paid over. All the usual precautions, and some that perhaps were rather unusual, had been adopted in order to prevent the partners from anticipating profits by premature drafts upon the funds of the firm. But now, as Marsden explained, he had exhausted his private account and was in sad need of a little ready to keep him going.

She instantly agreed to give him the money—with the pleasure a too indulgent mother might feel in giving to a spendthrift son. Extravagance—what is it? Only one of those faults of youth by which the thoughtless young culprits endear themselves to their elderly guardians.

"Yes, Dick, I'll write the cheque at once. My chequebook is over there."

She rose slowly from the sofa, and slowly moved across the room to the Sheraton desk near the window. Yates had begged her to beware of abrupt and hasty movements, and she walked about the house now with careful, well-considered footsteps.

"Of course, old girl, if you can see your way to making the amount for a little *more?*"

And she made it for a little more.

He was delighted. "Upon my word, Jane, you're a trump. No rot about you. When you see anyone in a hole, you don't badger him with a pack of questions—you just pull him out of the hole." . . .

He thanked her and praised her so much that she melted in tenderness, and almost told him her secret. She looked at him fondly and admiringly. He seemed so strong and so brave—with his stiff close-cropped hair and his white evenly-shaped teeth,—laughing gleefully as he pocketed his present,—like a great happy schoolboy. While she looked at him, the secret was trying to escape, was burning her lips, and knocking at her breast with each quickened heart-beat.

She succeeded, however, in restraining the expansive impulse. The delay can but heighten the triumph—it is so much grander to be able to say, not "I *think*," but "I *know*."

When he had hurried away to cash his cheque, she took out the Book that she had been reading and had shyly concealed under the cushion. It was the Bible. Reverently reopening it and musingly turning the leaves, she glanced at those chapters of Genesis that tell of the first gift of human life.

. . . "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

The softness and the exaltation of her mood showed very plainly in the expression of her face as she read the nobly fabled origin of love and marriage. While reading she made vows to God and to herself. If all went well, she would cheerfully bear the hardest usage at her husband's hands. She would never reproach him, she would

ever be a comfort to him. If and so long as their child lived, the torch-bearer carrying the fire of life kindled from their joint lives should guide her steps through the darkest places towards the distant glimmer of eternal light.

That night she was roused from her first sleep by the sound of heavily blundering footsteps. Mr. Marsden had come home in an unusually jolly state. His wife heard him stumbling about the adjacent room, knocking over a chair, laughing, and singing drunken snatches of song.

He had never before been quite so jolly. For a minute the hilarious music saddened her; but then she felt quite happy again. He was not really drunk—merely excited, elated. And besides, this sort of thing would not occur in the future: a generous fear of the questioning eyes of an innocent child would help to keep him straight.

And she fell to thinking of domestic arrangements that would be necessary before the great event. His bedroom and the dressing-room used to be the day and night nursery when Enid was a baby. The grandmother slept in the room at present occupied by Yates, and Yates slept in a smaller room. How would they manage now? This room should be the night nursery—she herself could sleep anywhere. Probably Yates would have to give up her nice room—but Yates would not mind. And, yes—the difficulty must be confronted—Dick must give up his dressing-room. Would he mind?

No. Every difficulty would be surmounted. All would be smoothly and easily arranged in the end. Dreamily sweeping away the difficulties, she sank again into restful sleep.

That important second date was drawing near, and Yates was becoming more and more fussily attentive. It

taxed all her strength of mind to keep the secret to herself; she longed for the time when it might be made public property.

"Look here, ma'am," she said mysteriously, "don't let anyone see us opening this parcel. Let's go upstairs and open it there, quiet and comfortable."

"What is it, Yates?"

Upstairs in the bedroom, Yates, with many shrewd nods and meaning smiles, untied her parcel, and displayed to Mrs. Marsden its entrancingly fascinating contents.

"Oh, Yates!"

They were the prettiest imaginable little baby-things —woollen socks, flannel robes, etc., articles of costume suitable to the very earliest stage; together with materials for binders, wrappers, and so on, that would require cutting, stitching, *making*.

