

Trollope Anthony

The Struggles of Brown, Jones, and Robinson



Anthony Trollope

**The Struggles of Brown,
Jones, and Robinson**

«Public Domain»

Trollope A.

The Struggles of Brown, Jones, and Robinson / A. Trollope —
«Public Domain»,

© Trollope A.
© Public Domain

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	13
CHAPTER IV	16
CHAPTER V	21
CHAPTER VI	26
CHAPTER VII	29
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	30

Trollope Anthony

The Struggles of Brown, Jones, and Robinson / By One of the Firm

CHAPTER I PREFACE BY ONE OF THE FIRM

It will be observed by the literary and commercial world that, in this transaction, the name of the really responsible party does not show on the title-page. I – George Robinson – am that party. When our Mr. Jones objected to the publication of these memoirs unless they appeared as coming from the firm itself, I at once gave way. I had no wish to offend the firm, and, perhaps, encounter a lawsuit for the empty honour of seeing my name advertised as that of an author. We had talked the matter over with our Mr. Brown, who, however, was at that time in affliction, and not able to offer much that was available. One thing he did say; "As we are partners," said Mr. Brown, "let's be partners to the end." "Well," said I, "if you say so, Mr. Brown, so it shall be." I never supposed that Mr. Brown would set the Thames on fire, and soon learnt that he was not the man to amass a fortune by British commerce. He was not made for the guild of Merchant Princes. But he was the senior member of our firm, and I always respected the old-fashioned doctrine of capital in the person of our Mr. Brown.

When Mr. Brown said, "Let's be partners to the end; it won't be for long, Mr. Robinson," I never said another word. "No," said I, "Mr. Brown; you're not what you was – and you're down a peg; I'm not the man to take advantage and go against your last wishes. Whether for long or whether for short, we'll pull through in the same boat to the end. It shall be put on the title-page – 'By One of the Firm.'" "God bless you, Mr. Robinson," said he; "God bless you."

And then Mr. Jones started another objection. The reader will soon realize that anything I do is sure to be wrong with Mr. Jones. It wouldn't be him else. He next declares that I can't write English, and that the book must be corrected, and put out by an editor? Now, when I inform the discerning British Public that every advertisement that has been posted by Brown, Jones, and Robinson, during the last three years has come from my own unaided pen, I think few will doubt my capacity to write the "Memoirs of Brown, Jones, and Robinson," without any editor whatsoever.

On this head I was determined to be firm. What! after preparing, and correcting, and publishing such thousands of advertisements in prose and verse and in every form of which the language is susceptible, to be told that I couldn't write English! It was Jones all over. If there is a party envious of the genius of another party in this sublunary world that party is our Mr. Jones.

But I was again softened by a touching appeal from our senior partner. Mr. Brown, though prosaic enough in his general ideas, was still sometimes given to the Muses; and now, with a melancholy and tender cadence, he quoted the following lines; —

"Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
For 'tis their nature to.
But 'tis a shameful sight to see, when partners of one firm like we,
Fall out, and chide, and fight!"

So I gave in again.

It was then arranged that one of Smith and Elder's young men should look through the manuscript, and make any few alterations which the taste of the public might require. It might be that the sonorous, and, if I may so express myself, magniloquent phraseology in which I was accustomed to invite the attention of the nobility and gentry to our last importations was not suited for the purposes of light literature, such as this. "In fiction, Mr. Robinson, your own unaided talents would doubtless make you great," said to me the editor of this Magazine; "but if I may be allowed an opinion, I do think that in the delicate task of composing memoirs a little assistance may perhaps be not inexpedient."

This was prettily worded; so what with this, and what with our Mr. Brown's poetry, I gave way; but I reserved to myself the right of an epistolary preface in my own name. So here it is.

Ladies and Gentlemen, – I am not a bit ashamed of my part in the following transaction. I have done what little in me lay to further British commerce. British commerce is not now what it was. It is becoming open and free like everything else that is British; – open to the poor man as well as to the rich. That bugbear Capital is a crumbling old tower, and is pretty nigh brought to its last ruin. Credit is the polished shaft of the temple on which the new world of trade will be content to lean. That, I take it, is the one great doctrine of modern commerce. Credit, – credit, – credit. Get credit, and capital will follow. Doesn't the word speak for itself? Must not credit be respectable? And is not the word "respectable" the highest term of praise which can be applied to the British tradesman?

Credit is the polished shaft of the temple. But with what are you to polish it? The stone does not come from the quarry with its gloss on. Man's labour is necessary to give it that beautiful exterior. Then wherewith shall we polish credit? I answer the question at once. With the pumice-stone and sand-paper of advertisement.

Different great men have promulgated the different means by which they have sought to subjugate the world. "Audacity – audacity – audacity," was the lesson which one hero taught. "Agitate – agitate – agitate," was the counsel of a second. "Register – register – register," of a third. But I say – Advertise, advertise, advertise! And I say it again and again – Advertise, advertise, advertise! It is, or should be, the Shibboleth of British commerce. That it certainly will be so I, George Robinson, hereby venture to prophesy, feeling that on this subject something but little short of inspiration has touched my eager pen.

There are those, – men of the old school, who cannot rouse themselves to see and read the signs of the time, men who would have been in the last ranks, let them have lived when they would, – who object to it that it is untrue, – who say that advertisements do not keep the promises which they make. But what says the poet, – he whom we teach our children to read? What says the stern moralist to his wicked mother in the play? "Assume a virtue if you have it not?" and so say I. "Assume a virtue if you have it not." It would be a great trade virtue in a haberdasher to have forty thousand pairs of best hose lying ready for sale in his warehouse. Let him assume that virtue if he have it not. Is not this the way in which we all live, and the only way in which it is possible to live comfortably. A gentleman gives a dinner party. His lady, who has to work all day like a dray-horse and scold the servants besides, to get things into order, loses her temper. We all pretty well know what that means. Well; up to the moment when she has to show, she is as bitter a piece of goods as may be. But, nevertheless, she comes down all smiles, although she knows that at that moment the drunken cook is spoiling the fish. She assumes a virtue, though she has it not; and who will say she is not right?

Well; I say again and again to all young tradesmen; – Advertise, advertise, advertise; – and don't stop to think too much about capital. It is a bugbear. Capital is a bugbear; and it is talked about by those who have it, – and by some that have not so much of it neither, – for the sake of putting down competition, and keeping the market to themselves.

There's the same game going on all the world over; and it's the natural game for mankind to play at. They who's up a bit is all for keeping down them who is down; and they who is down is so very soft through being down, that they've not spirit to force themselves up. Now I saw that very early in life. There is always going on a battle between aristocracy and democracy. Aristocracy likes to keep itself to itself; and democracy is just of the same opinion, only wishes to become aristocracy first.

We of the people are not very fond of dukes; but we'd all like to be dukes well enough ourselves. Now there are dukes in trade as well as in society. Capitalists are our dukes; and as they don't like to have their heels trod upon any more than the other ones, why they are always preaching up capital. It is their star and garter, their coronet, their ermine, their robe of state, their cap of maintenance, their wand of office, their noli me tangere. But stars and garters, caps and wands, and all other noli me tangeres, are gammon to those who can see through them. And capital is gammon. Capital is a very nice thing if you can get it. It is the desirable result of trade. A tradesman looks to end with a capital. But it's gammon to say that he can't begin without it. You might as well say a man can't marry unless he has first got a family. Why, he marries that he may have a family. It's putting the cart before the horse.

It's my opinion that any man can be a duke if so be it's born to him. It requires neither wit nor industry, nor any pushing nor go-ahead whatsoever. A man may sit still in his arm-chair, half asleep half his time, and only half awake the other, and be as good a duke as need be. Well; it's just the same in trade. If a man is born to a dukedom there, if he begins with a large capital, why, I for one would not thank him to be successful. Any fool could do as much as that. He has only to keep on polishing his own star and garter, and there are lots of people to swear that there is no one like him.

But give me the man who can be a duke without being born to it. Give me the man who can go ahead in trade without capital; who can begin the world with a quick pair of hands, a quick brain to govern them, and can end with a capital.

Well, there you are; a young tradesman beginning the world without capital. Capital, though it's a bugbear, nevertheless it's a virtue. Therefore, as you haven't got it, you must assume it. That's credit. Credit I take to be the belief of other people in a thing that doesn't really exist. When you go into your friend Smith's house, and find Mrs. S. all smiles, you give her credit for the sweetest of tempers. Your friend S. knows better; but then you see she's had wit enough to obtain credit. When I draw a bill at three months, and get it done, I do the same thing. That's credit. Give me credit enough, and I don't care a brass button for capital. If I could have but one wish, I would never ask a fairy for a second or a third. Let me have but unreserved credit, and I'll beat any duke of either aristocracy.

To obtain credit the only certain method is to advertise. Advertise, advertise, advertise. That is, assume, assume, assume. Go on assuming your virtue. The more you haven't got it, the more you must assume it. The bitterer your own heart is about that drunken cook and that idle husband who will do nothing to assist you, the sweeter you must smile. Smile sweet enough, and all the world will believe you. Advertise long enough, and credit will come.

