MR. BRITLING SEES IT THROUGH

BY

H. G. WELLS

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1916

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BOOK I

MATCHING'S EASY AT EASE

CHAPTER THE FIRST

MR. DIRECK VISITS MR. BRITLING

§ 1

It was the sixth day of Mr. Direck's first visit to England, and he was at his acutest perception of differences. He found England in every way gratifying and satisfactory, and more of a contrast with things American than he had ever dared to hope.

He had promised himself this visit for many years, but being of a sunny rather than energetic temperament—though he firmly believed himself to be a reservoir of clear-sighted American energy—he had allowed all sorts of things, and more particularly the uncertainties of Miss Mamie Nelson, to keep him back. But now there were no more uncertainties about Miss Mamie Nelson, and Mr. Direck had come over to England just to convince himself and everybody else that there were other interests in life for him than Mamie....

And also, he wanted to see the old country from which his maternal grandmother had sprung. Wasn't there even now in his bedroom in New York a water-colour of Market Saffron church, where the dear old lady had been confirmed? And generally he wanted to see Europe. As an interesting side show to the excursion he hoped, in his capacity of the rather underworked and rather over-salaried secretary of the Massachusetts Society for the Study of Contemporary Thought, to discuss certain agreeable possibilities with Mr. Britling, who lived at Matching's Easy.

Mr. Direck was a type of man not uncommon in America. He was very much after the fashion of that clean and pleasant-looking person one sees in the advertisements in American magazines, that agreeable person who smiles and says, "Good, it's the Fizgig Brand," or "Yes, it's a Wilkins, and that's the Best," or "My shirt-front never rucks; it's a Chesson." But now he was saying, still with the same firm smile, "Good. It's English." He was pleased by every unlikeness to things American, by every item he could hail as characteristic; in the train to London he had laughed aloud with pleasure at the chequer-board of little fields upon the hills of Cheshire, he had chuckled to find himself in a compartment without a corridor; he had tipped the polite yet kindly guard

magnificently, after doubting for a moment whether he ought to tip him at all, and he had gone about his hotel in London saying "Lordy! Lordy! My *word!*" in a kind of ecstasy, verifying the delightful absence of telephone, of steam-heat, of any dependent bathroom. At breakfast the waiter (out of Dickens it seemed) had refused to know what "cereals" were, and had given him his egg in a china egg-cup such as you see in the pictures in *Punch*. The Thames, when he sallied out to see it, had been too good to be true, the smallest thing in rivers he had ever seen, and he had had to restrain himself from affecting a marked accent and accosting some passer-by with the question, "Say! But is this little wet ditch here the Historical River Thames?"

In America, it must be explained, Mr. Direck spoke a very good and careful English indeed, but he now found the utmost difficulty in controlling his impulse to use a high-pitched nasal drone and indulge in dry "Americanisms" and poker metaphors upon all occasions. When people asked him questions he wanted to say "Yep" or "Sure," words he would no more have used in America than he could have used a bowie knife. But he had a sense of rôle. He wanted to be visibly and audibly America eye-witnessing. He wanted to be just exactly what he supposed an Englishman would expect him to be. At any rate, his clothes had been made by a strongly American New York tailor, and upon the strength of them a taxi-man had assumed politely but firmly that the shillings on his taximeter were dollars, an incident that helped greatly to sustain the effect of Mr. Direck, in Mr. Direck's mind, as something standing out with an almost representative clearness against the English scene.... So much so that the taxi-man got the dollars....

Because all the time he had been coming over he had dreaded that it wasn't true, that England was a legend, that London would turn out to be just another thundering great New York, and the English exactly like New Englanders....

§ 2

And now here he was on the branch line of the little old Great Eastern Railway, on his way to Matching's Easy in Essex, and he was suddenly in the heart of Washington Irving's England.

Washington Irving's England! Indeed it was. He couldn't sit still and just peep at it, he had to stand up in the little compartment and stick his large, firm-featured, kindly countenance out of the window as if he greeted it. The country under the June sunshine was neat and bright as an old-world garden, with little fields of corn surrounded by dog-rose hedges, and woods and small rushy pastures of an infinite

tidiness. He had seen a real deer park, it had rather tumbledown iron gates between its shield-surmounted pillars, and in the distance, beyond all question, was Bracebridge Hall nestling among great trees. He had seen thatched and timbered cottages, and half-a-dozen inns with creaking signs. He had seen a fat vicar driving himself along a grassy lane in a governess cart drawn by a fat grey pony. It wasn't like any reality he had ever known. It was like travelling in literature.

