CHAPTER I

AN INTERCESSOR

IN the heart of the City, but fended off from the roar and rattle of traffic by a ring of shops, and under the shadow of a smoke-begrimed classical church, stands—or rather stood, for they have removed it recently—the large public school of St. Peter's.

Entering the heavy old gate, against which the shops on both sides huddled close, you passed into the atmosphere of scholastic calm which, during working hours, pervades most places of education, and saw a long plain block of buildings, within which it was hard to believe, so deep was the silence, that some hundreds of boys were collected.

Even if you went down the broad stair to the school entrance and along the basement, where the bulk of the class-rooms was situated, there was only a faint hum to be heard from behind the numerous doors—until the red-waistcoated porter came out of his lodge and rang the big bell which told that the day's work was over.

Halfway down the main corridor was the "Middle-Third" class-room, a big square room with dingy cream-coloured walls, high windows darkened with soot, and a small stained writing-table at one end, surrounded on three sides by ranks of rugged seasoned forms and sloping desks; round the walls were varnished lockers with a number painted on the lid of each, and a big square stove stood in one corner.

The only person in the room just then was the form-master, Mark Ashburn; and he was proposing to leave it almost immediately, for the close air and the strain of keeping order all day had given him a headache, and he was thinking that before walking homeward he would amuse himself with a magazine, or a gossip in the masters' room.

Mark Ashburn was a young man, almost the youngest on the school staff, and very decidedly the best-looking.

He was tall and well made, with black hair and eloquent dark eyes, which had the gift of expressing rather more than a rigid examination would have found inside him—just now, for example, a sentimental observer would have read in their glance round the bare deserted room the passionate protest of a soul conscious of genius against the hard fate which had placed him there, whereas he was in reality merely wondering whose hat that was on the row of pegs opposite.

But if Mark was not a genius, there was a brilliancy in his manner that had something very captivating about it; an easy confidence in himself, that had the more merit because it had hitherto met with extremely small encouragement.

He dressed carefully, which was not without effect upon his class, for boys, without being over-scrupulous in the matter of their own costume, are apt to be critical of the garments of those in authority over them. To them he was "an awful swell"; though he was not actually over-dressed—it was only that he liked to walk home along Piccadilly with the air of a man who had just left his club and had nothing particular to do.

He was not unpopular with his boys: he did not care twopence about any of them, but he felt it pleasant to be popular, and his careless good-nature secured that result without much effort on his part. They had a great respect for his acquirements too, speaking of him among themselves as "jolly clever when he liked to show it"; for Mark was not above giving occasional indications of deep learning which were highly impressive. He went out of his way to do it, and was probably aware that the learning thus suggested would not stand any very severe test; but then there was no one there to apply it.

Any curiosity as to the last hat and coat on the wall was satisfied while he still sat at his desk, for the door, with its upper panels of corrugated glass protected by stout wire net-work—no needless precaution there—opened just then, and a small boy appeared, looking rather pale and uncomfortable, and holding a long sheet of blue foolscap in one hand.

"Hullo, Langton," said Mark, as he saw him; "so it's you; why, haven't you gone yet, eh? How's that?"

"Please, sir," began the boy, dolorously, "I've got into an awful row—I'm run in, sir."

"Ah!" said Mark; "sorry for you—what is it?"

"Well, I didn't do anything," said he. "It was like this. I was going along the passage, and just passing Old Jemmy's—I mean Mr. Shelford's—door, and it was open. And there was a fellow standing outside, a bigger fellow than me, and he caught hold of me by the collar and ran me right in and shut the door and bolted. And Mr. Shelford came at me and boxed my ears, and said it wasn't the first time, and I should have a detention card for it. And so he gave me this, and I'm to go up to the Doctor with it and get it signed when it's done!"

And the boy held out the paper, at the top of which Mark read in Shelford's tremulous hand—"Langton, 100 lines for outrageous impertinence.—J. Shelford."

"If I go up, you know, sir," said the boy, with a trembling lip, "I'm safe for a swishing."

"Well, I'm afraid you are," agreed Mark, "but you'd better make haste, hadn't you? or they'll close the Detention Room, and you'll only be worse off for waiting, you see."