But there must be some nous in your advertisements; there must be a system, and there must be some wit in your system. It won't suffice now-a-days to stick up on a blank wall a simple placard to say that you have forty thousand best hose just new arrived. Any wooden-headed fellow can do as much as that. That might have served in the olden times that we hear of, twenty years since; but the game to be successful in these days must be played in another sort of fashion. There must be some finish about your advertisements, something new in your style, something that will startle in your manner. If a man can make himself a real master of this art, we may say that he has learnt his trade, whatever that trade may be. Let him know how to advertise, and the rest will follow.

It may be that I shouldn't boast; but yet I do boast that I have made some little progress in this business. If I haven't yet practised the art in all its perfections, nevertheless I flatter myself I

have learned how to practise it. Regarding myself as something of a master of this art, and being actuated by purely philanthropic motives in my wish to make known my experience, I now put these memoirs before the public.

It will, of course, be urged against me that I have not been successful in what I have already attempted, and that our house has failed. This is true. I have not been successful. Our house has failed. But with whom has the fault been? Certainly not in my department.

The fact is, and in this my preface I will not keep the truth back from a discerning public, that no firm on earth, – or indeed elsewhere, – could be successful in which our Mr. Jones is one of the partners. There is an overweening vanity about that man which is quite upsetting. I confess I have been unable to stand it. Vanity is always allied to folly, and the relationship is very close in the person of our Mr. Jones. Of Mr. Brown I will never bring myself to say one disrespectful word. He is not now what he was once. From the bottom of my heart I pity his misfortunes. Think what it must be to be papa to a Goneril and a Regan, – without the Cordelia. I have always looked on Mrs. Jones as a regular Goneril; and as for the Regan, why it seems to me that Miss Brown is likely to be Miss Regan to the end of the chapter.

No; of Mr. Brown I will say nothing disrespectful; but he never was the man to be first partner in an advertising firm. That was our mistake. He had old-fashioned views about capital which were very burdensome. My mistake was this, – that in joining myself with Mr. Brown, I compromised my principles, and held out, as it were, a left hand to capital. He had not much, as will be seen; but he thought a deal of what he had got, and talked a deal of it too. This impeded my wings. This prevented me from soaring. One cannot touch pitch and not be defiled. I have been untrue to myself in having had any dealings on the basis of capital; and hence has it arisen that hitherto I have failed.

I make these confessions hoping that they may be serviceable to trade in general. A man cannot learn a great secret, and the full use of a great secret, all at once. My eyes are now open. I shall not again make so fatal a mistake. I am still young. I have now learned my lesson more thoroughly, and I yet anticipate success with some confidence.

Had Mr. Brown at once taken my advice, had his few thousand pounds been liberally expended in commencing a true system of advertising, we should have been, – I can hardly surmise where we should have been. He was for sticking altogether to the old system. Mr. Jones was for mixing the old and the new, for laying in stock and advertising as well, with a capital of 4,000! What my opinion is of Mr. Jones I will not now say, but of Mr. Brown I will never utter one word of disparagement.

I have now expressed what few words I wish to say on my own bottom. As to what has been done in the following pages by the young man who has been employed to look over these memoirs and put them into shape, it is not for me to speak. It may be that I think they might have read more natural-like had no other cook had a finger in the pie. The facts, however, are facts still. These have not been cooked.

Ladies and gentlemen, you who have so long distinguished our firm by a liberal patronage, to you I now respectfully appeal, and in showing to you a new article I beg to assure you with perfect confidence that there is nothing equal to it at the price at present in the market. The supply on hand is immense, but as a sale of unprecedented rapidity is anticipated, may I respectfully solicit your early orders? If not approved of the article shall be changed.

Ladies and gentlemen,
We have the honour to subscribe ourselves,
With every respect,
Your most obedient humble servants,
Brown, Jones, and Robinson,
Per George Robinson.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY HISTORY OF OUR MR. BROWN, WITH SOME FEW WORDS OF MR. JONES

O Commerce, how wonderful are thy ways, how vast thy power, how invisible thy dominion! Who can restrain thee and forbid thy further progress? Kings are but as infants in thy hands, and emperors, despotic in all else, are bound to obey thee! Thou civilizest, hast civilized, and wilt civilize. Civilization is thy mission, and man's welfare thine appointed charge. The nation that most warmly fosters thee shall ever be the greatest in the earth; and without thee no nation shall endure for a day. Thou art our Alpha and our Omega, our beginning and our end; the marrow of our bones, the salt of our life, the sap of our branches, the corner-stone of our temple, the rock of our foundation. We are built on thee, and for thee, and with thee. To worship thee should be man's chiefest care, to know thy hidden ways his chosen study.

One maxim hast thou, O Commerce, great and true and profitable above all others; – one law which thy votaries should never transgress. "Buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest." May those divine words be ever found engraved on the hearts of Brown, Jones, and Robinson!

Of Mr. Brown, the senior member of our firm, it is expedient that some short memoir should be given. At the time at which we signed our articles in 185 – , Mr. Brown had just retired from the butter business. It does not appear that in his early youth he ever had the advantage of an apprenticeship, and he seems to have been employed in various branches of trade in the position, if one may say so, of an out-door messenger. In this capacity he entered the service of Mr. McCockerell, a retail butter dealer in Smithfield. When Mr. McCockerell died our Mr. Brown married his widow, and thus found himself elevated at once to the full-blown dignity of a tradesman. He and his wife lived together for thirty years, and it is believed that in the temper of his lady he found some alloy to the prosperity which he had achieved. The widow McCockerell, in bestowing her person upon Mr. Brown, had not intended to endow him also with entire dominion over her shop and chattels. She loved to be supreme over her butter tubs, and she loved also to be supreme over her till. Brown's views on the rights of women were more in accordance with the law of the land as laid down in the statutes. He opined that a *femme couverte* could own no property, not even a butter tub; – and hence quarrels arose.

After thirty years of contests such as these Mr. Brown found himself victorious, made so not by the power of arguments, nor by that of his own right arm, but by the demise of Mrs. Brown. That amiable lady died, leaving two daughters to lament their loss, and a series of family quarrels, by which she did whatever lay in her power to embarrass her husband, but by which she could not prevent him from becoming absolute owner of the butter business, and of the stock in trade.

The two young ladies had not been brought up to the ways of the counter; and as Mr. Brown was not himself especially expert at that particular business in which his money was embarked, he prudently thought it expedient to dispose of the shop and goodwill. This he did to advantage; and thus at the age of fifty-five he found himself again on the world with 4,000*l.* in his pocket.

At this period one of his daughters was no longer under his own charge. Sarah Jane, the eldest of the two, was already Mrs. Jones. She had been captivated by the black hair and silk waistcoat of Mr. Jones, and had gone off with him in opposition to the wishes of both parents. This, she was aware, was not matter of much moment, for the opposition of one was sure to bring about a reconciliation with the other. And such was soon the case. Mrs. Brown would not see her daughter, or allow Jones to put his foot inside the butter-shop. Mr. Brown consequently took lodgings for them in the neighbourhood, and hence a close alliance sprung up between the future partners.

At this crisis Maryanne devoted herself to her mother. It was admitted by all who knew her that Maryanne Brown had charms. At that time she was about twenty-four years of age, and was certainly a fine young woman. She was, like her mother, a little too much inclined to corpulence, and there may be those who would not allow that her hair was auburn. Mr. Robinson, however, who was then devotedly attached to her, was of that opinion, and was ready to maintain his views against any man who would dare to say that it was red.

There was a dash about Maryanne Brown at that period which endeared her greatly to Mr. Robinson. She was quite above anything mean, and when her papa was left a widower in possession of four thousand pounds, she was one of those who were most anxious to induce him to go to work with spirit in a new business. She was all for advertising; that must be confessed of her, though her subsequent conduct was not all that it should have been. Maryanne Brown, when tried in the furnace, did not come out pure gold; but this, at any rate, shall be confessed in her behalf, that she had a dash about her, and understood more of the tricks of trade than any other of her family.

Mrs. McCockerell died about six months after her eldest daughter's marriage. She was generally called Mrs. McCockerell in the neighbourhood of Smithfield, though so many years had passed since she had lost her right to that name. Indeed, she generally preferred being so styled, as Mr. Brown was peculiarly averse to it. The name was wormwood to him, and this was quite sufficient to give it melody in her ears.

The good lady died about six months after her daughter's marriage. She was struck with apoplexy, and at that time had not been reconciled to her married daughter. Sarah Jane, nevertheless, when she heard what had occurred, came over to Smithfield. Her husband was then in employment as shopman at the large haberdashery house on Snow Hill, and lived with his wife in lodgings in Cowcross Street. They were supported nearly entirely by Mr. Brown, and therefore owed to him at this crisis not only obedience, but dutiful affection.

When, however, Sarah Jane first heard of her mother's illness, she seemed to think that she couldn't quarrel with her father fast enough. Jones had an idea that the old lady's money must go to her daughters, that she had the power of putting it altogether out of the hands of her husband, and that having the power she would certainly exercise it. On this speculation he had married; and as he and his wife fully concurred in their financial views, it was considered expedient by them to lose no time in asserting their right. This they did as soon as the breath was out of the old lady's body.

