

CHAPTER III

IN THE CITY ROAD

THERE are some old-established businesses in the City Road—certain retail shops—which seem oddly to preserve the flavour of the days when it was common for burgesses who traded there to make modest fortunes before the tide of fashion rolled westward.

To this class belonged the haberdasher's shop which bore above the doorway the name of Rodney and Sons. A small, quaint signboard on which was depicted a golden lamb symbolised the fact that the shop dealt primarily in woollen articles. That sign, painted by a once-famous artist who had squandered his talent in the pot-houses of the day, had suffered many things at many hands.

It had been removed from time to time by those heads of the house who regarded it as grotesque and altogether inappropriate to modern usages, and contemptuously compared it to the signboard of a public-house.

But the present tenant of the old shop did not so regard or despise it. He had been an odd, studious kind of boy, fond of possessing quaint things and of poking into old records. That liking had grown and strengthened with his years, with the result that, when he arrived at manhood and the business passed into his hands, he unearthed the old sign from a hiding-place in the cellar or the attic—he was never very clear which—had it cleaned, re-gilded and restored, and put above the door, where it was not at all out of place.