Mr. Britling's address was the Dower House, and it was, Mr. Britling's note had explained, on the farther edge of the park at Claverings. Claverings! The very name for some stately home of England....

And yet this was only forty-two miles from London. Surely it brought things within the suburban range. If Matching's Easy were in America, commuters would live there. But in supposing that, Mr. Direck displayed his ignorance of a fact of the greatest importance to all who would understand England. There is a gap in the suburbs of London. The suburbs of London stretch west and south and even west by north, but to the north-eastward there are no suburbs; instead there is Essex. Essex is not a suburban county; it is a characteristic and individualised county which wins the heart. Between dear Essex and the centre of things lie two great barriers, the East End of London and Epping Forest. Before a train could get to any villadom with a cargo of season-ticket holders it would have to circle about this rescued woodland and travel for twenty unprofitable miles, and so once you are away from the main Great Eastern lines Essex still lives in the peace of the eighteenth century, and London, the modern Babylon, is, like the stars, just a light in the nocturnal sky. In Matching's Easy, as Mr. Britling presently explained to Mr. Direck, there are half-a-dozen old people who have never set eyes on London in their lives—and do not want to.

"Aye-ya!"

"Fussin' about thea."

"Mr. Robinson, 'e went to Lon', 'e did. That's 'ow 'e 'urt 'is fut."

Mr. Direck had learnt at the main-line junction that he had to tell the guard to stop the train for Matching's Easy; it only stopped "by request"; the thing was getting better and better; and when Mr. Direck seized his grip and got out of the train there was just one little old Essex station-master and porter and signalman and everything, holding a red flag in his hand and talking to Mr. Britling about the cultivation of the sweet peas which glorified the station. And there was the Mr. Britling who was the only item of business and the greatest expectation in Mr. Direck's European journey, and he was quite unlike the portraits Mr. Direck had seen and quite unmistakably Mr. Britling all the same,

since there was nobody else upon the platform, and he was advancing with a gesture of welcome.

"Did you ever see such peas, Mr. Dick?" said Mr. Britling by way of introduction.

"My *word*," said Mr. Direck in a good old Farmer Hayseed kind of voice.

"Aye-ya!" said the station-master in singularly strident tones. "It be a rare year for sweet peas," and then he slammed the door of the carriage in a leisurely manner and did dismissive things with his flag, while the two gentlemen took stock, as people say, of one another.

§ 3

Except in the doubtful instance of Miss Mamie Nelson, Mr. Direck's habit was good fortune. Pleasant things came to him. Such was his position as the salaried secretary of this society of thoughtful Massachusetts business men to which allusion has been made. Its purpose was to bring itself expeditiously into touch with the best thought of the age.

Too busily occupied with practical realities to follow the thought of the age through all its divagations and into all its recesses, these Massachusetts business men had had to consider methods of access more quintessential and nuclear. And they had decided not to hunt out the best thought in its merely germinating stages, but to wait until it had emerged and flowered to some trustworthy recognition, and then, rather than toil through recondite and possibly already reconsidered books and writings generally, to offer an impressive fee to the emerged new thinker, and to invite him to come to them and to lecture to them and to have a conference with them, and to tell them simply, competently and completely at first hand just all that he was about. To come, in fact, and be himself—in a highly concentrated form. In this way a number of interesting Europeans had been given very pleasant excursions to America, and the society had been able to form very definite opinions upon their teaching. And Mr. Britling was one of the representative thinkers upon which this society had decided to inform itself. It was to broach this invitation and to offer him the impressive honorarium by which the society honoured not only its guests but itself, that Mr. Direck had now come to Matching's Easy. He had already sent Mr. Britling a letter of introduction, not indeed intimating his precise purpose, but mentioning merely a desire to know him, and the letter had been so happily phrased and its writer had left

such a memory of pleasant hospitality on Mr. Britling's mind during Mr. Britling's former visit to New York, that it had immediately produced for Mr. Direck an invitation not merely to come and see him but to come and stay over the week-end.

And here they were shaking hands.