"The work will do you good," said Yates. "Just to amuse yourself, when you're sitting all alone up here—and to keep your mind off the strain."

"Oh, Yates, they are lovely. Where did you get them?"

"Don't you bother where I got them," said Yates, looking shame-faced all at once. "I don't intend to tell you." But then she went on defiantly: "Well, if you *must* know, I got them in the children's outfitting department—over at Bence's.

Her mistress was not in the least angry. She smiled at the sound of the rival's name;—and, of course, in this particular department there was no rivalry between the two shops.

Yates was particular that her interesting patient should enjoy a moderate amount of fresh air, and advised that

in these cases gentle, carriage exercise is distinctly beneficial.

Several times, therefore, a brougham was procured from Mr. Young's stables, and mistress and maid went for a quiet afternoon drive. Yates would have preferred to enjoy these airings earlier in the day, but she agreed with Mrs. Marsden that a morning drive might appear "conspicuous." As it was, Yates made the excursion quite sufficiently remarkable—hot-water bottle for the patient's feet, rugs for her legs, three or four shawls for her shoulders.

"And don't you drive too fast," said Yates sternly to Mr. Young's coachman. "Take us along quiet. . . . And if you meet any of those great engines on the road, just turn round and go the other way."

"I don't want you frightened," she told Mrs. Marsden, "if only for half a minute."

Mr. Young's horses, at an easy jog trot, took them along very, very quietly; some air, but not too much, blew in upon them pleasantly; and throughout the drive the two women talked unceasingly of the same engrossing subject.

"Which do you hope for, yourself, ma'am?"

"Yates, I scarcely know."

"Well, ma'am, I'll tell you candid, it's a girl *I* am hoping for."

"But whichever it is—boy or girl—you'll love it just the same, won't you, Yates?"

"Indeed I shall, ma'am"

And they discussed christian names.

"If it is a boy, of course I shall wish him to have his father's name for one."

"Yes, I suppose so, ma'am."

"Richard for his first name; and, if Mr. Marsden approves, I shall call him Martin. I should like him to bear the name of Saint Martin—for a little romantic reason of my own. And I also like the name of Roderick —if that isn't too grand."

"I like the plain names best," said Yates. "If it's a girl, I do hope and trust you'll give her your own name, ma'am. You can't never get a better name than Jane. Let her be Miss Jane."

They met no ugly traction engines to upset the horses, and disturb the patient's composure. They chose the level sheltered roads, and avoided the dangerous windy hills; and Mrs. Marsden looked through the half-shut window at the featureless landscape, and thought it almost beautiful, even at this dead time of the year. It was bare and nearly colourless,—all the hedgerows of a dull brown, the far-off woods a misty grey, and here and there, seen through the black field-gates, patches of snow faintly sparkling beneath the feeble light. The tardy spring as yet showed scarce a sign of nascent energy. But the winter had no terrors for her now. There was summer in her heart.

The date had passed; and, passing, had left apparent certainty.

Yates was wildly excited, irrepressibly jubilant.

"You'll tell him now, won't you, ma'am?"

"Yes, I can tell him now."

"Everybody may know it now, ma'am.—And, oh, won't they be glad to hear the news in the shop?"

But naturally Mr. Marsden must hear the news before anybody else; and unluckily Mr. Marsden was not in Mallingbridge to hear it. He had been expected home

two days ago, but something was detaining him in London.

This final useless delay, after the long unavoidable delay, seemed more than Mrs. Marsden could support.

"Oh, why is he away? Oh, Yates, I want him—I want him with me. Oh, oh!" She burst into a sobbing fit, and wrung her hands piteously. "Yates, fetch him. Bring my husband back to me. Don't let him leave me now—of all times."

This was in the morning, before Mrs. Marsden had got up. After sobbing for a little while, she became suddenly faint and breathless, and sank back upon her pillow. Yates, scared by her faintness and whiteness, ran out of the room and despatched a hasty messenger.

She could not fetch the husband; so the good soul did the next best thing, and sent for the doctor.

When she returned to the bedroom Mrs. Marsden seemed all right again.

"Doctor Eldridge is coming to see you, ma'am."

"Is he?"