Mark was really rather sorry for him, though he had, as has been said, no great liking for boys; but this particular one, a round-faced, freckled boy, with honest eyes and a certain refinement in his voice and bearing that somehow suggested that he had a mother or sister who was a gentlewoman, was less objectionable to Mark than his fellows. Still he could not enter into his feelings sufficiently to guess why he was being appealed to in this way.

Young Langton half turned to go, dejectedly enough; then he came back and said, "Please, sir, can't you help me? I shouldn't mind the—the swishing so much if I'd done anything. But I haven't."

"What can I do?" asked Mark.

"If you wouldn't mind speaking to Mr. Shelford for me—he'd listen to you, and he won't to me."

"He will have gone by this time," objected Mark.

"Not if you make haste," said the boy, eagerly.

Mark was rather flattered by this confidence in his persuasive powers; he liked the idea, too, of posing as the protector of his class, and the good-natured element in him made him the readier to yield.

"Well, we'll have a shot at it, Langton," he said. "I doubt if it's much good, you know, but here goes. When

you get in, hold your tongue, and keep in the background —leave it to me."

So they went out into the long passage with its white-washed walls and rows of doors on each side, and black barrel-vaulting above.

Mark stopped at the door of the Upper Fourth Class-room, and went in.

Mr. Shelford was evidently just going, for as they came in he had put a very large hat on the back of his head, and was winding a long grey comforter round his throat; but he took off the hat courteously as he saw Mark. He was a little old man, with a high brick-red colour on his smooth, scarcely wrinkled cheeks, a big aquiline nose, a wide thin-lipped mouth, and sharp little grey eyes, which he cocked sideways at one like an angry parrot.

Langton retired to a form out of hearing, and sat down on one end of it, nursing his detention paper anxiously.

"Well, Ashburn," began the Reverend James Shelford, "is there anything I can do for you?"

"Why," said Mark, "the fact is, I——"

"Eh, what?" said the elder. "Wait a minute—there's that impident fellow back again! I thought I'd seen the last of him. Here, you sir, didn't I send you up for a flogging?"

"I—I believe you did, sir," said Langton, with extreme deference.

"Well, why ain't you *getting* that flogging—eh, sir? No impidence, now—just tell me, why ain't you being flogged? You ought to be in the middle of it now!"

"Well, you see," said Mark, "he's one of *my* boys——"

"I don't care whose boy he is," said the other, testily; "he's an impident fellow, sir."

"I don't think he is, really," said Mark.

"D'ye know what he did, then? Came whooping and shouting and hullabalooing into my room, for all the world as if it was his own nursery, sir. He's *always* doing it!"

"I never did it before," protested Langdon, "and it wasn't my fault this time."

"Wasn't your fault! You haven't got St. Vitus' dance, have you? I never heard there were any tarantula spiders here. You don't go dancing into the Doctor's room, do you? *He'll* give you a dancing lesson!" said the old gentleman, sitting down again to chuckle, and looking very like Mr. Punch.

"No, but allow me," put in Mark; "I assure you this boy is——"

"I know what you're going to tell me—he's a model boy, of course. It's singular what shoals of model boys *do* come dancing in here under some irresistible impulse after school. I'll put a stop to it now I've caught one. You don't know 'em as well as I do, sir, you don't know 'em—they're all impident and all liars—some are cleverer at it than others, and that's all."

"I'm afraid that's true enough," said Mark, who did not like being considered inexperienced.

"Yes, it's cruel work having to do with boys, sir—cruel and thankless. If ever I try to help a boy in my class I think is trying to get on and please me, what does he do? Turn round and play me some scurvy trick, just to prove to the others he's not currying favour. And then they insult me—why, that very boy has been and shouted 'Shellfish' through my keyhole many a time, I'll warrant!"

"I think you're mistaken," said Mark, soothingly.

"You do? I'll ask him. Here, d'ye mean to tell me you never called out 'Shellfish'—or—or other opprobrious epithets into my door, sir?" And he inclined his ear for the answer with his eyes fixed on the boy's face.

"Not 'Shellfish,'" said the boy; "I did 'Prawn' once. But that was long ago."

Mark gave him up then, with a little contempt for such injudicious candour.