Mr. Britling did not look at all as Mr. Direck had expected him to look. He had expected an Englishman in a country costume of golfing tweeds, like the Englishman in country costume one sees in American illustrated stories. Drooping out of the country costume of golfing tweeds he had expected to see the mildly unhappy face, pensive even to its drooping moustache, with which Mr. Britling's publisher had for some faulty and unfortunate reason familiarised the American public. Instead of this, Mr. Britling was in a miscellaneous costume, and mildness was the last quality one could attribute to him. His moustache, his hair, his eyebrows bristled; his flaming freckled face seemed about to bristle too. His little hazel eyes came out with a "ping" and looked at Mr. Direck. Mr. Britling was one of a large but still remarkable class of people who seem at the mere approach of photography to change their hair, their clothes, their moral natures. No photographer had ever caught a hint of his essential Britlingness and bristlingness. Only the camera could ever induce Mr. Britling to brush his hair, and for the camera alone did he reserve that expression of submissive martyrdom Mr. Direck knew. And Mr. Direck was altogether unprepared for a certain casualness of costume that sometimes overtook Mr. Britling. He was wearing now a very old blue flannel blazer, no hat, and a pair of knickerbockers, not tweed breeches but tweed knickerbockers of a remarkable bagginess, and made of one of those virtuous socialistic homespun tweeds that drag out into woolly knots and strings wherever there is attrition. His stockings were worsted and wrinkled, and on his feet were those extraordinary slippers of bright-coloured bast-like interwoven material one buys in the north of France. These were purple with a touch of green. He had, in fact, thought of the necessity of meeting Mr. Direck at the station at the very last moment, and had come away from his study in the clothes that had happened to him when he got up. His face wore the amiable expression of a wire-haired terrier disposed to be friendly, and it struck Mr. Direck that for a man of his real intellectual distinction Mr. Britling was unusually short.

For there can be no denying that Mr. Britling was, in a sense, distinguished. The hero and subject of this novel was at its very beginning a distinguished man. He was in the *Who's Who* of two continents. In the last few years he had grown with some rapidity into a writer recognised and welcomed by the more cultivated sections of the American public, and even known to a select circle of British readers. To his American discoverers he had first appeared as an essayist, a serious essayist who wrote about

aesthetics and Oriental thought and national character and poets and painting. He had come through America some years ago as one of those Kahn scholars, those promising writers and intelligent men endowed by Auguste Kahn of Paris, who go about the world nowadays in comfort and consideration as the travelling guests of that original philanthropist—to acquire the international spirit. Previously he had been a critic of art and literature and a writer of thoughtful third leaders in the London *Times*. He had begun with a Pembroke fellowship and a prize poem. He had returned from his world tour to his reflective yet original corner of *The Times* and to the production of books about national relationships and social psychology, that had brought him rapidly into prominence.

His was a naturally irritable mind, which gave him point and passion; and moreover he had a certain obstinate originality and a generous disposition. So that he was always lively, sometimes spacious, and never vile. He loved to write and talk. He talked about everything, he had ideas about everything; he could no more help having ideas about everything than a dog can resist smelling at your heels. He sniffed at the heels of reality. Lots of people found him interesting and stimulating, a few found him seriously exasperating. He had ideas in the utmost profusion about races and empires and social order and political institutions and gardens and automobiles and the future of India and China and aesthetics and America and the education of mankind in general.... And all that sort of thing....

Mr. Direck had read a very great deal of all this expressed opiniativeness of Mr. Britling: he found it entertaining and stimulating stuff, and it was with genuine enthusiasm that he had come over to encounter the man himself. On his way across the Atlantic and during the intervening days, he had rehearsed this meeting in varying keys, but always on the supposition that Mr. Britling was a large, quiet, thoughtful sort of man, a man who would, as it were, sit in attentive rows like a public meeting and listen. So Mr. Direck had prepared quite a number of pleasant and attractive openings, and now he felt was the moment for some one of these various simple, memorable utterances. But in none of these forecasts had he reckoned with either the spontaneous activities of Mr. Britling or with the station-master of Matching's Easy. Oblivious of any conversational necessities between Mr. Direck and Mr. Britling, this official now took charge of Mr. Direck's grip-sack, and, falling into line with the two gentlemen as they walked towards the exit gate, resumed what was evidently an interrupted discourse upon sweet peas, originally addressed to Mr. Britling.

He was a small, elderly man with a determined-looking face and a sea voice, and it was clear he overestimated the distance of his hearers.

"Mr. Darling what's head gardener up at Claverings, *'e* can't get sweet peas like that, try *'ow* 'e will. Tried everything 'e 'as. Sand ballast, 'e's tried. Seeds same as me. 'E came along 'ere only the other day, 'e did, and 'e says to me, 'e says, 'darned 'f I can see why a station-master should beat a professional gardener at 'is own game,' 'e says, 'but you do. And in your orf time, too, so's to speak,' 'e says. 'I've tried sile,' 'e says——"

"Your first visit to England?" asked Mr. Britling of his guest.