"It's only wise," said Yates authoritatively, "that he should take charge of the case now. It's full time we had him in. He knows your constitution—and you can trust him, and feel quite safe to go on just as he advises you."

Dr. Eldridge was a long time alone with the patient. After Yates had been told to leave them, he talked gently and gravely to his old friend. He confessed to being rather sceptical by habit of mind; in forming a diagnosis he was perhaps always disposed to err on the side of caution, and thus he often declined to accept what at first sight seemed an obvious inference until it had

been corroborated by indisputable evidence;—but then again, all his experience had shown him how prudent, how necessary it is to prepare oneself for disappointment. . . . He thought that Mrs. Marsden should, if possible, prepare herself for disapointment.

Outside the room, he spoke to Yates with a severity that was only mitigated by contempt.

"What nonsense have you been stuffing her up with? It's too bad of you." And then the professional contempt for amateur doctors sounded in the severe tone of his voice. "You ought to know better at your time of life."

He came again next day, and told Mrs. Marsden the bitter truth. The correct interpretation of the symptoms was far, very far different from that which she had imagined. And then he pronounced the words of doom. It was not the birth of hope, but the death of hope. Somewhat earlier than one would have predicted as likely, she had passed the turning-point in the cyclic history of her existence.

A deadly, numbing apathy descended upon her. She was not ill; but in order to escape the infinitely oppressive duties of dressing, sitting at meals, walking up and down stairs, listening to voices and answering questions, she pretended illness; and, to cover the pretence, Dr. Eldridge frequently visited her.

Day after day she lay upon her sofa, watching the feeble daylight turn to dusk, staring at the red glow of the coals or the golden flicker of burning wood—feeling too sad to reproach, too weak to curse the inexorable laws of destiny.

Her husband used to enter the room noisily and

jovially, with a cigar in his mouth and a shining silk hat on the back of his head.

"What the dickens is the matter with you, Jane?"

He did not guess. He could never read her thoughts.

"I believe you ought to rouse yourself, old girl. I suppose old Eldridge sees a chance of running up a nice little bill—and Yates will have her bit out of it. Between them, they'll persuade you you're going to kick the bucket."

"I feel so tired, Dick."

"Then go on taking it easy," said Marsden genially. "But here's my tip—look out for another doctor, and another maid. I wouldn't bid twopence, if both of them were put up to auction."

Another time he said, "Jane, do you twig why I am wearing my topper? That means *business*. Yes, I'm going to throw myself into my work now, heart and soul. Buck up as soon as you can, and come and see how I'm setting about me."

While he stood by the door, talking and smoking, she looked at him with dull but kind eyes.

Some of the glamour of that vanished hope still hung about him; and the sense of gratitude, although now meaningless, lingered for a long while. But for herself, it would have been a fact instead of an hysterical fancy. It was her fault, not his.

When he had shut the door, she thought of herself dully, without pity, in stupid wonder.

This is the end. The heats of summer gone; the mimic warmth of autumn gone too; nothing left but the cold, dead winter—the end of all.

XVI

THE state of apathetic indifference continued; the slow months dragged by, and still she could not shake off her invincible weariness and spur herself to resume activity.

Once or twice Enid invited her to pay the long-postponed visit of inspection; and, when these invitations were refused, she offered to come to see her mother. But she was put off with vague excuses. The weather seemed so doubtful this week; later in the year Mrs. Marsden would certainly make the eight-mile journey, and examine the charming home of her daughter and her son-in-law.

It was an effort even to write a letter; nothing really interested her; her highest wish was to be left alone.

She heard and occasionally saw what was happening in the shop; but the old keen delight in business had faded with all other delights. She was not wanted down there, behind the glass. Her husband was master there now, and he did not require her assistance. He was pushing on with his programme of change and innovation; he brought her architects' drawings and builders' plans to sign, and she signed them without questioning; he jauntily told her about his new Japanese department, his new agency trade, his revolutionised carpet store, and she listened meekly to everything, appeared willing to concur in anything.

He was inordinately pleased with himself, and his boastful self-confidence brimmed over in noisy chatter.