"Oh!" said Mr. Shelford, catching him, but not ungently, by the ear. "'Prawn,' eh? 'Prawn'; hear that, Ashburn? Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me *why* 'Prawn'?"

A natural tendency of the youthful mind to comparative physiology had discovered a fanciful resemblance which justified any graceful personalities of this kind; but Langton probably felt that candour had its limits, and that this was a question that required judgment in dealing with it.

"Because—because I've heard other fellows call you that," he replied.

"Ah, and why do *they* call me 'Prawn,' eh?"

"I never heard them give any reason," said the boy, diplomatically.

Mr. Shelford let the boy go with another chuckle, and Langton retired to his form again out of earsnot.

"Yes, Ashburn," said old Jemmy, "that's the name they have for me--one of 'em. 'Prawn' and 'Shellfish'—they yell it out after me as I'm going home, and then run away. And I've had to bear it thirty years. Yes, it's a wearing life, sir, a wearing life," he went on with less heat, "hearing generations of stoopid boys all blundering at the same stiff places, and worrying over the same old passages. I'm getting very tired of it; I'm an old man now. 'Occidit miseros crambe'--eh, you know how it goes on?"

"Yes, yes," said Mark, "quite so"--though he had but a dim recollection of the line in question.

"Talking of verses," said the other, "I hear we're to have the pleasure of seeing one of your productions on Speech-night this year. Is that so?"

"I was not aware anything was settled," said Mark, flushing with pleasure. "I did lay a little thing of my own, a sort of allegorical Christmas piece—a *masque*, don't you know—before the Doctor and the Speeches Committee, but I haven't heard anything definite yet."

"Oh, perhaps I'm premature," said Mr. Shelford; "perhaps I'm premature."

"Do you mind telling me if you've heard anything said about it?" asked Mark, thoroughly interested.

"I did hear some talk about it in the luncheon hour. You weren't in the room, I believe, but I think they were to come to a decision this afternoon."

"Then it will be all over by now," said Mark; "there may be a note on my desk about it. I--I think I'll go and see, if you'll excuse me."

And he left the room hastily, quite forgetting his original purpose in entering: something much more important to him than whether a boy should be flogged or not, when he had no doubt richly deserved it, was pending just then, and he could not rest until he knew the result.

For Mark had always longed for renown of some sort, and for the last few years literary distinction had seemed the most open to him. He had sought it by more ambitious attempts, but even the laurels which the performance of a piece of his by boy-actors on a Speech-day might bring him had become desirable; and though he had written and submitted his work confidently and carelessly enough, he found himself not a little anxious and excited as the time for a decision drew near.

It was a small thing; but if it did nothing else it would procure him a modified fame in the school and the masters' room, and Mark Ashburn had never felt resigned to be a nonentity anywhere.

Little wonder, then, that Langton's extremity faded out of his mind as he hurried back to his class-room, leaving that unlucky small boy in his captor's clutches.

The old clergyman put on the big hat again when Mark had gone, and stood up peering over the desk at his prisoner.

"Well, if you don't want to be locked up here all night, you'd better be off," he remarked.

"To the Detention Room, sir?" faltered the boy.

"You know the way, I believe? If not, I can show you," said the old gentleman politely.

"But really and truly," pleaded Langton, "I didn't do anything this time. I was shoved in."

"Who shoved you in? Come, you know well enough; you're going to lie, I can see. Who was he?"

It is not improbable that Langton *was* going to lie that time—his code allowed it—but he felt checked somehow.

"Well, I only know the fellow by name," he said at last.

"Well, and *what's* his name? Out with it; I'll give him a detention card instead."

"I can't tell you that," said the boy in a lower voice.

"And why not, ye impident fellow? You've just said you knew it. Why not?"

"Because it would be sneakish," said Langton boldly.

"Oh, 'sneakish,' would it?" said old Jemmy. "'Sneakish,' eh? Well, well, I'm getting old, I forget these things. Perhaps it would. I don't know what it is to insult an old man—that's fair enough, I dare say. And so you want me to let you off being whipped, eh?"

"Yes, when I've done nothing."

