Chapter LXXI

Clown. . . . 'Twas in the Bunch of Grapes, where, indeed, you have a delight to sit, have you not? Froth. I have so: because it is an open room, and good for winter. Clo. Why, very well then: I hope here be truths. - Measure for Measure.

Five days after the death of Raffles, Mr Bambridge was standing at his leisure under the large archway leading into the yard of the Green Dragon. He was not fond of solitary contemplation, but he had only just come out of the house, and any human figure standing at ease under the archway in the early afternoon was as certain to attract companionship as a pigeon which has found something worth peeking at. In this case there was no material object to feed upon, but the eye of reason saw a probability of mental sustenance in the shape of gossip. Mr Hopkins, the meek-mannered draper opposite, was the first to act on this inward vision, being the more ambitious of a little masculine talk because his customers were chiefly women. Mr Bambridge was rather curt to the draper, feeling that Hopkins was of course glad to talk to *him*, but that he was not going to waste much of his talk on Hopkins. Soon, however, there was a small cluster of more important listeners, who were either deposited from the passers-by, or had sauntered to the spot expressly to see if there were anything going on at the Green Dragon; and Mr Bambridge was finding it worth his while to say many impressive things about the fine studs he had been seeing and the purchases he had made on a journey in the north from which he had just returned. Gentlemen present were assured that when they could show him anything to cut out a blood mare, a bay, rising four, which was to be seen at Doncaster if they chose to go and look at it, Mr Bambridge would gratify them by being shot 'from here to Hereford.' Also, a pair of blacks which he was going to put into the break recalled vividly to his mind a pair which he had sold to Faulkner in '19, for a hundred guineas, and which Faulkner had sold for a hundred and sixty two months later - any gent who could disprove this statement being offered the privilege of calling Mr Bambridge by a very ugly name until the exercise made his throat dry.

When the discourse was at this point of animation, came up Mr Frank Hawley. He was not a man to compromise his dignity by lounging at the Green Dragon, but happening to pass along the High Street and seeing Bambridge on the other side, he took some of his long strides across to ask the horsedealer whether he had found the first-rate gig-horse which he had engaged to look for. Mr Hawley was requested to wait until he had seen a gray selected at Bilkley: if that did not meet his wishes to a hair, Bambridge did not know a horse when he saw it, which seemed to be the highest conceivable unlikelihood. Mr Hawley, standing with his back to the street, was fixing a time for looking at the gray and seeing it tried, when a horseman passed slowly by.

‘Bulstrode!’ said two or three voices at once in a low tone, one of them, which was the draper's, respectfully prefixing the ‘Mr;’ but nobody having more intention in this interjectural naming than if they had said ‘the Riverston coach’ when that vehicle appeared in the distance. Mr Hawley gave a careless glance round at Bulstrode's back, but as Bambridge's eyes followed it he made a sarcastic grimace.

‘By jingo! that reminds me,’ he began, lowering his voice a little, ‘I picked up something else at Bilkley besides your gig-horse, Mr Hawley. I picked up a fine story about Bulstrode. Do you know how he came by his fortune? Any gentleman wanting a bit of curious information, I can give it him free of expense. If everybody got their deserts, Bulstrode might have had to say his prayers at Botany Bay.’

‘What do you mean?’ said Mr Hawley, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and pushing a little forward under the archway. If Bulstrode should turn out to be a rascal, Frank Hawley had a prophetic soul.

‘I had it from a party who was an old chum of Bulstrode's. I'll tell you where I first picked him up,’ said Bambridge, with a sudden gesture of his fore-finger. ‘He was at Larcher's sale, but I knew nothing of him then - he slipped through my fingers - was after Bulstrode, no doubt. He tells me he can tap Bulstrode to any amount, knows all his secrets. However, he blabbed to me at Bilkley: he takes a stiff glass. Damme if I think he meant to turn king's evidence; but he's that sort of bragging fellow, the bragging runs over hedge and ditch with him, till he'd brag of a spavin as if it 'ud fetch money. A man should know when to pull up.’ Mr Bambridge made this remark with an air of disgust, satisfied that his own bragging showed a fine sense of the marketable.

‘What's the man's name? Where can he be found?’ said Mr Hawley.

‘As to where he is to be found, I left him to it at the Saracen's Head; but his name is Raffles.’