He had declared war against Bence; henceforth, he vowed, the tit-for-tat policy should be pursued with implacable thoroughness.

"Look out for yourself, Mr. Bence," he said vainGloriously. "It has been very nice for you up to now. Because you saw a naked face, you smacked it. But now you're smacked back—as you'll jolly well find. I expect my new fascia has opened your eyes to what's coming."

The new fascia had been erected. It was made of chestnut wood—a most artistic up-to-date piece of work, with the names Thompson and Marsden alternating in carved lozenges over all the windows, with linked festoons of flowers, with high relief and intaglio cutting—with what not decorative and grand. It ran the whole length of the street frontage and round the corner up St. Saviour's Court, and it cost £750.

But that expense was a fleabite when compared with the cost of the structural alterations that were now fairly in hand.

The yard was being completely covered. The carts would drive into what would be the ground floor; and above this there would be three floors of packing rooms, with every imaginable convenience of lifts, slides, and shoots, for manipulating the goods and discharging them at the public. Meanwhile, the old packing rooms had been huddled into unused cellars, and the space that they had occupied in the basement, indeed the entire basement, was being excavated to an astounding depth. Soon an immense subterranean area would be scooped out; vast halls with wide staircases would be constructed; a shop below a shop would be ready for Mr. Marsden's use.

But what he proposed to do with it he had not as yet disclosed. He was feverishly anxious to get all the work

finished, but the new basement especially occupied his ambitious dreams.

"Mears, old buck," he said often, "I'm itching to get down there. And how dam slow they are, aren't they?"

Having had his fling as a gentleman at large, he seemed to enjoy for a little while the quieter but more massive importance derived from his position as the proprietor of a successful business, the employer of labour, the patron of art and manufacture. He paid handsomely for the insertion of his portrait in the local newspaper, and arranged with the editor that paragraphs about himself and his operations should appear amongst news items without the objectionable word Advertisement. On early closing day he swaggered about the town, feeling that he was one of its most prominent citizens, and proving himself always ready to stand a drink to anyone who would say so.

When his architect came down from London to go over the works with the contractor, he carried them off to the Dolphin, before anything had been done, and gave them a sumptuous luncheon—sat bragging and drinking with them for hours. When at dusk they returned to the shop, Marsden was red and noisy, the architect was in a fuddled state, and the contractor frankly hiccoughed.

"Down with you, old boy," said Marsden jovially. "And buck 'em up—the lazy bounders. Get a move on. I want this job finished; and it seems to me you're all playing with it."

After the governor had been lunching he lost that sense of decorum which from long habit should make it almost as impossible to speak loudly in a shop as in a church. All the assistants and several customers were scandalised by the noisy tongues of Mr. Marsden and his architect.

"And you jolly well remember that everything's to be done without interference to my business. It's in the contract—and don't you forget it. Start to finish—that was the bargain—business to be carried on as usual."

"Oh, we don't forget, Mist' Marsd . . . No interferens. Bizniz muz go on zactly as usual."

But did it? Mears was appalled by the disturbance and confusion. Outside in the street a long line of builders' carts blocked the approach of carriage folk; from beneath the windows, through the opened gratings, earth and gravel and lumps of broken concrete were being painfully hauled out; the pavement was covered with mud, obstructed with débris, so that foot-people could not pass in comfort, and the Borough Surveyor had sent three notices urgently requesting the abatement of what was a public as well as a private nuisance. Inside the shop one heard growling thunders from the depths below one's feet, and sudden explosions as if one were walking over a volcano, while from every entrance to the dark vaults there issued clouds of destructive lime dust. Sometimes a department was shut up for an hour while a steel girder was rolled along the floor by twenty perspiring men; processions of bucket-bearers emerged unexpectedly; and one saw in every mirror a grimy face or a plaster-stained back.

What was the use of asking ladies to step upstairs and view our Oriental novelties, when the nearest staircase was temporarily converted into a slide for roped planks?

Ladies said No, thank you; they would call again.

"This is going to hit us, sir," said Mr. Mears gloomily. "It is going to hit us hard, if it continues much longer."