"And if I let you off you'll come gallopading in here as lively as ever to-morrow, calling out 'Shellfish'—no, I forgot—'Prawn's' *your* favourite epithet, ain't it?—calling out 'Prawn' under my very nose."

"No, I shan't," said the boy.

"Well, I'll take your word for it, whatever that's worth," and he tore up the compromising paper. "Run off home to your tea, and don't bother me any more."

Langton escaped, full of an awed joy, and old Mr. Shelford locked his desk, got out the big hook-nosed umbrella, which

had contracted a strong resemblance to himself, and went too.

"That's a nice boy," he muttered—"wouldn't tell tales, wouldn't he? But I dare say he was taking me in all the time. He'll be able to tell the other young scamps how neatly he got over 'old Jemmy.' I don't think he will, though. I can still tell when a boy's lying—I've had plenty of opportunities."

Meanwhile Mark had gone back to his class-room. One of the porters ran after him with a note, and he opened it eagerly, only to be disappointed, for it was not from the committee. It was dated from Lincoln's Inn, and came from his friend Holroyd.

"Dear Ashburn," the note ran, "don't forget your promise to look in here on your way home. You know it's the last time we shall walk back together, and there's a favour I want to ask of you before saying good-bye. I shall be at chambers till five, as I am putting my things together."

"I will go round presently," he thought. "I must say good-bye some time to-day, and it will be a bore to turn out after dinner."

As he stood reading the note, young Langton passed him, bag in hand, with a bright and grateful face.

"Please, sir," he said, saluting him, "thanks awfully for getting Mr. Shelford to let me off; he wouldn't have done it but for you."

"Oh, ah," said Mark, suddenly remembering his errand of mercy, "to be sure, yes. So, he has let you off, has he? Well, I'm very glad I was of use to you, Langton. It was a hard fight, wasn't it? That's enough, get along home, and let me find you better up in your Nepos than you were yesterday."

Beyond giving the boy his company in facing his judge for the second time, Mark, as will have been observed, had not been a very energetic advocate; but as Langton was evidently unaware of the fact, Mark himself was the last person to allude to it. Gratitude, whether earned or not, was gratitude, and always worth accepting.

"By Jove," he thought to himself with half-ashamed amusement, "I forgot all about the little beggar; left him to the tender mercies of old 'Prawn.' All's well that ends well, anyhow!"

As he stood by the *grille* at the porter's lodge, the old 'Prawn' himself passed slowly out, with his shoulders bent, and his old eyes staring straight before him with an absent, lack-lustre expression in them. Perhaps he was thinking that life might have been more cheerful for him if his wife Mary had lived, and he had had her and boys like that young Langton to meet him when his wearisome day was over, instead of being childless and a widower, and returning to the lonely, dingy house which he occupied as the incumbent of a musty church hard by.

Whatever he thought of, he was too engaged to notice Mark, who followed him with his eyes as he slowly worked his way up the flight of stone steps which led to the street level. "Shall *I* ever come to that?" he thought. "If I stay here all my life, I *may*. Ah, there's Gilbertson—he can tell me about this Speech-day business."

Gilbertson was a fellow-master, and one of the committee for arranging the Speech-day entertainment. For the rest he was a nervously fussy little man, and met Mark with evident embarrassment.

"Well, Gilbertson," said Mark, as unconcernedly as he could, "settled your programme yet?"

"Er—oh, yes, quite settled—quite—that is, not definitely as yet."

"And—my little production?"

"Oh, ah, to be sure, yes, your little production. We all liked it very much—oh, exceedingly so—the Doctor especially—charmed with it, my dear Ashburn, charmed!"

"Very glad to hear it," said Mark, with a sudden thrill; "and—and have you decided to take it, then?"

"Well," said Mr. Gilbertson, looking at the pavement all round him, "you see, the fact is, the Doctor thought, and some of us thought so too, that a piece to be acted by boys should have a leetle more—eh? and not quite so much—so much of what yours has, and a few of those little natural touches, you know—but you see what I mean, don't you?"

"It would be a capital piece with half that in it," said Mark, trying to preserve his temper, "but I could easily alter it, you know, Gilbertson."