‘Raffles!’ exclaimed Mr Hopkins. ‘I furnished his funeral yesterday. He was buried at Lowick. Mr Bulstrode followed him. A very decent funeral.’ There was a strong sensation among the listeners. Mr Bambridge gave an ejaculation in which ‘brimstone’ was the mildest word, and Mr Hawley, knitting his brows and bending his head forward, exclaimed, ‘What? - where did the man die?’

‘At Stone Court,’ said the draper. ‘The housekeeper said he was a relation of the master's. He came there ill on Friday.’

‘Why, it was on Wednesday I took a glass with him,’ interposed Bambridge.

‘Did any doctor attend him?’ said Mr Hawley

‘Yes. Mr Lydgate. Mr Bulstrode sat up with him one night. He died the third morning.’

‘Go on, Bambridge,’ said Mr Hawley, insistently. ‘What did this fellow say about Bulstrode?’

The group had already become larger, the town-clerk's presence being a guarantee that something worth listening to was going on there; and Mr Bambridge delivered his narrative in the hearing of seven. It was mainly what we know, including the fact about Will Ladislaw, with some local color and circumstance added: it was what Bulstrode had dreaded the betrayal of - and hoped to have buried forever with the corpse of Raffles - it was that haunting ghost of his earlier life which as he rode past the archway of the Green Dragon he was trusting that Providence had delivered him from. Yes, Providence. He had not confessed to himself yet that he had done anything in the way of contrivance to this end; he had accepted what seemed to have been offered. It was impossible to prove that he had done anything which hastened the departure of that man's soul.

But this gossip about Bulstrode spread through Middlemarch like the smell of fire. Mr Frank Hawley followed up his information by sending a clerk whom he could trust to Stone Court on a pretext of inquiring about hay, but really to gather all that could be learned about Raffles and his illness from Mrs Abel. In this way it came to his knowledge that Mr Garth had carried the man to Stone Court in his gig; and Mr Hawley in consequence took an opportunity of seeing Caleb, calling at his office to ask whether he had time to undertake an arbitration if it were required, and then asking him incidentally about Raffles. Caleb was betrayed into no word injurious to Bulstrode beyond the fact which he was forced to admit, that he had given up acting for him within the last week. Mr Hawley drew his inferences, and feeling convinced that Raffles had told his story to Garth, and that Garth had given up Bulstrode's affairs in consequence, said so a few hours later to Mr Toller. The statement was passed on until it had quite lost the stamp of an inference, and was taken as information coming straight from Garth, so that even a diligent historian might have concluded Caleb to be the chief publisher of Bulstrode's misdemeanors.

Mr Hawley was not slow to perceive that there was no handle for the law either in the revelations made by Raffles or in the circumstances of his death. He had himself ridden to Lowick village that he might look at the register and talk over the whole matter with Mr Farebrother, who was not more surprised than the lawyer that an ugly secret should have come to light about Bulstrode, though he had always had justice enough in him to hinder his antipathy from

turning into conclusions. But while they were talking another combination was silently going forward in Mr Farebrother's mind, which foreshadowed what was soon to be loudly spoken of in Middlemarch as a necessary 'putting of two and two together.' With the reasons which kept Bulstrode in dread of Raffles there flashed the thought that the dread might have something to do with his munificence towards his medical man; and though he resisted the suggestion that it had been consciously accepted in any way as a bribe, he had a foreboding that this complication of things might be of malignant effect on Lydgate's reputation. He perceived that Mr Hawley knew nothing at present of the sudden relief from debt, and he himself was careful to glide away from all approaches towards the subject.

'Well,' he said, with a deep breath, wanting to wind up the illimitable discussion of what might have been, though nothing could be legally proven, 'it is a strange story. So our mercurial Ladislaw has a queer genealogy! A high-spirited young lady and a musical Polish patriot made a likely enough stock for him to spring from, but I should never have suspected a grafting of the Jew pawnbroker. However, there's no knowing what a mixture will turn out beforehand. Some sorts of dirt serve to clarify.'

'It's just what I should have expected,' said Mr Hawley, mounting his horse. 'Any cursed alien blood, Jew, Corsican, or Gypsy.'

'I know he's one of your black sheep, Hawley. But he is really a disinterested, unworldly fellow,' said Mr Farebrother, smiling.

'Ay, ay, that is your Whiggish twist,' said Mr Hawley, who had been in the habit of saying apologetically that Farebrother was such a damned pleasant good-hearted fellow you would mistake him for a Tory.