Jones had married Sarah Jane solely with this view; and, indeed, it was highly improbable that he should have done so on any other consideration. Sarah Jane was certainly not a handsome girl. Her neck was scraggy, her arms lean, and her lips thin; and she resembled neither her father nor her mother. Her light brown, sandy hair, which always looked as though it were too thin and too short to adapt itself to any feminine usage, was also not of her family; but her disposition was a compound of the paternal and maternal qualities. She had all her father's painful hesitating timidity, and with it all her mother's grasping spirit. If there ever was an eye that looked sharp after the pence, that could weigh the ounces of a servant's meal at a glance, and foresee and prevent the expenditure of a farthing, it was the eye of Sarah Jane Brown. They say that it is as easy to save a fortune as to make one; and in this way, if in no other, Jones may be said to have got a fortune with his wife.

As soon as the breath was out of Mrs. McCockerell's body, Sarah Jane was there, taking inventory of the stock. At that moment poor Mr. Brown was very much to be pitied. He was a man of feeling, and even if his heart was not touched by his late loss, he knew what was due to decency. It behoved him now as a widower to forget the deceased lady's faults, and to put her under the ground with solemnity. This was done with the strictest propriety; and although he must, of course, have been thinking a good deal at that time as to whether he was to be a beggar or a rich man, nevertheless he conducted himself till after the funeral as though he hadn't a care on his mind, except the loss of Mrs. B.

Maryanne was as much on the alert as her sister. She had been for the last six months her mother's pet, as Sarah Jane had been her father's darling. There was some excuse, therefore, for Maryanne when she endeavoured to get what she could in the scramble. Sarah Jane played the part of Goneril to the life, and would have denied her father the barest necessities of existence, had it not ultimately turned out that the property was his own.

Maryanne was not well pleased to see her sister returning to the house at such a moment. She, at least, had been dutiful to her mother, or, if undutiful, not openly so. If Mrs. McCockerell had the power of leaving her property to whom she pleased, it would be only natural that she should leave it to the daughter who had obeyed her, and not to the daughter who had added to personal disobedience the worse fault of having been on friendly terms with her father.

This, one would have thought, would have been clear at any rate to Jones, if not to Sarah Jane; but they both seemed at this time to have imagined that the eldest child had some right to the inheritance as being the eldest. It will be observed by this and by many other traits in his character that Mr. Jones had never enjoyed the advantages of an education.

Mrs. McCockerell never spoke after the fit first struck her. She never moved an eye, or stirred a limb, or uttered a word. It was a wretched household at that time. The good lady died on a Wednesday, and was gathered to her fathers at Kensal Green Cemetery on the Tuesday following. During the intervening days Mr. Jones and Sarah Jane took on themselves as though they were owners of everything. Maryanne did try to prevent the inventory, not wishing it to appear that Mrs. Jones had any right to meddle; but the task was too congenial to Sarah Jane's spirit to allow of her giving it over. She revelled in the work. It was a delight to her to search out hidden stores of useless wealth, – to bring forth to the light forgotten hoards of cups and saucers, and to catalogue every rag on the premises.

The house at this time was not a pleasant one. Mr. Brown, finding that Jones, in whom he had trusted, had turned against him, put himself very much into the hands of a young friend of his, named George Robinson. Who and what George Robinson was will be told in the next chapter.

"There are three questions," said Robinson, "to be asked and answered. – Had Mrs. B. the power to make a will? If so, did she make a will? And if so, what was the will she made?"

Mr. Brown couldn't remember whether or no there had been any signing of papers at his marriage. A good deal of rum and water, he said, had been drunk; and there might have been signing too, – but he didn't remember it.

Then there was the search for the will. This was supposed to be in the hands of one Brisket, a butcher, for whom it was known Mrs. McCockerell had destined the hand of her younger daughter. Mr. Brisket had been a great favourite with the old lady, and she had often been heard to declare that he should have the wife and money, or the money without the wife. This she said to coerce Maryanne into the match.

But Brisket, when questioned, declared that he had no will in his possession. At this time he kept aloof from the house and showed no disposition to meddle with the affairs of the family. Indeed, all through these trying days he behaved honestly, if not with high feeling. In recounting the doings of Brown, Jones, and Robinson, it will sometimes be necessary to refer to Mr. Brisket. He shall always be spoken of as an honest man. He did all that in him lay to mar the bright hopes of one who was perhaps not the most insignificant of that firm. He destroyed the matrimonial hopes of Mr. Robinson, and left him to wither like a blighted trunk on a lone waste. But he was, nevertheless, an honest man, and so much shall be said of him. Let us never forget that "An honest man is the noblest work of God."

Brisket, when asked, said that he had no will, and that he knew of none. In fact there was no will forthcoming, and there is no doubt that the old woman was cut off before she had made one. It may also be premised that had she made one it would have been invalid, seeing that Mr. Brown, as husband, was, in fact, the owner of the whole affair.

Sarah Jane and Maryanne, when they found that no document was forthcoming, immediately gave out that they intended to take on themselves the duties of joint heiresses, and an alliance, offensive and defensive, was sworn between them. At this time Mr. Brown employed a lawyer, and the heiresses, together with Jones, employed another. There could be no possible doubt as to Mr. Brown being the owner of the property, however infatuated on such a subject Jones and his wife may have been. No lawyer in London could have thought that the young women had a leg to stand upon. Nevertheless, the case was undertaken, and Brown found himself in the middle of a lawsuit. Sarah Jane and Maryanne both remained in the house in Smithfield to guard the property on their own behalf. Mr. Brown also remained to guard it on his behalf. The business for a time was closed. This was done in opposition both to Mr. Brown and Maryanne; but Mrs. Jones could not bring herself to permit the purchase of a firkin of butter, unless the transaction could be made absolutely under her own eyes; and, even then, she would insist on superintending the retail herself and selling every pound, short weight. It was the custom of the trade, she said; and to depart from it would ruin them.

Things were in this condition, going from bad to worse, when Jones came over one evening, and begged an interview with Mr. Brown. That interview was the commencement of the partnership. From such small matters do great events arise.

At that interview Mr. Robinson was present. Mr. Brown indeed declared that he would have no conversation with Jones on business affairs, unless in the presence of a third party. Jones represented that if they went on as they were now doing, the property would soon be swallowed up by the lawyers. To this Mr. Brown, whose forte was not eloquence, tacitly assented with a deep groan.

"Then," said Jones, "let us divide it into three portions. You shall have one; Sarah Jane a second; and I will manage the third on behalf of my sister-in-law, Maryanne. If we arrange it well, the lawyers will never get a shilling."

The idea of a compromise appeared to Mr. Brown to be not uncommendable; but a compromise on such terms as those could not of course be listened to. Robinson strongly counselled him to nail his colours to the mast, and kick Mr. Jones downstairs. But Mr. Brown had not spirit for this.

"One's children is one's children," said he to Robinson, when they went apart into the shop to talk the matter over. "The fruit of one's loins, and the prop of one's age."

Robinson could not help thinking that Sarah Jane was about as bad a prop as any that ever a man leant on; but he was too generous to say so. The matter was ended at last by a compromise. "Go on with the business together," said Robinson; "Mr. Brown keeping, of course, a preponderating share in his own hands."

"I don't like butter," said Jones. "Nothing great can be done in butter."

"It is a very safe line," said Mr. Brown, "if the connection is good."

"The connection must have been a good deal damaged," said Robinson, "seeing that the shop has been closed for a fortnight. Besides, it's a woman's business; – and you have no woman to manage it," added he, fearing that Mrs. Jones might be brought in, to the detriment of all concerned.

Jones suggested haberdashery; Robinson, guided by a strong idea that there is a more absolute opening for the advertising line in haberdashery than in any other business, assented.

"Then let it be haberdashery," said Mr. Brown, with a sigh. And so that was settled.

CHAPTER III

THE EARLY HISTORY OF MR. ROBINSON

And haberdashery it was. But here it may be as well to say a few words as to Mr. Robinson, and to explain how he became a member of the firm. He had been in his boyhood, – a bill-sticker; and he defies the commercial world to show that he ever denied it. In his earlier days he carried the paste and pole, and earned a livelihood by putting up notices of theatrical announcements on the hoardings of the metropolis. There was, however, that within him which Nature did not intend to throw away on the sticking of bills, as was found out quickly enough by those who employed him. The lad, while he was running the streets with his pole in his hand, and his pot round his neck, learned first to read, and then to write what others might read. From studying the bills which he carried, he soon took to original composition; and it may be said of him, that in fluency of language and richness of imagery few surpassed him. In person Mr. Robinson was a genteel young man, though it cannot be said of him that he possessed manly beauty. He was slight and active, intelligent in his physiognomy, and polite in his demeanour. Perhaps it may be unnecessary to say anything further on this head.

Mr. Robinson had already established himself as an author in his own line, and was supporting himself decently by his own unaided abilities, when he first met Maryanne Brown in the Regent's Park. She was then walking with her sister, and resolutely persisted in disregarding all those tokens of admiration which he found himself unable to restrain.

There certainly was a dash about Maryanne Brown that at certain moments was invincible. Hooped petticoats on the back of her sister looked like hoops, and awkward hoops. They were angular, lopsided, and lumpy. But Maryanne wore her hoops as a duchess wears her crinoline. Her well-starched muslin dress would swell off from her waist in a manner that was irresistible to George Robinson. "Such grouping!" as he said to his friend Walker. "Such a flow of drapery! such tournure! Ah, my dear fellow, the artist's eye sees these things at a glance." And then, walking at a safe distance, he kept his eyes on them.

"I'm sure that fellow's following us," said Sarah Jane, looking back at him with all her scorn.

"There's no law against that, I suppose," said Maryanne, tartly. So much as that Mr. Robinson did succeed in hearing.