"No, no," said Gilbertson eagerly, "you mustn't think of it; you'd spoil it; we couldn't hear of it, and—and it won't be necessary to trouble you. Because, you see, the Doctor thought it was a little long, and not quite light

enough; and not exactly the sort of thing we want, but we all admired it."

"But it won't do? Is that what you mean?"

"Why—er—nothing definite at present. We are going to write you a letter about it. Good-bye, good-bye! Got a train to catch at Ludgate Hill."

And he bustled away, glad to escape, for he had not counted upon having to announce a rejection in person.

Mark stood looking after him, with a slightly dazed feeling. *That* was over, then. He had written works which he felt persuaded had only to become known to bring him fame; but for all that it seemed that he was not considered worthy to entertain a Speech-night audience at a London public school.

Hitherto Mark's life had contained more of failure than success. From St. Peter's he had gone to a crammer's to be prepared for the Indian Civil Service, and an easy pass had been anticipated for him even at the first trial. Unfortunately, however, his name came out low down on the list—a disaster which he felt must be wiped out at all hazards, and, happening to hear of an open scholarship that was to be competed for at a Cambridge college, he tried for it, and this time was successful. A well-to-do uncle, who had undertaken the expenses hitherto, was now induced to consent to the abandonment of the Civil Service in favour of a University career, and Mark entered upon it accordingly with fair prospects of distinction, if he read with even ordinary steadiness.

This he had done during his first year, though he managed to get a fair share of enjoyment out of his life, but then something happened to change the whole current of his ambitions—he composed a college skit which brought him considerable local renown, and from that moment was sought as a contributor to sundry of those ephemeral undergraduate periodicals which, in their short life, are so universally reviled and so eagerly read.

Mark's productions, imitative and crude as they necessarily were, had admirers who strengthened his own conviction that literature was his destiny; the tripos faded into the background, replaced by the more splendid vision of seeing an accepted article from his pen in a real London magazine; he gave frantic chase to the will-o'-the-wisp of literary fame, which so many pursue all their lives in

vain, fortunate if it comes at last to flicker for a while over their graves.

With Mark the results were what might have been expected; his papers in his second year examinations were so bad that he received a solemn warning that his scholarship was in some danger, though he was not actually deprived of it, and finally, instead of the good class his tutor had once expected, he took a low third, and left Cambridge in almost as bad a plight as Arthur Pendennis.

Now he had found himself forced to accept a third-form mastership in his old school, where it seemed that, if he was no longer a disciple, he was scarcely a prophet.

But all this had only fanned his ambition. He would show the world there was something in him still; and he began to send up articles to various London magazines, and to keep them going like a juggler's oranges, until his productions obtained a fair circulation, in manuscript.

Now and then a paper of his did gain the honours of publication, so that his disease did not die out, as happens with some. He went on, writing whatever came into his head, and putting his ideas out in every variety of literary mould—from blank-verse tragedy to a sonnet, and a three-volume novel to a society paragraph—with equal ardour and facility, and very little success.

For he believed in himself implicitly. At present he was still before the outwork of prejudice which must be stormed by every conscript in the army of literature: that he would carry it eventually he did not doubt. But this disappointment about the committee hit him hard for a moment; it seemed like a forecast of a greater disaster. Mark, however, was of a sanguine temperament, and it did not take him long to remount his own pedestal. "After all," he thought, "what does it matter? If my 'Sweet Bells Jangled' is only taken, I sha'n't care about anything else. And there is some of my best work in that, too. I'll go round to Holroyd, and forget this business."

CHAPTER II

A Last Walk

Mark turned in from Chancery Lane under the old gateway.

A gas jet was glimmering here and there behind the slits of dusty glass in the turret staircase, although it was

scarcely dusk in the outer world; for Old Square is generally a little in advance in this respect. He passed the door laden with names and shining black plates announcing removals, till he came to the entrance on the second floor, where one of the names on a dingy ledge above the door was "Mr. Vincent Holroyd."

