

seat, but blew an inquiry as to who was there down a pipe which passed from his room to the side of the street door, a few inches above the bell. By means of this acoustic arrangement the gentleman waiting on the top step for admittance was suddenly surprised by a hoarse bellowing close to his ears.

"Who is it? What do you want?" were the muffled words that came through the mouthpiece.

The gentleman regained his composure, and called forth the nature of his business up the tube in reply.

"My name is Angelo Salmon. I wish to speak to Mr. Halfday for a few minutes."

"All right," answered Brian, "I will come down."

Angelo waited patiently until the door was opened in due course by the curator, who came on the step and glared into the young man's face with eagerness.

"Is anything the matter?" he exclaimed.

"I have news for you, Mr. Halfday."

"Bad news?"

"It is bad news to me, at all events."

"Oh! that doesn't matter," said Brian abruptly; "I was afraid Miss Westbrook had sent you."

"No—but Miss Westbrook left us this morning."

"Where has she gone? Why have I not been told of this before? What is the reason of it?" asked Brian.

"I shall be most happy to explain—but it is rather a long story, and I have come for your advice, Mr. Halfday."

"Well—well," said Brian impatiently, "begin, please."

"On the door-step? You will excuse me, Mr. Halfday, but I thought that—"

"Will you step inside?"

"Thank you—I think I will."

"I am busy to-night—I had set myself a long task," said Brian, "and you interfere with it. There, I am discourteous—but don't mind me."

"Oh! I don't mind you in the least now, Mr. Halfday," said Angelo as he stepped into the hall. Brian closed the door, and turned around sharply with his hand on the lock.

"Why not *now*?" he asked.

"I have heard so much about you lately from Miss Westbrook."

"Has she not had anything better to talk

about than such a bad-tempered fellow as I am?" asked Brian thoughtfully, and yet gratefully.

"She misunderstood you cruelly, she tells me—and she has so high an opinion of you at present, that I am in duty bound to follow suit."

"You are extremely obliging," said Brian drily. "Miss Westbrook's opinions influence yours, then?"

"I am proud to say so."

"Haven't you any opinions of your own?"

"Not any—worth mentioning," Angelo added, after a moment's consideration.

"Is that why you have come for mine?" asked Brian in his usual quick manner of pitching one question after another at a listener.

"Partly, sir, I must confess."

"My opinions are utterly worthless, I am beginning to consider," said Brian bitterly; "my knowledge of the world is a snare, and my estimate of human character a delusion. You must not rely on me in any way."

"Mabel Westbrook said, only a little while ago, to me—the day before yesterday, in fact—that if I ever was beset by doubt or difficulty, I could not do a better or a wiser act than come to you for advice. So I have come!"

"The lady does me a high honour," murmured Brian; "but she has proceeded to extremes in her kind estimate of me. This is a mental reaction for thinking me a scamp. Presently she will judge me as I am. Will you follow me?"

"I thank you."

Brian Halfday led the way to his room, as a few weeks ago he had led the way for her who had been lately speaking in his praise. His irritable mood had vanished as if by magic, beneath the spell of the few words that Angelo Salmon had addressed to him without any thought of flattery. He was glad to receive his visitor now; he should hear a great deal of Mabel Westbrook, and of all that had happened during the last ten days; and work was not so pleasant a thing as it had seemed half an hour ago. He placed a chair for his guest, packed away his papers in the desk, and then sat down with his hands clasped upon it, after a habit of his when awakening to interest in passing things.

"In what way can I be of use to you, Mr. Salmon?" he asked.