Mr Hawley rode home without thinking of Lydgate's attendance on Raffles in any other light than as a piece of evidence on the side of Bulstrode. But the news that Lydgate had all at once become able not only to get rid of the execution in his house but to pay all his debts in Middlemarch was spreading fast, gathering round it conjectures and comments which gave it new body and impetus, and soon filling the ears of other persons besides Mr Hawley, who were not slow to see a significant relation between this sudden command of money and Bulstrode's desire to stifle the scandal of Raffles. That the money came from Bulstrode would infallibly have been guessed even if there had been no direct evidence of it; for it had beforehand entered into the gossip about Lydgate's affairs, that neither his father-in-law nor his own family would do anything for him, and direct evidence was furnished not only by a clerk at the Bank, but by innocent Mrs Bulstrode herself, who mentioned the loan to Mrs Plymdale, who mentioned it to her daughter-in-law of the house of Toller, who

mentioned it generally. The business was felt to be so public and important that it required dinners to feed it, and many invitations were just then issued and accepted on the strength of this scandal concerning Bulstrode and Lydgate; wives, widows, and single ladies took their work and went out to tea oftener than usual; and all public conviviality, from the Green Dragon to Dollop's, gathered a zest which could not be won from the question whether the Lords would throw out the Reform Bill.

For hardly anybody doubted that some scandalous reason or other was at the bottom of Bulstrode's liberality to Lydgate. Mr Hawley indeed, in the first instance, invited a select party, including the two physicians, with Mr Toller and Mr Wrench, expressly to hold a close discussion as to the probabilities of Raffles's illness, reciting to them all the particulars which had been gathered from Mrs Abel in connection with Lydgate's certificate, that the death was due to delirium tremens; and the medical gentlemen, who all stood undisturbedly on the old paths in relation to this disease, declared that they could see nothing in these particulars which could be transformed into a positive ground of suspicion. But the moral grounds of suspicion remained: the strong motives Bulstrode clearly had for wishing to be rid of Raffles, and the fact that at this critical moment he had given Lydgate the help which he must for some time have known the need for; the disposition, moreover, to believe that Bulstrode would be unscrupulous, and the absence of any indisposition to believe that Lydgate might be as easily bribed as other haughty-minded men when they have found themselves in want of money. Even if the money had been given merely to make him hold his tongue about the scandal of Bulstrode's earlier life, the fact threw an odious light on Lydgate, who had long been sneered at as making himself subservient to the banker for the sake of working himself into predominance, and discrediting the elder members of his profession. Hence, in spite of the negative as to any direct sign of guilt in relation to the death at Stone Court, Mr Hawley's select party broke up with the sense that the affair had ‘an ugly look.’

But this vague conviction of indeterminable guilt, which was enough to keep up much head-shaking and biting innuendo even among substantial professional seniors, had for the general mind all the superior power of mystery over fact. Everybody liked better to conjecture how the thing was, than simply to know it; for conjecture soon became more confident than knowledge, and had a more liberal allowance for the incompatible. Even the more definite scandal concerning Bulstrode's earlier life was, for some minds, melted into the mass of mystery, as so much lively metal to be poured out in dialogue, and to take such fantastic shapes as heaven pleased.

This was the tone of thought chiefly sanctioned by Mrs Dollop, the spirited landlady of the Tankard in Slaughter Lane, who had often to resist the shallow pragmatism of customers disposed to think that their reports from the outer world were of equal force with what had 'come up' in her mind. How it had been brought to her she didn't know, but it was there before her as if it had been 'scored with the chalk on the chimney-board - ' as Bulstrode should say, 'his inside was *that black* as if the hairs of his head knowed the thoughts of his heart, he'd tear 'em up by the roots.'

'That's odd,' said Mr Limp, a meditative shoemaker, with weak eyes and a piping voice. 'Why, I read in the `Trumpet' that was what the Duke of Wellington said when he turned his coat and went over to the Romans.'

'Very like,' said Mrs Dollop. 'If one raskill said it, it's more reason why another should. But hypo*crite* as he's been, and holding things with that high hand, as there was no parson i' the country good enough for him, he was forced to take Old Harry into his counsel, and Old Harry's been too many for him.'

'Ay, ay, he's a 'complice you can't send out o' the country,' said Mr Crabbe, the glazier, who gathered much news and groped among it dimly. 'But by what I can make out, there's them says Bulstrode was for running away, for fear o' being found out, before now.'