If Mark had hitherto been a failure, Vincent Holroyd could not be pronounced a success. He had been, certainly, more distinguished at college; but after taking his degree, reading for the Bar, and being called, three years had passed in forced inactivity—not, perhaps, an altogether unprecedented circumstance in a young barrister's career, but with the unpleasant probability, in his case, of a continued brieflessness. A dry and reserved manner, due to a secret shyness, had kept away many whose friendship might have been useful to him. Of the interest popularly believed to be indispensable to a barrister he could command none, and, with more than the average amount of ability, the opportunity for displaying it was denied him; so that when he was suddenly called upon to leave England for an indefinite time, he was able to abandon prospects that were not brilliant without any particular reluctance.

Mark found him tying up his few books and effects in the one chamber which he had sub-rented, a little panelled room looking out on Chancery Lane, and painted the pea-green colour which, with a sickly buff, seem set apart for professional decoration.

His face, which was dark and somewhat plain, with large, strong features, had a pleasant look on it as he turned to meet Mark. "I'm glad you could come," he said "I thought we'd walk back together for the last time. I shall be ready in one minute. I'm only getting my law books together."

"You're not going to take them out to Ceylon with you, then?"

"Not now. Brandon—my landlord, you know—will let me keep them here till I send for them. I've just seen him. Shall we go now?"

They passed out through the dingy, gas-lit clerk's room, and struck across Lincoln's Inn Fields and Long Acre, towards Piccadilly and Hyde Park. It was by no means a typical November afternoon: the sky was a delicate blue and the air mild, with just enough of autumn keenness in

it to remind one, not unpleasantly, of the real time of year.

"Well," said Holroyd, rather sadly, "you and I won't walk together like this again for a long time."

"I suppose not," said Mark, with a regret that sounded a little formal, for their approaching separation did not, as a matter of fact, make him particularly unhappy.

Holroyd had always cared for him much more than he had cared for Holroyd, for whom Mark's friendship had been a matter of circumstance rather than deliberate preference. They had been quartered in the same lodgings at Cambridge, and had afterwards "kept" on the same staircase in college, which had led to a more or less daily companionship, a sort of intimacy that is not always strong enough to bear transplantation to town.

Holroyd had taken care that it should survive their college days; for he had an odd liking for Mark, in spite of a tolerably clear insight into his character. Mark had a way of inspiring friendships without much effort on his part, and this undemonstrative, self-contained man felt an affection for him which was stronger than he ever allowed himself to show.

Mark, for his part, had begun to feel an increasing constraint in the company of a friend who had an unpleasantly keen eye for his weak points, and with who he was always conscious of a certain inferiority which, as he could discover no reason for it, galled his vanity the more.

His careless tone wounded Holroyd, who had hoped for some warmer response and they walked on in silence until they turned into Hyde Park and crossed to Rotten Row, when Mark said, "By the way, Vincent, wasn't there something you wanted to speak to me about?"

"I wanted to ask a favour of you; it won't give you much trouble," said Holroyd.

"Oh, in that case, if it's anything I *can* do, you know—but what is it?"

"Well," said Holroyd, "the fact is—I never told a soul till now—but I've written a book."

"Never mind, old boy," said Mark, with a slight laugh; for the confession, or perhaps a certain embarrassment with which it was made, seemed to put Holroyd more on a level with himself. "So have lots of fellows, and no one

thinks any the worse of them—unless they print it. Is it a law book ?"

"Not exactly," said Holroyd ; "it's a romance."

"A romance !" cried Mark. "You !"

"Yes," said Holroyd, "I. I've always been something of a dreamer, and I amused myself by putting one of my dreams down on paper."

"And you want me to run my eyes over it and lick it into shape a little ?" said Mark.

"Not quite that," said Holroyd; "it must stand as it is. What I'm going to ask is this : I don't know any fellow I would care to ask but yourself. I want it published. I shall be out of England, probably with plenty of other matters to occupy me for some time. I want you to look after the manuscript for me while I'm away. Do you mind taking the trouble ?"

"Not a bit, old fellow," said Mark, "no trouble in the world ; only tying up the parcel each time, sending it off again. Well, I didn't mean that ; but it's no trouble, really. What sort of a book is it ?"

"It's a romance, as I said," said Holroyd. "I don't know that I can describe it more exactly : it——"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," interrupted Mark. "I can read it some time. What have you called it ?"

"'Glamour,'" said Holroyd, still with a sensitive shrinking at having to reveal what had long been a cherished secret.

"It isn't a society novel, I suppose ?"