The girls entered their mother's house; but as they did so, Maryanne lingered for a moment in the doorway. Was it accident, or was it not? Did the fair girl choose to give her admirer one chance, or was it that she was careful not to crush her starch by too rapid an entry?

"I shall be in Regent's Park on Sunday afternoon," whispered Robinson, as he passed by the house, with his hand to his mouth. It need hardly be said that the lady vouchsafed him no reply.

On the following Sunday George Robinson was again in the park, and after wandering among its rural shades for half a day, he was rewarded by seeing the goddess of his idolatry. Miss Brown was there with a companion, but not with Sarah Jane. He had already, as though by instinct, conceived in his heart as powerful an aversion for one sister as affection for the other, and his delight was therefore unbounded when he saw that she he loved was there, while she he hated was away.

'Twere long to tell, at the commencement of this narrative, how a courtship was commenced and carried on; how Robinson sighed, at first in vain and then not in vain; how good-natured was Miss Twizzle, the bosom friend of Maryanne; and how Robinson for a time walked and slept and fed on roses.

There was at that time a music class held at a certain elegant room near Osnaburgh Church in the New Road, at which Maryanne and her friend Miss Twizzle were accustomed to attend. Those lessons were sometimes prosecuted in the evening, and those evening studies sometimes

resulted in a little dance. We may say that after a while that was their habitual tendency, and that the lady pupils were permitted to introduce their male friends on condition that the gentlemen paid a shilling each for the privilege. It was in that room that George Robinson passed the happiest hours of his chequered existence. He was soon expert in all the figures of the mazy dance, and was excelled by no one in the agility of his step or the endurance of his performances. It was by degrees rumoured about that he was something higher than he seemed to be, and those best accustomed to the place used to call him the Poet. It must be remembered that at this time Mrs. McCockerell was still alive, and that as Sarah Jane had then become Mrs. Jones, Maryanne was her mother's favourite, and destined to receive all her mother's gifts. Of the name and person of William Brisket, George Robinson was then in happy ignorance, and the first introduction between them took place in the Hall of Harmony.

'Twas about eleven o'clock in the evening, when the light feet of the happy dancers had already been active for some hour or so in the worship of their favourite muse, that Robinson was standing up with his arm round his fair one's waist, immediately opposite to the door of entrance. His right arm still embraced her slight girdle, whilst with his left hand he wiped the perspiration from his brow. She leaned against him palpitating, for the motion of the music had been quick, and there had been some amicable contest among the couples. It is needless to say that George Robinson and Maryanne Brown had suffered no defeat. At that moment a refreshing breeze of the night air was wafted into the room from the opened door, and Robinson, looking up, saw before him a sturdy, thickset man, with mottled beefy face, and by his side there stood a spectre. "It's your sister," whispered he to Maryanne, in a tone of horror.

"Oh, laws! there's Bill," said she, and then she fainted. The gentleman with the mottled face was indeed no other than Mr. Brisket, the purveyor of meat, for whose arms Mrs. McCockerell had destined the charms of her younger daughter. Conduct baser than that of Mrs. Jones on this occasion is not perhaps recorded in history. She was no friend of Brisket's. She had it not at heart to forward her mother's views. At this period of their lives she and her mother never met. But she had learned her sister's secret, and having it in her power to crush her sister's happiness, had availed herself of the opportunity.

"There he is," said she, quite aloud, so that the whole room should hear. "He's a bill-sticker!" and she pointed the finger of scorn at her sister's lover.

"I'm one who have always earned my own living," said Robinson, "and never had occasion to hang on to any one." This he said knowing that Jones's lodgings were paid for by Mr. Brown.

Hereupon Mr. Brisket walked across the room, and as he walked there was a cloud of anger on his brow. "Perhaps, young man," he said, – and as he spoke he touched Robinson on the shoulder, – "perhaps, young man, you wouldn't mind having a few words with me outside the door."

"Sir," said the other with some solemnity, "I am not aware that I have the honour of your acquaintance."

"I'm William Brisket, butcher," said he; "and if you don't come out when I asks you, by jingo, I'll carry you."

The lady had fainted. The crowd of dancers was standing round, with inquiring faces. That female spectre repeated the odious words, still pointing at him with her finger, "He's a bill-sticker!" Brisket was full fourteen stone, whereas Robinson might perhaps be ten. What was Robinson to do? "Are you going to walk out, or am I going to carry you?" said the Hercules of the slaughter-house.

"I will do anything," said Robinson, "to relieve a lady's embarrassment."

They walked out on to the landing-place, whither not a few of the gentlemen and some of the ladies followed them.

"I say, young man," said Brisket, "do you know who that young woman is?"

"I certainly have the honour of her acquaintance," said Robinson.

"But perhaps you haven't the honour of knowing that she's my wife, – as is to be. Now you know it." And then the coarse monster eyed him from head to foot. "Now you may go home to your mother," said he. "But don't tell her anything of it, because it's a secret."

He was fifteen stone at least, and Robinson was hardly ten. Oh, how vile is the mastery which matter still has over mind in many of the concerns of life! How can a man withstand the assault of a bull? What was Robinson to do? He walked downstairs into the street, leaving Maryanne behind with the butcher.

Some days after this he contrived a meeting with his love, and he then learned the history of that engagement. "She hated Brisket," she said. "He was odious to her. He was always greasy and smelt of meat; – but he had a respectable business."

"And is my Maryanne mercenary?" asked Robinson.

"Now, George," said she, "it's no use you scolding me, and I won't be scolded. Ma says that I must be civil to him, and I'm not going to quarrel with ma. At any rate not yet."

"But surely, Maryanne –"

"It's no good you surelying me, George, for I won't be surelyed. If you don't like me you can leave me."

"Maryanne, I adore you."

"That's all very well, and I hope you do; but why did you make a row with that man the other night?"

"But, dearest love, he made the row with me."

"And when you did make it," continued Maryanne, "why didn't you see it out?" Robinson did not find it easy to answer this accusation. That matter has still dominion over mind, though the days are coming when mind shall have dominion over matter, was a lesson which, in after days, it would be sweet to teach her. But at the present moment the time did not serve for such teaching. "A man must look after his own, George, or else he'll go to the wall," she said, with a sneer. And then he parted from her in anger.

But his love did not on that account wax cool, and so in his misery he had recourse to their mutual friend, Miss Twizzle. "The truth is this," said Miss Twizzle, "I believe she'd take him, because he's respectable and got a business."

"He's horribly vulgar," said Robinson.

"Oh, bother!" said Miss Twizzle. "I know nothing about that. He's got a business, and whoever marries Brisket won't have to look for a bed to sleep on. But there's a hitch about the money."

Then Mr. Robinson learned the facts. Mrs. McCockerell, as she was still called, had promised to give her daughter five hundred pounds as her marriage portion, but Mr. Brisket would not go to the altar till he got the money. "He wanted to extend himself," he said, "and would not marry till he saw his way." Hence had arisen that delay which Maryanne had solaced by her attendance at the music-hall.

"But if you're in earnest," said Miss Twizzle, "don't you be down on your luck. Go to old Brown, and make friends with him. He'll stand up for you, because he knows his wife favours Brisket."

George Robinson did go to Mr. Brown, and on the father the young man's eloquence was not thrown away. "She shall be yours, Mr. Robinson," he said, after the first fortnight. "But we must be very careful with Mrs. B."

After the second fortnight Mrs. B. was no more! And in this way it came to pass that George Robinson was present as Mr. Brown's adviser when that scheme respecting the haberdashery was first set on foot.

CHAPTER IV

NINE TIMES NINE IS EIGHTY-ONE. SHOWING HOW BROWN, JONES, AND ROBINSON SELECTED THEIR HOUSE OF BUSINESS

And haberdashery it was. But there was much yet to be done before any terms for a partnership could be settled. Mr. Jones at first insisted that he and his father-in-law should begin business on equal terms. He considered that any questions as to the actual right in the property would be mean after their mutual agreement to start in the world as friends. But to this Mr. Brown, not unnaturally, objected.

"Then I shall go back to my lawyer," said Jones. Whereupon he did leave the room, taking his hat with him; but he remained below in the old shop.

"If I am to go into partnership with that man alone," said Mr. Brown, turning to his young friend almost in despair, "I may prepare for the Gazette at once. – And for my grave!" he added, solemnly.

"I'll join you," said Robinson. "I haven't got any money. You know that. But then neither has he."

"I wish you had a little," said Mr. Brown. "Capital is capital, you know."

"But I've got that which is better than capital," said Robinson, touching his forehead with his forefinger. "And if you'll trust me, Mr. Brown, I won't see you put upon." The promise which Mr. Robinson then gave he kept ever afterwards with a marked fidelity.

"I will trust you," said Mr. Brown. "It shall be Brown, Jones, and Robinson."

"And Brown, Jones, and Robinson shall carry their heads high among the greatest commercial firms of this wealthy metropolis," said Robinson, with an enthusiasm which was surely pardonable at such a moment.

Mr. Jones soon returned with another compromise; but it was of a low, peddling nature. It had reference to sevenths and eighths, and went into the payments of the household bills. "I, as one of the partners, must object to any such arrangements," said Robinson.

"You! – you one of the partners!" said Jones.

"If you have no objection – certainly!" said Robinson. "And if you should have any objection, – equally so."

"You! – a bill-sticker!" said Jones.