'He'll be drove away, whether or no,' said Mr Dill, the barber, who had just dropped in. 'I shaved Fletcher, Hawley's clerk, this morning - he's got a bad finger - and he says they're all of one mind to get rid of Bulstrode. Mr Thesiger is turned against him, and wants him out o' the parish. And there's gentlemen in this town says they'd as soon dine with a fellow from the hulks. `And a deal sooner I would,' says Fletcher; `for what's more against one's stomach than a man coming and making himself bad company with his religion, and giving out as the Ten Commandments are not enough for him, and all the while he's worse than half the men at the tread-mill?' Fletcher said so himself.'

'It'll be a bad thing for the town though, if Bulstrode's money goes out of it,' said Mr Limp, quaveringly.

'Ah, there's better folks spend their money worse,' said a firm-voiced dyer, whose crimson hands looked out of keeping with his good-natured face.

'But he won't keep his money, by what I can make out,' said the glazier. 'Don't they say as there's somebody can strip it off him? By

what I can understan', they could take every penny off him, if they went to lawing.'

'No such thing!' said the barber, who felt himself a little above his company at Dollop's, but liked it none the worse. 'Fletcher says it's no such thing. He says they might prove over and over again whose child this young Ladislaw was, and they'd do no more than if they proved I came out of the Fens - he couldn't touch a penny.'

'Look you there now!' said Mrs Dollop, indignantly. 'I thank the Lord he took my children to Himself, if that's all the law can do for the motherless. Then by that, it's o' no use who your father and mother is. But as to listening to what one lawyer says without asking another - I wonder at a man o' your cleverness, Mr Dill. It's well known there's always two sides, if no more; else who'd go to law, I should like to know? It's a poor tale, with all the law as there is up and down, if it's no use proving whose child you are. Fletcher may say that if he likes, but I say, don't Fletcher *me*!'

Mr Dill affected to laugh in a complimentary way at Mrs Dollop, as a woman who was more than a match for the lawyers; being disposed to submit to much twitting from a landlady who had a long score against him.

'If they come to lawing, and it's all true as folks say, there's more to be looked to nor money,' said the glazier. 'There's this poor creetur as is dead and gone; by what I can make out, he'd seen the day when he was a deal finer gentleman nor Bulstrode.'

'Finer gentleman! I'll warrant him,' said Mrs Dollop; 'and a far personabler man, by what I can hear. As I said when Mr Baldwin, the tax-gatherer, comes in, a-standing where you sit, and says, `Bulstrode got all his money as he brought into this town by thieving and swindling,' - I said, `You don't make me no wiser, Mr Baldwin: it's set my blood a-creeping to look at him ever sin' here he came into Slaughter Lane a-wanting to buy the house over my head: folks don't look the color o' the dough-tub and stare at you as if they wanted to see into your backbone for nothingk.' That was what I said, and Mr Baldwin can bear me witness.'

'And in the rights of it too,' said Mr Crabbe. 'For by what I can make out, this Raffles, as they call him, was a lusty, fresh-colored man as you'd wish to see, and the best o' company - though dead he lies in Lowick churchyard sure enough; and by what I can understan', there's them knows more than they *should* know about how he got there.'

‘I'll believe you!’ said Mrs Dallop, with a touch of scorn at Mr Crabbe's apparent dimness. ‘When a man's been 'ticed to a lone house, and there's them can pay for hospitals and nurses for half the country-side choose to be sitters-up night and day, and nobody to come near but a doctor as is known to stick at nothingk, and as poor as he can hang together, and after that so flush o' money as he can pay off Mr Byles the butcher as his bill has been running on for the best o' joints since last Michaelmas was a twelvemonth - I don't want anybody to come and tell me as there's been more going on nor the Prayer-book's got a service for - I don't want to stand winking and blinking and thinking.’

Mrs Dollop looked round with the air of a landlady accustomed to dominate her company. There was a chorus of adhesion from the more courageous; but Mr Limp, after taking a draught, placed his flat hands together and pressed them hard between his knees, looking down at them with blear-eyed contemplation, as if the scorching power of Mrs Dollop's speech had quite dried up and nullified his wits until they could be brought round again by further moisture.

‘Why shouldn't they dig the man up and have the Crowner?’ said the dyer. ‘It's been done many and many's the time. If there's been foul play they might find it out.’