"No," said Holroyd. "I'm not much of a society man ; I go out very little."

"You won't be able to do the hermit much over in Ceylon, will you ?"

"I don't know. My father's plantation is in rather a remote part of the island. I don't think he has ever been very intimate with the other planters near him, and as I left the place when I was a child I have fewer friends there than here even. But there will be plenty to do if I am to learn the business, as he seems to wish. No one knows me out there except my poor old father, and we're almost strangers. I'm leaving the few people I care for behind me."

"Oh, it will be all right," said Mark, with the comfortable view one takes of another's future ; "you'll get on well

enough. We shall have you a rich coffee-planter, or a Deputy Judge Advocate, in no time. *Any* fellow has a chance out there. And you'll soon make friends in a place like that."

"I like my friends ready-made, I think," said Holroyd; "but one must make the best of it I suppose."

"Well," said Mark, stopping, "I suppose you turn off here?"

Holroyd would have been willing to go on with him further had Mark proposed it, but he gave no sign of desiring this, so his friend's pride kept him silent too.

"One word more about the—the book," he said. "I may put your name and address on the title-page, then? It goes off to Chilton and Fladgate to-night."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Mark, "put whatever you like."

"I've not given them my real name, and, if anything comes of it, I should like that kept a secret."

"Just as you please; but why?"

"If I keep on at the Bar, a novel, whether it's a success or not, is not the best bait for briefs," said Holroyd; "and besides, if I am to get a slating, I'd rather have it under an *alias*, don't you see? So the only name on the title-page is 'Vincent Beauchamp.'"

"Very well," said Mark, "none shall know till you choose to tell them, and, if anything has to be done about the book, I'll see to it with pleasure, and write to you when it's settled. So you can make your mind easy about *that*."

"Thanks," said Holroyd; "and now, good-bye, Mark."

There was real feeling in his voice, and Mark himself caught something of it as he took the hand Vincent held out.

"Good-bye, old boy," he said. "Take care of yourself—pleasant voyage and good luck. You're no letter-writer, I know, but you'll drop me a line now and then, I hope. What's the name of the ship you go out in?"

"The 'Mangalore.' She leaves the Docks to-morrow. Good-bye for the present, Mark. We shall see one another again, I hope. Don't forget all about me before that."

"No, no," said Mark; "we've been friends too long for that."

One more good-bye, a momentary English awkwardness in getting away from one another, and they parted.

Mark looked after his friend's tall strong figure for a moment before it disappeared in the dark. "Well, I've seen the last of him," he thought. "Poor old Holroyd! to think of his having written a book—he's one of those unlucky beggars who never make a hit at anything. I expect I shall have some trouble about it by-and-by."

Holroyd walked on with a heavier heart. "He won't miss me," he told himself. "Will Mabel say good-bye like that?"

CHAPTER III

GOOD-BYE

ON the same afternoon in which we have seen Mark and Vincent walk home together for the last time, Mrs. Langton and her eldest daughter Mabel were sitting in the pretty drawing-room of their house in Kensington Park Gardens.

Mrs. Langton was the wife of a successful Q.C. at the Chancery Bar, and one of those elegantly languid women with a manner charming enough to conceal a slight shallowness of mind and character; she was pretty still, and an invalid at all times when indisposition was not positively inconvenient.

Mrs. Langton was leaning luxuriously back in a low soft chair, lazily watching the firebeams glisten through the glass screen, and Mabel was on a couch near the window trying to read a magazine by the fading light.

"Hadn't you better ring for the lamps, Mabel?" suggested her mother. "You can't possibly see to read by this light, and it's so trying for the eyes. I suppose no one else will call now, but it's very strange that Vincent should not have come to say good-bye."

"So do I," agreed Mabel. "It's not like Vincent, though he was always shy and odd in some things. He hasn't been to see us nearly so much lately, but I can't believe he will really go away without a word."

Mrs. Langton yawned delicately. "It would not surprise me, I must say," she said. "When a young man sets himself——" but whatever she was going to say was broken off by the entrance of her youngest daughter Dolly, with the German governess, followed by the man bearing rose-shaded lamps.

Dolly was a vivacious child of about nine, with golden