

Vindication

PROLOGUE

" . . . One fine frosty day,
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there . . .
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old."

—ROBERT BROWNING: *Fra Lippo Lippi*.

Carlton House Chambers, Bury Street, St. James', when seen embossed on the thick, rough-edged note-paper which Mr. Jorley supplied to his socially ambitious tenants, always looked more impressive than *Carlton House Chambers* when at length discovered by his tenants' baffled and despairing friends. *Bury Street* was then found to be a misleading euphemism for the nameless alley which leads far from that thoroughfare to the mews behind; *Carlton House Chambers* were revealed as an upper part over a newsvendor's shop, with a tavern on the one side and a grocer's on the other. A scarred and rain-streaked sign-board announced unceasingly, whether the house were empty or full, that there were gentlemen's chambers to let and that particulars would be supplied by Mr. S. Jorley. It was equally characteristic of his tenants and of their visitors that the name of the house did not obtrude itself on the street but was disclosed in confidence if the caller could be presumed to come in good faith and not in quest of an overdue account.

This modesty of bearing spread downwards from the chambers to the shop of the newsvendor and, on either side, to the tavern and to the grocery store, till a fanciful passer-by could discern on the dingy face of each house a mute appeal to be left alone. Three times in ten years the grocer had been fined for allowing