‘Not they, Mr Jonas!’ said Mrs Dollop, emphatically. ‘I know what doctors are. They're a deal too cunning to be found out. And this Doctor Lydgate that's been for cutting up everybody before the breath was well out o' their body - it's plain enough what use he wanted to make o' looking into respectable people's insides. He knows drugs, you may be sure, as you can neither smell nor see, neither before they're swallowed nor after. Why, I've seen drops myself ordered by Doctor Gambit, as is our club doctor and a good charikter, and has brought more live children into the world nor ever another i' Middlemarch - I say I've seen drops myself as made no difference whether they was in the glass or out, and yet have griped you the next day. So I'll leave your own sense to judge. Don't tell me! All I say is, it's a mercy they didn't take this Doctor Lydgate on to our club. There's many a mother's child might ha' rued it.’

The heads of this discussion at ‘Dollop's’ had been the common theme among all classes in the town, had been carried to Lowick Parsonage on one side and to Tipton Grange on the other, had come fully to the ears of the Vincy family, and had been discussed with sad reference to ‘poor Harriet’ by all Mrs Bulstrode's friends, before Lydgate knew distinctly why people were looking strangely at him, and before Bulstrode himself suspected the betrayal of his secrets. He had not been accustomed to very cordial relations with his neighbors, and hence he could not miss the signs of cordiality; moreover, he had been

taking journeys on business of various kinds, having now made up his mind that he need not quit Middlemarch, and feeling able consequently to determine on matters which he had before left in suspense.

'We will make a journey to Cheltenham in the course of a month or two,' he had said to his wife. 'There are great spiritual advantages to be had in that town along with the air and the waters, and six weeks there will be eminently refreshing to us.'

He really believed in the spiritual advantages, and meant that his life henceforth should be the more devoted because of those later sins which he represented to himself as hypothetic, praying hypothetically for their pardon: - 'if I have herein transgressed.'

As to the Hospital, he avoided saying anything further to Lydgate, fearing to manifest a too sudden change of plans immediately on the death of Raffles. In his secret soul he believed that Lydgate suspected his orders to have been intentionally disobeyed, and suspecting this he must also suspect a motive. But nothing had been betrayed to him as to the history of Raffles, and Bulstrode was anxious not to do anything which would give emphasis to his undefined suspicions. As to any certainty that a particular method of treatment would either save or kill, Lydgate himself was constantly arguing against such dogmatism; he had no right to speak, and he had every motive for being silent. Hence Bulstrode felt himself providentially secured. The only incident he had strongly winced under had been an occasional encounter with Caleb Garth, who, however, had raised his hat with mild gravity.

Meanwhile, on the part of the principal townsmen a strong determination was growing against him.

A meeting was to be held in the Town-Hall on a sanitary question which had risen into pressing importance by the occurrence of a cholera case in the town. Since the Act of Parliament, which had been hurriedly passed, authorizing assessments for sanitary measures, there had been a Board for the superintendence of such measures appointed in Middlemarch, and much cleansing and preparation had been concurred in by Whigs and Tories. The question now was, whether a piece of ground outside the town should be secured as a burial-ground by means of assessment or by private subscription. The meeting was to be open, and almost everybody of importance in the town was expected to be there.

Mr Bulstrode was a member of the Board, and just before twelve o'clock he started from the Bank with the intention of urging the plan of private subscription. Under the hesitation of his projects, he had for

some time kept himself in the background, and he felt that he should this morning resume his old position as a man of action and influence in the public affairs of the town where he expected to end his days. Among the various persons going in the same direction, he saw Lydgate; they joined, talked over the object of the meeting, and entered it together.

It seemed that everybody of mark had been earlier than they. But there were still spaces left near the head of the large central table, and they made their way thither. Mr Farebrother sat opposite, not far from Mr Hawley; all the medical men were there; Mr Thesiger was in the chair, and Mr Brooke of Tipton was on his right hand.

Lydgate noticed a peculiar interchange of glances when he and Bulstrode took their seats.

After the business had been fully opened by the chairman, who pointed out the advantages of purchasing by subscription a piece of ground large enough to be ultimately used as a general cemetery, Mr Bulstrode, whose rather high-pitched but subdued and fluent voice the town was used to at meetings of this sort, rose and asked leave to deliver his opinion. Lydgate could see again the peculiar interchange of glances before Mr Hawley started up, and said in his firm resonant voice, 'Mr Chairman, I request that before any one delivers his opinion on this point I may be permitted to speak on a question of public feeling, which not only by myself, but by many gentlemen present, is regarded as preliminary.'