"Absolutely," said Mr. Direck.

"I says to 'im, 'there's one thing you 'aven't tried,' I says," the station-master continued, raising his voice by a Herculean feat still higher.

"I've got a little car outside here," said Mr. Britling. "I'm a couple of miles from the station."

"I says to 'im, I says, ''ave you tried the vibritation of the trains?' I says. 'That's what you 'aven't tried, Mr. Darling. That's what you *can't* try,' I says. 'But you rest assured that that's the secret of my sweet peas,' I says, 'nothing less and nothing more than the vibritation of the trains.'"

Mr. Direck's mind was a little confused by the double nature of the conversation and by the fact that Mr. Britling spoke of a car when he meant an automobile. He handed his ticket mechanically to the station-master, who continued to repeat and endorse his anecdote at the top of his voice as Mr. Britling disposed himself and his guest in the automobile.

"You know you 'aven't 'urt that mud-guard, sir, not the slightest bit that matters," shouted the station-master. "I've been a looking at it—er. It's my fence that's suffered most. And that's only strained the post a lil' bit. Shall I put your bag in behind, sir?"

Mr. Direck assented, and then, after a momentary hesitation, rewarded the station-master's services.

"Ready?" asked Mr. Britling.

"That's all right sir," the station-master reverberated.

With a rather wide curve Mr. Britling steered his way out of the station into the highroad.

§ 4

And now it seemed was the time for Mr. Direck to make his meditated speeches. But an unexpected complication was to defeat this intention. Mr. Direck perceived almost at once that Mr. Britling was probably driving an automobile for the first or second or at the extremest the third time in his life.

The thing became evident when he struggled to get into the high gear—an attempt that stopped the engine, and it was even more startlingly so when Mr. Britling narrowly missed a collision with a baker's cart at a corner. "I pressed the accelerator," he explained afterwards, "instead of the brake. One does at first. I missed him by less than a foot." The estimate was a generous one. And after that Mr. Direck became too anxious not to distract his host's thoughts to persist with his conversational openings. An attentive silence came upon both gentlemen that was broken presently by a sudden outcry from Mr. Britling and a great noise of tormented gears. "Damn!" cried Mr. Britling, and "How the *devil*?"

Mr. Direck perceived that his host was trying to turn the car into a very beautiful gateway, with gate-houses on either side. Then it was manifest that Mr. Britling had abandoned this idea, and then they came to a stop a dozen yards or so along the main road. "Missed it," said Mr. Britling, and took his hands off the steering wheel and blew stormily, and then whistled some bars of a fretful air, and became still.

"Do we go through these ancient gates?" asked Mr. Direck.

Mr. Britling looked over his right shoulder and considered problems of curvature and distance. "I think," he said, "I will go round outside the park. It will take us a little longer, but it will be simpler than backing and manoeuvring here now.... These electric starters are remarkably convenient things. Otherwise now I should have to get down and wind up the engine."

After that came a corner, the rounding of which seemed to present few difficulties until suddenly Mr. Britling cried out, "Eh! *eh*! EH! Oh, *damn*!"

Then the two gentlemen were sitting side by side in a rather sloping car that had ascended the bank and buried its nose in a hedge of dog-rose and honeysuckle, from which two missel thrushes, a blackbird and a number of sparrows had made a hurried escape....

§ 5

"Perhaps," said Mr. Britling without assurance, and after a little peaceful pause, "I can reverse out of this."

He seemed to feel some explanation was due to Mr. Direck. "You see, at first—it's perfectly simple—one steers *round* a corner and then one doesn't put the wheels straight again, and so one keeps on going round—more than one meant to. It's the bicycle habit; the bicycle rights itself. One expects a car to do the same thing. It was my fault. The book explains all this question clearly, but just at the moment I forgot."

He reflected and experimented in a way that made the engine scold and fuss....

"You see, she won't budge for the reverse.... She's—embedded.... Do you mind getting out and turning the wheel back? Then if I reverse, perhaps we'll get a move on...."

Mr. Direck descended, and there were considerable efforts.

"If you'd just grip the spokes. Yes, so.... One, Two, Three!... No! Well, let's just sit here until somebody comes along to help us. Oh! Somebody will come all right. Won't you get up again?"

And after a reflective moment Mr. Direck resumed his seat beside Mr. Britling....

§ 6

The two gentlemen smiled at each other to dispel any suspicion of discontent.

