

MISS POLE (*moving c.*). Miss Matty . . . this is terrible . . . if the bank has failed, you are ruined . . . !

MISS MATTY. Yes, Miss Pole . . . I think I am . . .

MISS POLE (*moving to Miss M.*). Then may I ask if you will think it your duty to offer sovereigns for all the bank notes in Cranford . . . ?

MISS MATTY. Dear Miss Pole . . . it is often very difficult for me to make up my mind about what is right and what is wrong . . . but when I saw poor Jem standing there before me, I suddenly knew what was my duty . . . and as for all the other notes in Cranford . . . I can only wait and see what happens . . . and when it does happen, perhaps I shall be helped as I was tonight . . . to see what is right . . .

MARY. But Miss Matty . . .

MISS MATTY (*crossing to fire*). And you must understand, dear, that as the Rector's daughter . . . these poor people look up to me . . . and to people of our position, and we must not let them down, must we . . . ? Shall we go upstairs . . . ?

(MISS MATTY and MARY each take candelabrum and with Miss P. in centre move to the stairs very solemnly . . .)

And perhaps we shall not be frightened of imaginary robbers, now that we have something more serious to think about . . .

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE

SET. The same.

TIME. Two days later: a bright sunny morning.

(*At rise: The stage appears to be deserted but we can hear the noise of very energetic scrubbing and, almost at once, we see the posterior portion of MARTHA. She is on her hands and knees scrubbing the front hall for dear life. She backs into view . . . gives a last wipe to the floor . . . stands up, dries her hands on her apron, lifts her bucket from the hallway into the parlour and, as she turns, enter MISS MATTY . . . down stairs. She is dressed for the street in bonnet and cape and she carries in her hand an open letter.*)

MARTHA. If you're going out now, ma'am, will you just tell me what you fancy for lunch, before you go . . . ?

MISS MATTY (*who has been thinking about something else*). Oh . . . let me see . . . Something very plain . . . a mutton chop perhaps . . . that will be enough for Miss Mary and me . . . I think . . .

MARTHA. And for pudding?

MISS MATTY. I don't think we will have any pudding today, Martha . . .

MARTHA. No pudding . . . ? That's the first time I've heard you say "no pudding" . . .

MISS MATTY (*breaking r.*). I have no great fancy for sweet things, today. And Martha, I am afraid . . . you see . . . that is owing to circumstances, I fear, Martha, that I must give you notice to leave me . . .

MARTHA (*in violent astonishment*). Leave you . . . !

MISS MATTY. At the end of the month . . .

MARTHA. You mean that letter . . . it says you haven't got no more money . . . ? I didn't like the look of it when I brought it up . . .

MISS MATTY (*moving c.*). Yes, Martha . . . it means I am quite ruined . . . it means I shall have just five shillings a week to