Mr Hawley's mode of speech, even when public decorum repressed his 'awful language,' was formidable in its curtness and self-possession. Mr Thesiger sanctioned the request, Mr Bulstrode sat down, and Mr Hawley continued.

'In what I have to say, Mr Chairman, I am not speaking simply on my own behalf: I am speaking with the concurrence and at the express request of no fewer than eight of my fellow-townsmen, who are immediately around us. It is our united sentiment that Mr Bulstrode should be called upon - and I do now call upon him - to resign public positions which he holds not simply as a tax-payer, but as a gentleman among gentlemen. There are practices and there are acts which, owing to circumstances, the law cannot visit, though they may be worse than many things which are legally punishable. Honest men and gentlemen, if they don't want the company of people who perpetrate such acts, have got to defend themselves as they best can, and that is what I and the friends whom I may call my clients in this affair are determined to do. I don't say that Mr Bulstrode has been guilty of shameful acts, but I call upon him either publicly to deny and confute the scandalous statements made against him by a man now

dead, and who died in his house - the statement that he was for many years engaged in nefarious practices, and that he won his fortune by dishonest procedures - or else to withdraw from positions which could only have been allowed him as a gentleman among gentlemen.'

All eyes in the room were turned on Mr Bulstrode, who, since the first mention of his name, had been going through a crisis of feeling almost too violent for his delicate frame to support. Lydgate, who himself was undergoing a shock as from the terrible practical interpretation of some faint augury, felt, nevertheless, that his own movement of resentful hatred was checked by that instinct of the Healer which thinks first of bringing rescue or relief to the sufferer, when he looked at the shrunken misery of Bulstrode's livid face.

The quick vision that his life was after all a failure, that he was a dishonored man, and must quail before the glance of those towards whom he had habitually assumed the attitude of a reprover - that God had disowned him before men and left him unscreened to the triumphant scorn of those who were glad to have their hatred justified - the sense of utter futility in that equivocation with his conscience in dealing with the life of his accomplice, an equivocation which now turned venomously upon him with the full-grown fang of a discovered lie: - all this rushed through him like the agony of terror which fails to kill, and leaves the ears still open to the returning wave of execration. The sudden sense of exposure after the re-established sense of safety came - not to the coarse organization of a criminal but to - the susceptible nerve of a man whose intensest being lay in such mastery and predominance as the conditions of his life had shaped for him.

But in that intense being lay the strength of reaction. Through all his bodily infirmity there ran a tenacious nerve of ambitious self-preserving will, which had continually leaped out like a flame, scattering all doctrinal fears, and which, even while he sat an object of compassion for the merciful, was beginning to stir and glow under his ashy paleness. Before the last words were out of Mr Hawley's mouth, Bulstrode felt that he should answer, and that his answer would be a retort. He dared not get up and say, 'I am not guilty, the whole story is false' - even if he had dared this, it would have seemed to him, under his present keen sense of betrayal, as vain as to pull, for covering to his nakedness, a frail rag which would rend at every little strain.

For a few moments there was total silence, while every man in the room was looking at Bulstrode. He sat perfectly still, leaning hard against the back of his chair; he could not venture to rise, and when he began to speak he pressed his hands upon the seat on each side of him. But his voice was perfectly audible, though hoarser than usual, and his words were distinctly pronounced, though he paused between

sentence as if short of breath. He said, turning first toward Mr Thesiger, and then looking at Mr Hawley -

'I protest before you, sir, as a Christian minister, against the sanction of proceedings towards me which are dictated by virulent hatred. Those who are hostile to me are glad to believe any libel uttered by a loose tongue against me. And their consciences become strict against me. Say that the evil-speaking of which I am to be made the victim accuses me of malpractices - ' here Bulstrode's voice rose and took on a more biting accent, till it seemed a low cry - 'who shall be my accuser? Not men whose own lives are unchristian, nay, scandalous - not men who themselves use low instruments to carry out their ends - whose profession is a tissue of chicanery - who have been spending their income on their own sensual enjoyments, while I have been devoting mine to advance the best objects with regard to this life and the next.'

After the word chicanery there was a growing noise, half of murmurs and half of hisses, while four persons started up at once - Mr Hawley, Mr Toller, Mr Chichely, and Mr Hackbutt; but Mr Hawley's outburst was instantaneous, and left the others behind in silence.