"My driving leaves something to be desired," said Mr. Britling with an air of frank impartiality. "But I have only just got this car for myself—after some years of hired cars—the sort of lazy arrangement where people supply car, driver, petrol, tyres, insurance and everything at so much a month. It bored me abominably. I can't imagine now how I stood it for so long. They sent me down a succession of compact, scornful boys who used to go fast when I wanted to go slow, and slow when I wanted to go fast, and who used to take every corner on the wrong side at top speed, and charge dogs and hens for the sport of it, and all sorts of things like that. They would not even let me choose my roads. I should have got myself a car long ago, and driven it, if it wasn't for that infernal business with a handle one had to do when the engine stopped. But here, you see, is a reasonably cheap car with an electric starter—American, I need scarcely say. And here I am—going at my own pace."

Mr. Direck glanced for a moment at the pretty disorder of the hedge in which they were embedded, and smiled and admitted that it was certainly much more agreeable.

Before he had finished saying as much Mr. Britling was talking again.

He had a quick and rather jerky way of speaking; he seemed to fire out a thought directly it came into his mind, and he seemed to have a loaded magazine of thoughts in his head. He spoke almost exactly twice as fast as Mr. Direck, clipping his words much more, using much compacter sentences, and generally cutting his corners, and this put Mr. Direck off his game.

That rapid attack while the transatlantic interlocutor is deploying is indeed a not infrequent defect of conversations between Englishmen and Americans. It is a source of many misunderstandings. The two conceptions of conversation differ fundamentally. The English are much less disposed to listen than the American; they have not quite the same sense of conversational give and take, and at first they are apt to reduce their visitors to the rôle of auditors wondering when their turn will begin. Their turn never does begin. Mr. Direck sat deeply in his slanting seat with a half face to his celebrated host and said "Yep" and "Sure" and "That *is* so," in the dry grave tones that he believed an Englishman would naturally expect him to use, realising this only very gradually.

Mr. Britling, from his praise of the enterprise that had at last brought a car he could drive within his reach, went on to that favourite topic of all intelligent Englishmen, the adverse criticism of things British. He pointed out that the central position of the brake and gear levers in his automobile made it extremely easy for the American manufacturer to turn it out either as a left-handed or a right-handed car, and so adapt it either to the Continental or to the British rule of the road. No English cars were so adaptable. We British suffered much from our insular rule of the road, just as we suffered much from our insular weights and measures. But we took a perverse pride in such disadvantages. The irruption of American cars into England was a recent phenomenon, it was another triumph for the tremendous organising ability of the American mind. They were doing with the automobile what they had done with clocks and watches and rifles, they had standardised and machined wholesale, while the British were still making the things one by one. It was an extraordinary thing that England, which was the originator of the industrial system and the original developer of the division of labour, should have so fallen away from systematic manufacturing. He believed this was largely due to the influence of Oxford and the Established Church....

At this point Mr. Direck was moved by an anecdote. "It will help to illustrate what you are saying, Mr. Britling, about systematic organisation if I tell you a little incident that happened to a friend of mine in Toledo, where they are setting up a big plant with a view to capturing the entire American and European market in the class of the thousand-dollar car——"

"There's no end of such little incidents," said Mr. Britling, cutting in without apparent effort. "You see, we get it on both sides. Our manufacturer class was, of course, originally an insurgent class. It was a class of distended craftsmen. It had the craftsman's natural enterprise and natural radicalism. As soon as it prospered and sent its boys to Oxford it was lost. Our manufacturing class was assimilated in no time to the conservative classes, whose education has always had a mandarin quality—very, very little of it, and very cold and choice. In America you have so far had no real conservative class at all. Fortunate continent! You cast out your Tories, and you were left with nothing but Whigs and Radicals. But our peculiar bad luck has been to get a sort of revolutionary who is a Tory mandarin too. Ruskin and Morris, for example, were as reactionary and anti-scientific as the dukes and the bishops. Machine haters. Science haters. Rule of Thumbites to the bone. So are our current Socialists. They've filled this country with the idea that the ideal automobile ought to be made entirely by the hand labour of traditional craftsmen, quite individually, out of beaten copper, wrought iron and seasoned oak. All this electric-starter business and this electric lighting outfit I have here, is perfectly hateful to the English mind.... It isn't that we are simply backward in these things, we are antagonistic. The British mind has never really tolerated electricity; at least, not that sort of electricity that runs through wires. Too slippery and glib for it. Associates it with Italians and fluency generally, with Volta, Galvani, Marconi and so on. The proper British electricity is that high-grade useless long-sparking stuff you get by turning round a glass machine; stuff we used to call frictional electricity. Keep it in Leyden jars.... At Claverings here they still refuse to have electric bells. There was a row when the Solomonsons, who were tenants here for a time, tried to put them in...."