In the presence of William Brisket, George Robinson had been forced to acknowledge that matter must still occasionally prevail over mind; but he felt no such necessity in the presence of Jones. "I'll tell you what it is," said Robinson; "I've never denied my former calling. Among friends I often talk about it. But mind you, Mr. Jones, I won't bear it from you! I'm not very big myself, but I think I could stand up before you!"

But in this quarrel they were stopped by Mr. Brown. "Let dogs delight," he said or sung, "to bark and bite; – " and then he raised his two fat hands feebly, as though deprecating any further wrath. As usual on such occasions Mr. Robinson yielded, and then explained in very concise language the terms on which it was proposed that the partnership should be opened. Mr. Brown should put his "capital" into the business, and be entitled to half the profits. Mr. Jones and Mr. Robinson should give the firm the advantage of their youth, energies, and genius, and should each be held as the possessor of a quarter. That Mr. Jones made long and fierce objections to this, need hardly be stated. It is believed that he did, more than once, go back to his lawyer. But Mr. Brown,

who, for the time, put himself into the hands of his youngest partner, remained firm, and at last the preliminaries were settled.

The name of the house, the nature of the business, and the shares of the partners were now settled, and the site of the future labours of the firm became the next question. Mr. Brown was in favour of a small tenement in Little Britain, near to the entrance into Smithfield.

"There would not be scope there," said Robinson.

"And no fashion," said Jones.

"It's safe and respectable," pleaded Mr. Brown. "There have been shops in Little Britain these sixty years in the same families."

But Robinson was of opinion that the fortunes of the firm might not improbably be made in six, if only they would commence with sufficient distinction. He had ascertained that large and commanding premises might be had in St. Paul's Churchyard, in the frontage of which the square feet of plate glass could be counted by the hundred. It was true that the shop was nearly all window; but then, as Mr. Robinson said, an extended front of glass was the one thing necessary. And it was true also that the future tenants must pay down a thousand pounds before they entered; – but then, as he explained, how could they better expend the trifle of money which they possessed?

"Trifle of money!" said Mr. Brown, thinking of the mountains of butter and years of economy which had been required to put together those four thousand pounds; – thinking also, perhaps, of the absolute impecuniosity of his young partner who thus spoke.

Jones was for the West End and Regent Street. There was a shop only two doors off Regent Street, which could be made to look as if it was almost in Regent Street. The extension of a side piece of plate glass would show quite into Regent Street. He even prepared a card, describing the house as "2 doors from Regent Street," printing the figure and the words "Regent Street" very large, and the intermediate description very small. It was ever by such stale, inefficient artifices as these that he sought success.

"Who'll care for your card?" said Robinson. "When a man's card comes to be of use to him, the thing's done. He's living in his villa by that time, and has his five thousand a-year out of the profits."

"I hope you'll both have your willas before long," said Brown, trying to keep his partners in good humour. "But a cottage *horney* will be enough for me. I'd like to be able to give my children their bit of dinner on Sunday hot and comfortable. I want no more than that."

That was a hard battle, and it resulted in no victory. The dingy shop in Little Britain was, of course, out of the question; and Mr. Brown assisted Robinson in preventing that insane attempt at aping the unprofitable glories of Regent Street. The matter ended in another compromise, and a house was taken in Bishopsgate Street, of which the frontage was extensive and commanding, but as to which it must certainly be confessed that the back part of the premises was inconveniently confined.

"It isn't exactly all I could wish," said Robinson, standing on the pavement as he surveyed it. "But it will do. With a little originality and some dash, we'll make it do. We must give it a name."

"A name?" said Mr. Brown; "it's 81, Bishopsgate Street; ain't it? They don't call houses names in London."

"That's just why we'll have a name for ours, Mr. Brown."

"The 'Albert Emporium,'" suggested Jones; "or 'Victoria Mart.'"

Mr. Jones, as will be seen, was given to tuft-hunting to the backbone. His great ambition was to have a lion and unicorn, and to call himself haberdasher to a royal prince. He had never realized the fact that profit, like power, comes from the people, and not from the court. "I wouldn't put up the Queen's arms if the Queen came and asked me," Robinson once said in answer to him. "That game has been played out, and it isn't worth the cost of the two wooden figures."

"'The Temple of Fashion' would do very well," said Jones.

"The Temple of Fiddlestick!" said Robinson.

"Of course you say so," said Jones.

"Let dogs delight – " began Mr. Brown, standing as we were in the middle of the street.

"I'll tell you what," said Robinson; "there's nothing like colour. We'll call it Magenta House, and we'll paint it magenta from the roof to the window tops."

This beautiful tint had only then been invented, and it was necessary to explain the word to Mr. Brown. He merely remarked that the oil and paint would come to a deal of money, and then gave way. Jones was struck dumb by the brilliancy of the idea, and for once forgot to object.

"And, I'll tell you what," said Robinson – "nine times nine is eighty-one."

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Brown, who delighted to agree with his younger partner when circumstances admitted it. "You are right there, certainly." Jones was observed to go through the multiplication table mentally, but he could detect no error.

"Nine times nine is eighty-one," repeated Robinson with confidence, "and we'll put that fact up over the first-floor windows."

And so they did. The house was painted magenta colour from top to bottom. And on the front in very large figures and letters, was stated the undoubted fact that nine times nine is 81. "If they will only call us 'The nine times nine,' the thing is done," said Robinson. Nevertheless, the house was christened Magenta House. "And now about glass," said Robinson, when the three had retired to the little back room within.

Mr. Robinson, however, admitted afterwards that he was wrong about the colour and the number. Such methods of obtaining attention were, he said, too easy of imitation, and devoid of any inherent attraction of their own. People would not care for nine times nine in Bishopsgate Street, if there were nine times nines in other streets as well. "No," said he; "I was but beginning, and made errors as beginners do. Outside there should be glass, gas, gold, and glare. Inside there should be the same, with plenty of brass, and if possible a little wit. If those won't do it, nothing will." All the same the magenta colour and the nine times nine did have their effect. "Nine times nine is eighty-one," was printed on the top of all the flying advertisements issued by the firm, and the printing was all done in magenta.

Mr. Brown groaned sorely over the expenditure that was necessary in preparation of the premises. His wish was that this should be paid for in ready money; and indeed it was necessary that this should be done to a certain extent. But the great object should have been to retain every available shilling for advertisements. In the way of absolute capital, – money to be paid for stock, – 4,000*l.* was nothing. But 4,000*l.* scattered broadcast through the metropolis on walls, omnibuses, railway stations, little books, pavement chalkings, illuminated notices, porters' backs, gilded cars, and men in armour, would have driven nine times nine into the memory of half the inhabitants of London. The men in armour were tried. Four suits were obtained in Poland Street, and four strong men were hired who rode about town all day on four brewers' horses. They carried poles with large banners, and on the banners were inscribed the words which formed the shibboleth of the firm; —

MAGENTA HOUSE,
9 TIMES 9 IS 81,
BISHOPSGATE STREET.

And four times a day these four men in armour met each other in front of the windows of the house, and stood there on horseback for fifteen minutes, with their backs to the curbstone. The forage, however, of the horses became so terribly large an item of expenditure that Mr. Brown's heart failed him. His heart failed him, and he himself went off late one evening to the livery stable-keeper who supplied the horses, and in Mr. Robinson's absence, the armour was sent back to Poland Street.

"We should have had the police down upon us, George," said Mr. Brown, deprecating the anger of his younger partner.

"And what better advertisement could you have wished?" said Robinson. "It would have been in all the papers, and have cost nothing."

"But you don't know, George, what them beastesses was eating! It was frightful to hear of! Four-and-twenty pounds of corn a day each of 'em, because the armour was so uncommon heavy." The men in armour were then given up, but they certainly were beginning to be effective. At 6 p. m., when the men were there, it had become impossible to pass the shop without going into the middle of the street, and on one or two occasions the policemen had spoken to Mr. Brown. Then there was a slight accident with a child, and the newspapers had interfered.

But we are anticipating the story, for the men in armour did not begin their operations till the shop had been opened.

"And now about glass," said Robinson, as soon as the three partners had retired from the outside flags into the interior of the house.

"It must be plate, of course," said Jones. Plate! He might as well have said when wanting a house, that it must have walls.

"I rather think so," said Robinson; "and a good deal of it."

"I don't mind a good-sized common window," said Brown.

"A deal better have them uncommon," said Robinson, interrupting him. "And remember, sir, there's nothing like glass in these days. It has superseded leather altogether in that respect."

"Leather!" said Mr. Brown, who was hardly quick enough for his junior partner.

"Of all our materials now in general use," said Robinson, "glass is the most brilliant, and yet the cheapest; the most graceful and yet the strongest. Though transparent it is impervious to wet. The eye travels through it, but not the hailstorm. To the power of gas it affords no obstacle, but is as efficient a barrier against the casualties of the street as an iron shutter. To that which is ordinary it lends a grace; and to that which is graceful it gives a double lustre. Like a good advertisement, it multiplies your stock tenfold, and like a good servant, it is always eloquent in praise of its owner. I look upon plate glass, sir, as the most glorious product of the age; and I regard the tradesman who can surround himself with the greatest quantity of it, as the most in advance of the tradesmen of his day. Oh, sir, whatever we do, let us have glass."

"It's beautiful to hear him talk," said Mr. Brown; "but it's the bill I'm a thinking of."