'If you mean me, sir, I call you and every one else to the inspection of my professional life. As to Christian or unchristian, I repudiate your canting palavering Christianity; and as to the way in which I spend my income, it is not my principle to maintain thieves and cheat offspring of their due inheritance in order to support religion and set myself up as a saintly Killjoy. I affect no niceness of conscience - I have not found any nice standards necessary yet to measure your actions by, sir. And I again call upon you to enter into satisfactory explanations concerning the scandals against you, or else to withdraw from posts in which we at any rate decline you as a colleague. I say, sir, we decline to co-operate with a man whose character is not cleared from infamous lights cast upon it, not only by reports but by recent actions.'

'Allow me, Mr Hawley,' said the chairman; and Mr Hawley, still fuming, bowed half impatiently, and sat down with his hands thrust deep in his pockets.

'Mr Bulstrode, it is not desirable, I think, to prolong the present discussion,' said Mr Thesiger, turning to the pallid trembling man; 'I must so far concur with what has fallen from Mr Hawley in expression of a general feeling, as to think it due to your Christian profession that you should clear yourself, if possible, from unhappy aspersions. I for my part should be willing to give you full opportunity and hearing. But I must say that your present attitude is painfully inconsistent with those principles which you have sought to identify yourself with,

and for the honor of which I am bound to care. I recommend you at present, as your clergyman, and one who hopes for your reinstatement in respect, to quit the room, and avoid further hindrance to business.'

Bulstrode, after a moment's hesitation, took his hat from the floor and slowly rose, but he grasped the corner of the chair so totteringly that Lydgate felt sure there was not strength enough in him to walk away without support. What could he do? He could not see a man sink close to him for want of help. He rose and gave his arm to Bulstrode, and in that way led him out of the room; yet this act, which might have been one of gentle duty and pure compassion, was at this moment unspeakably bitter to him. It seemed as if he were putting his sign-manual to that association of himself with Bulstrode, of which he now saw the full meaning as it must have presented itself to other minds. He now felt the conviction that this man who was leaning tremblingly on his arm, had given him the thousand pounds as a bribe, and that somehow the treatment of Raffles had been tampered with from an evil motive. The inferences were closely linked enough; the town knew of the loan, believed it to be a bribe, and believed that he took it as a bribe.

Poor Lydgate, his mind struggling under the terrible clutch of this revelation, was all the while morally forced to take Mr Bulstrode to the Bank, send a man off for his carriage, and wait to accompany him home.

Meanwhile the business of the meeting was despatched, and fringed off into eager discussion among various groups concerning this affair of Bulstrode - and Lydgate.

Mr Brooke, who had before heard only imperfect hints of it, and was very uneasy that he had 'gone a little too far' in countenancing Bulstrode, now got himself fully informed, and felt some benevolent sadness in talking to Mr Farebrother about the ugly light in which Lydgate had come to be regarded. Mr Farebrother was going to walk back to Lowick.

'Step into my carriage,' said Mr Brooke. 'I am going round to see Mrs Casaubon. She was to come back from Yorkshire last night. She will like to see me, you know.'

So they drove along, Mr Brooke chatting with good-natured hope that there had not really been anything black in Lydgate's behavior - a young fellow whom he had seen to be quite above the common mark, when he brought a letter from his uncle Sir Godwin. Mr Farebrother said little: he was deeply mournful: with a keen perception of human

weakness, he could not be confident that under the pressure of humiliating needs Lydgate had not fallen below himself.

When the carriage drove up to the gate of the Manor, Dorothea was out on the gravel, and came to greet them.

'Well, my dear,' said Mr Brooke, 'we have just come from a meeting - a sanitary meeting, you know.'

'Was Mr Lydgate there?' said Dorothea, who looked full of health and animation, and stood with her head bare under the gleaming April lights. 'I want to see him and have a great consultation with him about the Hospital. I have engaged with Mr Bulstrode to do so.'

'Oh, my dear,' said Mr Brooke, 'we have been hearing bad news - bad news, you know.'

They walked through the garden towards the churchyard gate, Mr Farebrother wanting to go on to the parsonage; and Dorothea heard the whole sad story.

She listened with deep interest, and begged to hear twice over the facts and impressions concerning Lydgate. After a short silence, pausing at the churchyard gate, and addressing Mr Farebrother, she said energetically -

'You don't believe that Mr Lydgate is guilty of anything base? I will not believe it. Let us find out the truth and clear him!'