Mr. Direck had followed this cascade of remarks with a patient smile and a slowly nodding head. "What you say," he said, "forms a very marked contrast indeed with the sort of thing that goes on in America. This friend of mine I was speaking of, the one who is connected with an automobile factory in Toledo——"

"Of course," Mr. Britling burst out again, "even conservatism isn't an ultimate thing. After all, we and your enterprising friend at Toledo, are very much the same blood. The conservatism, I mean, isn't racial. And our earlier energy shows it isn't in the air or in

the soil. England has become unenterprising and sluggish because England has been so prosperous and comfortable...."

"Exactly," said Mr. Direck. "My friend of whom I was telling you, was a man named Robinson, which indicates pretty clearly that he was of genuine English stock, and, if I may say so, quite of your build and complexion; racially, I should say, he was, well—very much what you are...."

§ 7

This rally of Mr. Direck's mind was suddenly interrupted.

Mr. Britling stood up, and putting both hands to the sides of his mouth, shouted "Yi-ah! Aye-ya! Thea!" at unseen hearers.

After shouting again, several times, it became manifest that he had attracted the attention of two willing but deliberate labouring men. They emerged slowly, first as attentive heads, from the landscape. With their assistance the car was restored to the road again. Mr. Direck assisted manfully, and noted the respect that was given to Mr. Britling and the shillings that fell to the men, with an intelligent detachment. They touched their hats, they called Mr. Britling "Sir." They examined the car distantly but kindly. "Ain't 'urt 'e, not a bit 'e ain't, not really," said one encouragingly. And indeed except for a slight crumpling of the mud-guard and the detachment of the wire of one of the headlights the automobile was uninjured. Mr. Britling resumed his seat; Mr. Direck gravely and in silence got up beside him. They started with the usual convulsion, as though something had pricked the vehicle unexpectedly and shamefully behind. And from this point Mr. Britling, driving with meticulous care, got home without further mishap, excepting only that he scraped off some of the metal edge of his footboard against the gate-post of his very agreeable garden.

His family welcomed his safe return, visitor and all, with undisguised relief and admiration. A small boy appeared at the corner of the house, and then disappeared hastily again. "Daddy's got back all right at last," they heard him shouting to unseen hearers.

§ 8

Mr. Direck, though he was a little incommoded by the suppression of his story about Robinson—for when he had begun a thing he liked to finish it—found Mr. Britling's household at once thoroughly British, quite un-American and a little difficult to follow. It had a quality that at first he could not define at all. Compared with anything he had ever seen in his life before it struck him as being—he found the word at last—sketchy. For instance, he was introduced to nobody except his hostess, and she was indicated to him by a mere wave of Mr. Britling's hand. "That's Edith," he said, and returned at once to his car to put it away. Mrs. Britling was a tall, freckled woman with pretty bright brown hair and preoccupied brown eyes. She welcomed him with a handshake, and then a wonderful English parlourmaid—she at least was according to expectations—took his grip-sack and guided him to his room. "Lunch, sir," she said, "is outside," and closed the door and left him to that and a towel-covered can of hot water.

It was a square-looking old red-brick house he had come to, very handsome in a simple Georgian fashion, with a broad lawn before it and great blue cedar trees, and a drive that came frankly up to the front door and then went off with Mr. Britling and the car round to unknown regions at the back. The centre of the house was a big airy hall, oak-panelled, warmed in winter only by one large fireplace and abounding in doors which he knew opened into the square separate rooms that England favours. Bookshelves and stuffed birds comforted the landing outside his bedroom. He descended to find the hall occupied by a small bright bristling boy in white flannel shirt and knickerbockers and bare legs and feet. He stood before the vacant open fireplace in an attitude that Mr. Direck knew instantly was also Mr. Britling's. "Lunch is in the garden," the Britling scion proclaimed, "and I've got to fetch you. And, I say! is it true? Are you American?"

"Why surely," said Mr. Direck.

"Well, I know some American," said the boy. "I learnt it."

"Tell me some," said Mr. Direck, smiling still more amiably.

"Oh! Well—God darn you! Ouch, Gee-whizz! Soak him, Maud! It's up to you, Duke...."