"But it won't continue," said Marsden irritably. "They're bound by contract to finish before the twentieth

of next month. Besides, you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs."

There could be no doubt, thought Mears, as to the broken eggs; but the question was, Would Mr. Marsden's omelette ever come to table, or would it get tossed into the fire with so much else that seemed finding an end there?

Towards the completion of the contract time, Marsden more than once forced his wife to come through the door of communication, and have a look round the altered shop. She was admittedly convalescent now. She had not demurred when the master of the house gave Dr. Eldridge what he called "a straight tip" to cease paying professional visits. She had not protested when, in her presence, an almost straighter tip was given to Yates that the boring fuss about a malady of the imagination must cease. In fact she herself had said that there was nothing the matter with her.

She could not therefore refuse to show herself when he explicitly commanded her to do so.

Many changes—as she passed by Woollens and China and Glass, it was like walking in a dream, among the distorted shadows of familiar objects. Miss Woolfrey ran out of China and Glass to welcome her; but the other assistants, male and female, seemed shy of attracting her attention. Changes on all sides, which she looked at with indifferent eyes—but one change that slowly compelled a more careful observation. Perhaps downstairs this, the greatest of the changes, would not be observable? But no, it was noticed as plainly downstairs as upstairs.

There were fewer customers.

She glanced at the clock outside the counting-house. Three-twenty! In the middle of the afternoon, at this season of the year, the shop should be thronged with

customers; and it appeared to be, comparatively speaking, empty.

Marsden was waiting to receive her behind the glass, in her old sanctum.

"Come in, Jane. Here I am—hard at it."

Her bureau had disappeared. Where it used to stand there was a large but compact American desk; and in front of this Mr. Marsden sat enthroned. She glanced round the room, and saw a small new writing-table in the space between the second safe and the wall.

"I thought you could sit over there, Jane," said Marsden, pointing with his patent self-feeding pen. "You'd be out of the draught—for one thing."

She was to be pushed into a corner, to be made to understand her insignificant position under the new order of things,—but she did not protest.

"Now then. Come along."

He took her first of all through the Furniture, and showed her his sub-department for the sale of desks and all other office requisites similar to those which he had purchased for his own use. This was what he called agency work.

"No risk, don't you see, old girl! Doing the trick with other people's capital." And he explained how the German firm that supplied England with these American goods had given him most advantageous terms. "A splendid agreement for *us!* If the things don't go off quick, we just shovel the lot back at them—and try something else. That's *trade.* Keep a move on—don't go to sleep."

Then presently he took her upstairs, to what he called his Japan Exhibition.

The Cretonne Department had been compressed and curtailed to make room for this new feature, and she

passed through the archway of an ornate partition in order to admire and wonder at the oriental novelties.

"Now, Jane, this is what I'm really proud of."

There was plenty to see and to think about. Marsden made her handle carved and tinted ivory warriors with glittering swords and tiny burnished helmets, dragons with jewelled eyes and enamelled jaws, exquisite little cloisonné boxes; made her stoop to look at the malachite plinths of huge squat vases; and made her stretch her neck to look at gold-embossed friezes of great tall screens.

All these goods were very expensive; and she asked if any of them had been introduced, like the Yankee furniture, on sale or return.

"No, these are our own racket—and tip-top stuff, the best of its kind, never brought to Europe till last summer. . . . The stock stands us in close on four thousand pounds. You wouldn't think it, would you? But it's *art*. It's an education to possess such things."

She hazarded another question. Did he think that Mallingbridge would consent to pay for such high-class education?

"It'll be a great disappointment to me if they don't clear us out in three months from now. Of course they haven't discovered yet what we're offering them. But they *will*. I go on the double policy—play down to your public in one department, but try to lift your public in another. That's the way to keep alive."

And, as they left the Japanese treasures and strolled about the upper floor, he rattled off his glib catch-words.

"These are hustling times. Get a move on somehow. That's what I tell them—They'll soon tumble to it."

He parted from her near the door of communication.

"Ta-ta, old girl. . . . Oh, by the way, I shan't be in to

dinner to-night—or to-morrow either. I'm off to London. I'm wanted there about my Christmas Baz——" And he checked himself. "But I'll ask old Mears to tell you all about that."