"If you will only go enough ahead, Mr. Brown, you'll find that nobody will trouble you with such bills."

"But they must be paid some day, George."

"Of course they must; but it will never do to think of that now. In twelve months or so, when we have set the house well going, the payment of such bills as that will be a mere nothing, – a thing that will be passed as an item not worth notice. Faint heart never won fair lady, you know, Mr. Brown." And then a cloud came across George Robinson's brow as he thought of the words he had spoken; for his heart had once been faint, and his fair lady was by no means won.

"That's quite true," said Jones; "it never does. Ha! ha! ha!"

Then the cloud went away from George Robinson's brow, and a stern frown of settled resolution took its place. At that moment he made up his mind, that when he might again meet that giant butcher he would forget the difference in their size, and accost him as though they two were equal. What though some fell blow, levelled as at an ox, should lay him low for ever. Better that, than endure from day to day the unanswered taunts of such a one as Jones!

Mr. Brown, though he was not quick-witted, was not deficient when the feelings of man and man were concerned. He understood it all, and taking advantage of a moment when Jones had stepped up the shop, he pressed Robinson's hand and said, – "You shall have her, George. If a

father's word is worth anything, you shall have her." But in this case, – as in so many others, – a father's word was not worth anything.

"But to business!" said Robinson, shaking off from him all thoughts of love.

After that Mr. Brown had not the heart to oppose him respecting the glass, and in that matter he had everything nearly his own way. The premises stood advantageously at the corner of a little alley, so that the window was made to jut out sideways in that direction, and a full foot and a half was gained. On the other side the house did not stand flush with its neighbour, – as is not unfrequently the case in Bishopsgate Street, – and here also a few inches were made available. The next neighbour, a quiet old man who sold sticks, threatened a lawsuit; but that, had it been instituted, would have got into the newspapers and been an advertisement. There was considerable trouble about the entrance. A wide, commanding centre doorway was essential; but this, if made in the desirable proportions, would have terribly crippled the side windows. To obviate this difficulty, the exterior space allotted for the entrance between the frontage of the two windows was broad and noble, but the glass splayed inwards towards the shop, so that the absolute door was decidedly narrow.

"When we come to have a crowd, they won't get in and out," said Jones.

"If we could only crush a few to death in the doorway our fortune would be made," said Robinson.

"God forbid!" said Mr. Brown; "God forbid! Let us have no bloodshed, whatever we do."

In about a month the house was completed, and much to the regret of both the junior partners, a considerable sum of ready money was paid to the tradesmen who performed the work. Mr. Jones was of opinion that by sufficient cunning such payments might be altogether evaded. No such thought rested for a moment in the bosom of Mr. Robinson. All tradesmen should be paid, and paid well. But the great firm of Brown, Jones, and Robinson would be much less likely to scrutinize the price at which plate glass was charged to them per square foot, when they were taking their hundreds a day over the counter, than they would be now when every shilling was of importance to them.

"For their own sake you shouldn't do it," said he to Mr. Brown. "You may be quite sure they don't like it."

"I always liked it myself," said Mr. Brown. And thus he would make little dribbling payments, by which an unfortunate idea was generated in the neighbourhood that money was not plentiful with the firm.

CHAPTER V

THE DIVISION OF LABOUR

There were two other chief matters to which it was now necessary that the Firm should attend; the first and primary being the stock of advertisements which should be issued; and the other, or secondary, being the stock of goods which should be obtained to answer the expectations raised by those advertisements.

"But, George, we must have something to sell," said Mr. Brown, almost in despair. He did not then understand, and never since has learned the secrets of that commercial science which his younger partner was at so much pains to teach. There are things which no elderly man can learn; and there are lessons which are full of light for the new recruit, but dark as death to the old veteran.

"It will be so doubtless with me also," said Robinson, soliloquizing on the subject in his melancholy mood. "The day will come when I too must be pushed from my stool by the workings of younger genius, and shall sink, as poor Mr. Brown is now sinking, into the foggy depths of fageydom. But a man who is a man – " and then that melancholy mood left him, "can surely make his fortune before that day comes. When a merchant is known to be worth half a million, his fageydom is respected."

That necessity of having something to sell almost overcame Mr. Brown in those days. "What's the good of putting down 5,000 Kolinski and Minx Boas in the bill, if we don't possess one in the shop?" he asked; "we must have some if they're asked for." He could not understand that for a first start effect is everything. If customers should want Kolinski Boas, Kolinski Boas would of course be forthcoming, – to any number required; either Kolinski Boas, or quasi Kolinski, which in trade is admitted to be the same thing. When a man advertises that he has 40,000 new paletots, he does not mean that he has got that number packed up in a box. If required to do so, he will supply them to that extent, – or to any further extent. A long row of figures in trade is but an elegant use of the superlative. If a tradesman can induce a lady to buy a diagonal Osnabruck cashmere shawl by telling her that he has 1,200 of them, who is injured? And if the shawl is not exactly a real diagonal Osnabruck cashmere, what harm is done as long as the lady gets the value for her money? And if she don't get the value for her money, whose fault is that? Isn't it a fair stand-up fight? And when she tries to buy for 4*l.*, a shawl which she thinks is worth about 8*l.*, isn't she dealing on the same principles herself? If she be lucky enough to possess credit, the shawl is sent home without payment, and three years afterwards fifty per cent. is perhaps offered for settlement of the bill. It is a fair fight, and the ladies are very well able to take care of themselves.

And Jones also thought they must have something to sell. "Money is money," said he, "and goods is goods. What's the use of windows if we haven't anything to dress them? And what's the use of capital unless we buy a stock?"

With Mr. Jones, George Robinson never cared to argue. The absolute impossibility of pouring the slightest ray of commercial light into the dim chaos of that murky mind had long since come home to him. He merely shook his head, and went on with the composition on which he was engaged. It need hardly be explained here that he had no idea of encountering the public throng on their opening day, without an adequate assortment of goods. Of course there must be shawls and cloaks; of course there must be muffs and boas; of course there must be hose and handkerchiefs. That dressing of the windows was to be the special care of Mr. Jones, and Robinson would take care that there should be the wherewithal. The dressing of the windows, and the parading of the shop, was to be the work of Jones. His ambition had never soared above that, and while serving in the house on Snow Hill, his utmost envy had been excited by the youthful aspirant who there walked the boards, and with an oily courtesy handed chairs to the ladies. For one short week he had

been allowed to enter this Paradise. "And though I looked so sweet on them," said he, "I always had my eye on them. It's a grand thing to be down on a well-dressed woman as she's hiding a roll of ribbon under her cloak." That was his idea of grandeur!

A stock of goods was of course necessary, but if the firm could only get their name sufficiently established, that matter would be arranged simply by written orders to two or three wholesale houses. Competition, that beautiful science of the present day, by which every plodding cart-horse is converted into a racer, makes this easy enough. When it should once become known that a firm was opening itself on a great scale in a good thoroughfare, and advertising on real, intelligible principles, there would be no lack of goods.

"You can have any amount of hose you want, out of Cannon Street," said Mr. Robinson, "in forty-five minutes. They can be brought in at the back while you are selling them over the counter."

"Can they?" said Mr. Brown: "perhaps they can. But nevertheless, George, I think I'll buy a few. It'll be an ease to my mind."

He did so; but it was a suicidal act on his part. One thing was quite clear, even to Mr. Jones. If the firm commenced business to the extent which they contemplated, it was out of the question that they should do everything on the ready-money principle. That such a principle is antiquated, absurd, and uncommercial; that it is opposed to the whole system of trade as now adopted in this metropolis, has been clearly shown in the preface to these memoirs. But in this instance, in the case of Brown, Jones, and Robinson, the doing so was as impracticable as it would have been foolish, if practicable. Credit and credit only was required. But of all modes of extinguishing credit, of crushing, as it were, the young baby in its cradle, there is none equal to that of spending a little ready money, and then halting. In trade as in love, to doubt, – or rather, to seem to doubt, – is to be lost. When you order goods, do so as though the bank were at your back. Look your victim full in the face, and write down your long numbers without a falter in your pen. And should there seem a hesitation on his part, do not affect to understand it. When the articles are secured, you give your bill at six months' date; then your credit at your bankers, – your discount system, – commences. That is another affair. When once your bank begins that with you, – and the banks must do so, or they may put up their shutters, – when once your bank has commenced, it must carry on the game. You are floated then, placed well in the centre of the full stream of commerce, and it must be your own fault if you do not either retire with half a million, or become bankrupt with an *éclat*, which is worth more than any capital in refitting you for a further attempt. In the meantime it need hardly be said that you yourself are living on the very fat of the land.

But birds of a feather should flock together, and Mr. Brown and Mr. Robinson were not exactly of the same plumage.

It was finally arranged that Mr. Robinson should have *carte blanche* at his own particular line of business, to the extent of fifteen hundred pounds, and that Mr. Brown should go into the warehouse and lay out a similar sum in goods. Both Jones and Mrs. Jones accompanied the old man, and a sore time he had of it. It may here be remarked that Mrs. Jones struggled very hard to get a footing in the shop, but on this point it should be acknowledged that her husband did his duty for a while.

"It must be you or I, Sarah Jane," said he; "but not both."

"I have no objection in life," said she; "you can stay at home, if you please."