"Now where did you learn all that?" asked Mr. Direck recovering.

"Out of the Sunday Supplement," said the youthful Britling.

"Why! Then you know all about Buster Brown," said Mr. Direck. "He's Fine—eh?"

The Britling child hated Buster Brown. He regarded Buster Brown as a totally unnecessary infant. He detested the way he wore his hair and the peculiar cut of his

knickerbockers and—him. He thought Buster Brown the one drop of paraffin in the otherwise delicious feast of the Sunday Supplement. But he was a diplomatic child.

"I think I like Happy Hooligan better," he said. "And dat ole Maud."

He reflected with joyful eyes, Buster clean forgotten. "Every week," he said, "she kicks some one."

It came to Mr. Direck as a very pleasant discovery that a British infant could find a common ground with the small people at home in these characteristically American jests. He had never dreamt that the fine wine of Maud and Buster could travel.

"Maud's a treat," said the youthful Britling, relapsing into his native tongue.

Mr. Britling appeared coming to meet them. He was now in a grey flannel suit—he must have jumped into it—and altogether very much tidier....

§ 9

The long narrow table under the big sycamores between the house and the adapted barn that Mr. Direck learnt was used for "dancing and all that sort of thing," was covered with a blue linen diaper cloth, and that too surprised him. This was his first meal in a private household in England, and for obscure reasons he had expected something very stiff and formal with "spotless napery." He had also expected a very stiff and capable service by implacable parlourmaids, and the whole thing indeed highly genteel. But two cheerful women servants appeared from what was presumably the kitchen direction, wheeling a curious wicker erection, which his small guide informed him was called Aunt Clatter—manifestly deservedly—and which bore on its shelves the substance of the meal. And while the maids at this migratory sideboard carved and opened bottles and so forth, the small boy and a slightly larger brother, assisted a little by two young men of no very defined position and relationship, served the company. Mrs. Britling sat at the head of the table, and conversed with Mr. Direck by means of hostess questions and imperfectly accepted answers while she kept a watchful eye on the proceedings.

The composition of the company was a matter for some perplexity to Mr. Direck. Mr. and Mrs. Britling were at either end of the table, that was plain enough. It was also fairly plain that the two barefooted boys were little Britlings. But beyond this was a cloud of uncertainty. There was a youth of perhaps seventeen, much darker than

Britling but with nose and freckles rather like his, who might be an early son or a stepson; he was shock-headed and with that look about his arms and legs that suggests overnight growth; and there was an unmistakable young German, very pink, with close-cropped fair hair, glasses and a panama hat, who was probably the tutor of the younger boys. (Mr. Direck also was wearing his hat, his mind had been filled with an exaggerated idea of the treacheries of the English climate before he left New York. Every one else was hatless.) Finally, before one reached the limits of the explicable there was a pleasant young man with a lot of dark hair and very fine dark blue eyes, whom everybody called "Teddy." For him, Mr. Direck hazarded "secretary."

But in addition to these normal and understandable presences, there was an entirely mysterious pretty young woman in blue linen who sat and smiled next to Mr. Britling, and there was a rather kindred-looking girl with darker hair on the right of Mr. Direck who impressed him at the very outset as being still prettier, and—he didn't quite place her at first—somehow familiar to him; there was a large irrelevant middle-aged lady in black with a gold chain and a large nose, between Teddy and the tutor; there was a tall middle-aged man with an intelligent face, who might be a casual guest; there was an Indian young gentleman faultlessly dressed up to his brown soft linen collar and cuffs, and thereafter an uncontrolled outbreak of fine bronze modelling and abundant fuzzy hair; and there was a very erect and attentive baby of a year or less, sitting up in a perambulator and gesticulating cheerfully to everybody. This baby it was that most troubled the orderly mind of Mr. Direck. The research for its paternity made his conversation with Mrs. Britling almost as disconnected and absent-minded as her conversation with him. It almost certainly wasn't Mrs. Britling's. The girl next to him or the girl next to Mr. Britling or the lady in black might any of them be married, but if so where was the spouse? It seemed improbable that they would wheel out a foundling to lunch....