Then he ran downstairs, two steps at a time, and swaggered here and there between the counters to impress the assistants with his hustlingly Napoleonic air.

Occasionally he loved to step forward, wave aside the assistant, and himself serve a customer. He thoroughly enjoyed the awe-struck admiration of the shop when he thus granted it a display of his skill. It was his only real gift—the salesman art; and it never failed him.

But it was something that he could not impart. Assistants who imitated his method—trying to catch the smiling, almost chaffing manner that could immediately convert a grumpy lethargic critic into a prompt and cheerful buyer—were merely familiar and impudent, and ended by huffing the customer.

And the governor, when he happened to detect want of success in one of his young gentlemen or young ladies, came down like a hundred of bricks.

He treated the two sexes quite impartially, and the women could not say that he bullied the men worse than he bullied them. But he had a deadly sort of satire that the younger girls dreaded more than the angriest storm of abuse. Thus if he saw one of them sitting down, he would address her with apparently amiable solicitude.

"Is that ledge hard, Miss Vincent? Couldn't someone get her a cushion? Make yourself at home. Why don't you come round the counter and sit on the customers' laps? . . . We must find you a comfortable seat *somewhere*—and change of air too. Mallingbridge isn't agreeing with your constitution, if you feel as slack as all this."

Like the people of his house, these people of his shop feared him, and, perhaps without putting the thoughts into words, or troubling to quote adages, understood that beggars on horseback always ride with reckless disregard of the safety and comfort of the humble companions with whom they were recently tramping along the hard road, and that no master is so tyrannical as a promoted servant. In the opinion of the shop-assistants, he could not go to London too often or stay there too long.

While he was away this time, Mears came to Mrs. Marsden with a long face and a gloomy voice, and gave her the delayed information as to her husband's Christmas programme.

The new underground floor was to be used for a grand Bazaar, and Mears had been told to win her round to the idea.

Mears himself hated the idea. He thought the bazaar a brainless plagiarism of Bence's, and altogether unworthy of Thompson's. It would be exactly like Bence's, but on a much larger scale—beneath the good respectable shop, a cheap and nasty shop, in which catch-penny travesties of decent articles would be the only wares: fancy stationery, sham jewellery, spurious metals; horrid little clocks that won't go, knives and scissors that won't cut, collar-boxes more flimsy than the collars they are intended to hold—everything beastly that crumples, bends, or breaks before you can get home with it.

"But he won't abandon the idea," said Mears. "That's a certainty. He's mad keen on it. The only thing is for you to use your influence—and I'll back you up solid—to persuade him to modify it."

And Mears strongly advocated modification on these lines: make the bazaar a fitting annexe,—substitute boots

and shoes for the sixpenny toys, good leather trunks for the paper boxes, nice engravings for the coloured photographs,—offer the public genuine stuff and not trash.

Accordingly, Mr. Marsden, as soon as he returned, was begged by his partner and his manager to grant their joint petition for a slightly modified Christmas carnival. But he said it was too late. They ought to have gone into the matter earlier.

He had bought the trash,—had engaged his London girls,—was ready; and like a general on the eve of a campaign, he could not be bothered with advice from subordinate officers.

When discussing this horrible innovation, Mears had extracted from Mrs. Marsden a distinct show of interest; several times afterwards he had endeavoured to stimulate and increase the interest; and now, just before Christmas, he earnestly implored her to rouse herself.

"We miss you, ma'am, worse every day. It isn't *safe* to let things drift. We can't get on without you."

Then one morning she had an early breakfast, dressed herself in her shop black, came down behind the glass, took her seat at the little corner table of her old room, and unobtrusively began working.

Marsden, when he came in two or three hours later, was surprised to see her.

"Hullo, Jane, what do you think you are doing?"

"Well, Dick," she said submissively, "I should like to help in the shop—as I used to, you know."

"Bravo. Excellent! I want all the help that anyone can give me;" and he seated himself in the chair of honour. "But look here. Don't mess about with the papers on this desk. I work after a system—and if my papers get muddled, it simply upsets me and wastes my time."