"By no means," he replied. "If you come here, and your father permits it, I shall go to America. Of course the firm will allow me for my share." She tried it on very often after that, and gave the firm much trouble, but I don't think she got her hand into the cash drawer above once or twice during the first twelve months.

The division of labour was finally arranged as follows. Mr. Brown was to order the goods; to hire the young men and women, look after their morality, and pay them their wages; to listen to any special applications when a desire might be expressed to see the firm; and to do the heavy

respectable parental business. There was a little back room with a sky-light, in which he was to sit; and when he was properly got up, his manner of shaking his head at the young people who misbehaved themselves, was not ineffective. There is always danger when young men and women are employed together in the same shop, and if possible this should be avoided. It is not in human nature that they should not fall in love, or at any rate amuse themselves with ordinary flirtations. Now the rule is that not a word shall be spoken that does not refer to business. "Miss O'Brien, where is the salmon-coloured sarsenet? or, Mr. Green, I'll trouble you for the ladies' sevens." Nothing is ever spoken beyond that. "Morals, morals, above everything!" Mr. Brown was once heard to shout from his little room, when a whisper had been going round the shop as to a concerted visit to the Crystal Palace. Why a visit to the Crystal Palace should be immoral, when talked of over the counter, Mr. Brown did not explain on that occasion.

"A very nice set of young women," the compiler of these memoirs once remarked to a commercial gentleman in a large way, who was showing him over his business, "and for the most part very good-looking."

"Yes, sir, yes; we attend to their morals especially. They generally marry from us, and become the happy mothers of families."

"Ah," said I, really delighted in my innocence. "They've excellent opportunities for that, because there are so many decent young men about."

He turned on me as though I had calumniated his establishment with a libel of the vilest description. "If a whisper of such a thing ever reaches us, sir," said he, quite alive with virtuous indignation; "if such a suspicion is ever engendered, we send them packing at once! The morals of our young women, sir – " And then he finished his sentence simply by a shake of his head. I tried to bring him into an argument, and endeavoured to make him understand that no young woman can become a happy wife unless she first be allowed to have a lover. He merely shook his head, and at last stamped his foot. "Morals, sir!" he repeated. "Morals above everything. In such an establishment as this, if we are not moral, we are nothing." I supposed he was right, but it seemed to me to be very hard on the young men and women. I could only hope that they walked home together in the evening.

In the new firm in Bishopsgate Street, Mr. Brown, of course, took upon himself that branch of business, and some little trouble he had, because his own son-in-law and partner would make eyes to the customers.

"Mr. Jones," he once said before them all; "you'll bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave; you will, indeed." And then he put up his fat hand, and gently stroked the white expanse of his bald pate. But that was a very memorable occasion.

Such was Mr. Brown's business. To Mr. Jones was allocated the duty of seeing that the shop was duly dressed, of looking after the customers, including that special duty of guarding against shop-lifting, and of attending generally to the retail business. It cannot be denied that for this sort of work he had some specialties. His eye was sharp, and his ear was keen, and his feelings were blunt. In a certain way, he was good-looking, and he knew how to hand a chair with a bow and smile, which went far with the wives and daughters of the East End little tradesmen, – and he was active enough at his work. He was usually to be seen standing in the front of the shop, about six yards within the door, rubbing his hands together, or arranging his locks, or twiddling with his brass watch-chain. Nothing disconcerted him, unless his wife walked into the place; and then, to the great delight of the young men and women, he was unable to conceal his misery. By them he was hated, – as was perhaps necessary in his position. He was a tyrant, who liked to feel at every moment the relish of his power. To the poor girls he was cruel, treating them as though they were dirt beneath his feet. For Mr. Jones, though he affected the reputation of an admirer of the fair sex, never forgot himself by being even civil to a female who was his paid servant. Woman's smile had a charm for him, but no charm equal to the servility of dependence.

But on the shoulders of Mr. Robinson fell the great burden of the business. There was a question as to the accounts; these, however, he undertook to keep in his leisure moments, thinking but little of the task. But the work of his life was to be the advertising department. He was to draw up the posters; he was to write those little books which, printed on magenta-coloured paper, were to be thrown with reckless prodigality into every vehicle in the town; he was to arrange new methods of alluring the public into that emporium of fashion. It was for him to make a credulous multitude believe that at that shop, number Nine Times Nine in Bishopsgate Street, goods of all sorts were to be purchased at prices considerably less than the original cost of their manufacture. This he undertook to do; this for a time he did do; this for years to come he would have done, had he not experienced an interference in his own department, by which the whole firm was ultimately ruined and sent adrift.

"The great thing is to get our bills into the hands of the public," said Robinson.

"You can get men for one and nine a day to stand still and hand 'em out to the passers-by," said Mr. Brown.

"That's stale, sir, quite stale; novelty in advertising is what we require; – something new and startling."

"Put a chimney-pot on the man's head," said Mr. Brown, "and make it two and three."

"That's been tried," said Robinson.

"Then put two chimney-pots," said Mr. Brown. Beyond that his imagination did not carry him.

Chimney-pots and lanterns on men's heads avail nothing. To startle men and women to any purpose, and drive them into Bishopsgate Street, you must startle them a great deal. It does not suffice to create a momentary wonder. Mr. Robinson, therefore, began with eight footmen in full livery, with powdered hair and gold tags to their shoulders. They had magenta-coloured plush knee-breeches, and magenta-coloured silk stockings. It was in May, and the weather was fine, and these eight excellently got-up London footmen were stationed at different points in the city, each with a silken bag suspended round his shoulder by a silken cord. From these bags they drew forth the advertising cards of the house, and presented them to such of the passers-by as appeared from their dress and physiognomy to be available for the purpose. The fact has now been ascertained that men and women who have money to spend will not put out their hands to accept common bills from street advertisers. In an ordinary way the money so spent is thrown away. But from these men, arrayed in gorgeous livery, a duchess would have stayed her steps to accept a card. And duchesses did stay their steps, and cards from the young firm of Brown, Jones, and Robinson were, as the firm was credibly informed, placed beneath the eyes of a very illustrious personage indeed.

The nature of the card was this. It was folded into three, and when so folded, was of the size of an ordinary playing card. On the outside, which bore a satin glaze with a magenta tint, there was a blank space as though for an address, and the compliments of the firm in the corner; when opened there was a separate note inside, in which the public were informed in very few words, that "Messrs. Brown, Jones, and Robinson were prepared to open their house on the 15th of May, intending to carry on their trade on principles of commerce perfectly new, and hitherto untried. The present rate of money in the city was five per cent., and it would be the practice of the firm to charge five and a half per cent. on every article sold by them. The very quick return which this would give them, would enable B. J. and R. to realize princely fortunes, and at the same time to place within the reach of the public goods of the very best description at prices much below any that had ever yet been quoted." This also was printed on magenta-coloured paper, and "nine times nine is eighty-one" was inserted both at the top and the bottom.

On the inside of the card, on the three folds, were printed lists of the goods offered to the public. The three headings were "cloaks and shawls," "furs and velvets," "silks and satins;" and

in a small note at the bottom it was stated that the stock of hosiery, handkerchiefs, ribbons, and gloves, was sufficient to meet any demand which the metropolis could make upon the firm.

When that list was first read out in conclave to the partners, Mr. Brown begged almost with tears in his eyes, that it might be modified. "George," said he, "we shall be exposed."

"I hope we shall," said Robinson. "Exposition is all that we desire."

"Eight thousand African monkey muffs! Oh, George, you must leave out the monkey muffs."

"By no means, Mr. Brown."

"Or bring them down to a few hundreds. Two hundred African monkey muffs would really be a great many."

"Mr. Brown," said Robinson on that occasion; – and it may be doubted whether he ever again spoke to the senior partner of his firm in terms so imperious and decisive; "Mr. Brown, to you has been allotted your share in our work, and when you insisted on throwing away our ready money on those cheap Manchester prints, I never said a word. It lay in your department to do so. The composition of this card lies in mine, and I mean to exercise my own judgment." And then he went on, "Eight thousand real African monkey muffs; six thousand ditto, ditto, ditto, very superior, with long fine hair." Mr. Brown merely groaned, but he said nothing further.

"Couldn't you say that they are such as are worn by the Princess Alice?" suggested Jones.

"No, I could not," answered Robinson. "You may tell them that in the shop if you please. That will lie in your department."

In this way was the first card of the firm drawn out, and in the space of a fortnight, nineteen thousand of them were disseminated through the metropolis. When it is declared that each of those cards cost B. J. and R. threepence three farthings, some idea may be formed of the style in which they commenced their operations.

CHAPTER VI

IT IS OUR OPENING DAY

And now the day had arrived on which the firm was to try the result of their efforts. It is believed that the 15th of May in that year will not easily be forgotten in the neighbourhood of Bishopsgate Street. It was on this day that the experiment of the men in armour was first tried, and the four cavaliers, all mounted and polished as bright as brass, were stationed in the front of the house by nine o'clock. There they remained till the doors and shop windows were opened, which ceremony actually took place at twelve. It had been stated to the town on the preceding day by a man dressed as Fame, with a long horn, who had been driven about in a gilt car, that this would be done at ten. But peeping through the iron shutters at that hour, the gentlemen of the firm saw that the crowd was as yet by no means great. So a huge poster was put up outside each window: —

POSTPONED TILL ELEVEN

IMMENSE PRESSURE OF GOODS IN THE BACK PREMISES

At eleven this was done again; but at twelve the house was really opened. At that time the car with Fame and the long horn was stationed in front of the men in armour, and there really was a considerable concourse of people.

"This won't do, Mr. Brown," a policeman had said. "The people are half across the street."

"Success! success!" shouted Mr. Robinson, from the first landing on the stairs. He was busy correcting the proofs of their second set of notices to the public.

"Shall we open, George?" whispered Mr. Brown, who was rather flurried.

"Yes; you may as well begin," said he. "It must be done sooner or later." And then he retired quietly to his work. He had allowed himself to be elated for one moment at the interference of the police, but after that he remained above, absorbed in his work; or if not so absorbed, disdainful to mix with the crowd below. For there, in the centre of the shop, leaning on the arm of Mr. William Brisket, stood Maryanne Brown.

As regards grouping, there was certainly some propriety in the arrangements made for receiving the public. When the iron shutters were wound up, the young men of the establishment stood in a row behind one of the counters, and the young women behind the other. They were very nicely got up for the occasion. The girls were all decorated with magenta-coloured ribbons, and the young men with magenta neckties. Mr. Jones had been very anxious to charge them for these articles in their wages, but Mr. Brown's good feeling had prevented this. "No, Jones, no; the master always finds the livery." There had been something in the words, master and livery, which had tickled the ears of his son-in-law, and so the matter had been allowed to pass by.

In the centre of the shop stood Mr. Brown, very nicely dressed in a new suit of black. That bald head of his, and the way he had of rubbing his hands together, were not ill-calculated to create respect. But on such occasions it was always necessary to induce him to hold his tongue. Mr. Brown never spoke effectively unless he had been first moved almost to tears. It was now his special business to smile, and he did smile. On his right hand stood his partner and son-in-law Jones, mounted quite irrespectively of expense. His waistcoat and cravat may be said to have been gorgeous, and from his silky locks there came distilled a mixed odour of musk and patchouli. About his neck also the colours of the house were displayed, and in his hand he waved a magenta handkerchief. His wife was leaning on his arm, and on such an occasion as this even Robinson

had consented to her presence. She was dressed from head to foot in magenta. She wore a magenta bonnet, and magenta stockings, and it was said of her that she was very careful to allow the latter article to be seen. The only beauty of which Sarah Jane could boast, rested in her feet and ankles.

But on the other side of Mr. Brown stood a pair, for whose presence there George Robinson had not expressed his approbation, and as to one of whom it may be said that better taste would have been shown on all sides had he not thus intruded himself. Mr. Brisket had none of the rights of proprietorship in that house, nor would it be possible that he should have as long as the name of the firm contained within itself that of Mr. Robinson. Had Brown, Jones, and Brisket agreed to open shop together, it would have been well for Brisket to stand there with that magenta shawl round his neck, and waving that magenta towel in his hand. But as it was, what business had he there?

"What business has he there? Ah, tell me that; what business has he there?" said Robinson to himself, as he sat moodily in the small back room upstairs. "Ah, tell me that, what business has he here? Did not the old man promise that she should be mine? Is it for him that I have done all; for him that I have collected the eager crowd of purchasers that throng the hall of commerce below, which my taste has decorated? Or for her – ? Have I done this for her, – the false one? But what recks it? She shall live to know that had she been constant to me she might have sat – almost upon a throne!" And then he rushed again to his work, and with eager pen struck off those well-known lines about the house which some short time after ravished the ears of the metropolis.

In a following chapter of these memoirs it will be necessary to go back for a while to the domestic life of some of the persons concerned, and the fact of Mr. Brisket's presence at the opening of the house will then be explained. In the meantime the gentle reader is entreated to take it for granted that Mr. William Brisket was actually there, standing on the left hand of Mr. Brown, waving high above his head a huge magenta cotton handkerchief, and that on his other arm was hanging Maryanne Brown, leaning quite as closely upon him as her sister did upon the support which was her own. For one moment George Robinson allowed himself to look down upon the scene, and he plainly saw that clutch of the hand upon the sleeve. "Big as he is," said Robinson to himself, "pistols would make us equal. But the huge ox has no sense of chivalry."

It was unfortunate for the future intrinsic comfort of the firm that that member of it who was certainly not the least enterprising should have found himself unable to join in the ceremony of opening the house; but, nevertheless, it must be admitted that that ceremony was imposing. Maryanne Brown was looking her best, and dressed as she was in the correctest taste of the day, wearing of course the colours of the house, it was not unnatural that all eyes should be turned on her. "What a big man that Robinson is!" some one in the crowd was heard to observe. Yes; that huge lump of human clay that called itself William Brisket, the butcher of Aldersgate Street, was actually taken on that occasion for the soul, and life, and salt of an advertising house. Of Mr. William Brisket, it may here be said, that he had no other idea of trade than that of selling at so much per pound the beef which he had slaughtered with his own hands.

But that ceremony was imposing. "Ladies and gentlemen," said those five there assembled – speaking as it were with one voice, – "we bid you welcome to Magenta House. Nine times nine is eighty-one. Never forget that." Robinson had planned the words, but he was not there to assist at their utterance! "Ladies and gentlemen, again we bid you welcome to Magenta House." And then they retired backwards down the shop, allowing the crowd to press forward, and all packed themselves for awhile into Mr. Brown's little room at the back.

"It was smart," said Mr. Brisket.

"And went off uncommon well," said Jones, shaking the scent from his head. "All the better, too, because that chap wasn't here."

"He's a clever fellow," said Brisket.

"And you shouldn't speak against him behind his back, Jones. Who did it all? And who couldn't have done it if he hadn't been here?" When these words were afterwards told to George Robinson, he forgave Mr. Brown a great deal.

The architect, acting under the direction of Mr. Robinson, had contrived to arch the roof, supporting it on five semicircular iron girders, which were left there visible to the eye, and which were of course painted magenta. On the foremost of these was displayed the name of the firm, – Brown, Jones, and Robinson. On the second, the name of the house, – Magenta House. On the third the number, – Nine times nine is eighty one. On the fourth, an edict of trade against which retail houses in the haberdashery line should never sin, – "Terms: Ready cash." And on the last, the special principle of our trade, – "Five-and-a-half per cent. profit." The back of the shop was closed in with magenta curtains, through which the bald head of Mr. Brown would not unfrequently be seen to emerge; and on each side of the curtains there stood a tall mirror, reaching up to the very ceiling. Upon the whole, the thing certainly was well done.

"But the contractor," – the man who did the work was called the contractor, – "the contractor says that he will want the rest of his money in two months," said Mr. Brown, whining.

"He would not have wanted any for the next twelve months," answered Robinson, "if you had not insisted on paying him those few hundreds."

"You can find fault with the bill, you know," said Jones, "and delay it almost any time by threatening him with a lawyer."

"And then he will put a distress on us," said Mr. Brown.

"And after that will be very happy to take our bill at six months," answered Robinson. And so that matter was ended for the time.

Those men in armour stood there the whole of that day, and Fame in his gilded car used his trumpet up and down Bishopsgate Street with such effect, that the people living on each side of the street became very sick of him. Fame himself was well acted, – at 16s. the day, – and when the triumphal car remained still, stood balanced on one leg, with the other stretched out behind, in a manner that riveted attention. But no doubt his horn was badly chosen. Mr. Robinson insisted on a long single-tubed instrument, saying that it was classical; but a cornet à piston would have given more pleasure.

A good deal of money was taken on that day; but certainly not so much as had been anticipated. Very many articles were asked for, looked at, and then not purchased. But this, though it occasioned grief to Mr. Brown, was really not of much moment. That the thing should be talked of, – if possible mentioned in the newspapers – was the object of the firm.

"I would give my bond for 2,000/.," said Robinson, "to get a leader in the Jupiter."

The first article demanded over the counter was a real African monkey muff, very superior, with long fine hair.

"The ships which are bringing them have not yet arrived from the coast," answered Jones, who luckily stepped up at the moment. "They are expected in the docks to-morrow."

CHAPTER VII

MISS BROWN PLEADS HER OWN CASE, AND MR. ROBINSON WALKS ON BLACKFRIARS BRIDGE

At the time of Mrs. McCockerell's death Robinson and Maryanne Brown were not on comfortable terms with each other. She had twitted him with being remiss in asserting his own rights in the presence of his rival, and he had accused her of being fickle, if not actually false.

"I shall be just as fickle as I please," she said. "If it suits me I'll have nine to follow me; but there shan't be one of the nine who won't hold up his head and look after his own."

"Your conduct, Maryanne – ."

"George, I won't be scolded, and that you ought to know. If you don't like me, you are quite welcome to do the other thing." And then they parted. This took place after Mr. Brown's adherence to the Robinson interest, and while Brisket was waiting passively to see if that five hundred pounds would be forthcoming.

Their next meeting was in the presence of Mr. Brown; and on that occasion all the three spoke out their intentions on the subject of their future family arrangements, certainly with much plain language, if not on every side with positive truth. Mr. Robinson was at the house in Smithfield, giving counsel to old Mr. Brown as to the contest which was then being urged between him and his son-in-law. At that period the two sisters conceived that their joint pecuniary interests required that they should act together; and it must be acknowledged that they led poor Mr. Brown a sad life of it. He and Robinson were sitting upstairs in the little back room looking out into Spavinhorse Yard, when Maryanne abruptly broke in upon them.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.