Realising at last that the problem of relationship must be left to solve itself if he did not want to dissipate and consume his mind entirely, Mr. Direck turned to his hostess, who was enjoying a brief lull in her administrative duties, and told her what a memorable thing the meeting of Mr. Britling in his own home would be in his life, and how very highly America was coming to esteem Mr. Britling and his essays. He found that with a slight change of person, one of his premeditated openings was entirely serviceable here. And he went on to observe that it was novel and entertaining to find Mr. Britling driving his own automobile and to note that it was an automobile of American manufacture. In America they had standardised and systematised the making of such things as automobiles to an extent that would, he thought, be almost startling to Europeans. It was certainly startling to the European manufacturers. In

illustration of that he might tell a little story of a friend of his called Robinson—a man who curiously enough in general build and appearance was very reminiscent indeed of Mr. Britling. He had been telling Mr. Britling as much on his way here from the station. His friend was concerned with several others in one of the biggest attacks that had ever been made upon what one might describe in general terms as the thousand-dollar light automobile market. What they said practically was this: This market is a jig-saw puzzle waiting to be put together and made one. We are going to do it. But that was easier to figure out than to do. At the very outset of this attack he and his associates found themselves up against an unexpected and very difficult proposition....

At first Mrs. Britling had listened to Mr. Direck with an almost undivided attention, but as he had developed his opening the feast upon the blue linen table had passed on to a fresh phase that demanded more and more of her directive intelligence. The two little boys appeared suddenly at her elbows. "Shall we take the plates and get the strawberries, Mummy?" they asked simultaneously. Then one of the neat maids in the background had to be called up and instructed in undertones, and Mr. Direck saw that for the present Robinson's illuminating experience was not for her ears. A little baffled, but quite understanding how things were, he turned to his neighbour on his left....

The girl really had an extraordinarily pretty smile, and there was something in her soft bright brown eye—like the movement of some quick little bird. And—she was like somebody he knew! Indeed she was. She was quite ready to be spoken to.

"I was telling Mrs. Britling," said Mr. Direck, "what a very great privilege I esteem it to meet Mr. Britling in this highly familiar way."

"You've not met him before?"

"I missed him by twenty-four hours when he came through Boston on the last occasion. Just twenty-four hours. It was a matter of very great regret to me."

"I wish I'd been paid to travel round the world."

"You must write things like Mr. Britling and then Mr. Kahn will send you."

"Don't you think if I promised well?"

"You'd have to write some promissory notes, I think—just to convince him it was all right."

The young lady reflected on Mr. Britling's good fortune.

"He saw India. He saw Japan. He had weeks in Egypt. And he went right across America."

Mr. Direck had already begun on the liner to adapt himself to the hopping inconsecutiveness of English conversation. He made now what he felt was quite a good hop, and he dropped his voice to a confidential undertone. (It was probably Adam in his first conversation with Eve, who discovered the pleasantness of dropping into a confidential undertone beside a pretty ear with a pretty wave of hair above it.)

"It was in India, I presume," murmured Mr. Direck, "that Mr. Britling made the acquaintance of the coloured gentleman?"

"Coloured gentleman!" She gave a swift glance down the table as though she expected to see something purple with yellow spots. "Oh, that is one of Mr. Lawrence Carmine's young men!" she explained even more confidentially and with an air of discussing the silver bowl of roses before him. "He's a great authority on Indian literature, he belongs to a society for making things pleasant for Indian students in London, and he has them down."

"And Mr. Lawrence Carmine?" he pursued.

Even more intimately and confidentially she indicated Mr. Carmine, as it seemed by a motion of her eyelash.

Mr. Direck prepared to be even more *sotto-voce* and to plumb a much profounder mystery. His eye rested on the perambulator; he leant a little nearer to the ear.... But the strawberries interrupted him.

"Strawberries!" said the young lady, and directed his regard to his left shoulder by a little movement of her head.

He found one of the boys with a high-piled plate ready to serve him.

And then Mrs. Britling resumed her conversation with him. She was so ignorant, she said, of things American, that she did not even know if they had strawberries there. At any rate, here they were at the crest of the season, and in a very good year. And in the rose season too. It was one of the dearest vanities of English people to think their apples and their roses and their strawberries the best in the world.

"And their complexions," said Mr. Direck, over the pyramid of fruit, quite manifestly intending a compliment. So that was all right.... But the girl on the left of him was speaking across the table to the German tutor, and did not hear what he had said. So that even if it wasn't very neat it didn't matter....

Then he remembered that she was like that old daguerreotype of a cousin of his grandmother's that he had fallen in love with when he was a boy. It was her smile. Of course! Of course!... And he'd sort of adored that portrait.... He felt a curious disposition to tell her as much....

"What makes this visit even more interesting if possible to me," he said to Mrs. Britling, "than it would otherwise be, is that this Essex country is the country in which my maternal grandmother was raised, and also long way back my mother's father's people. My mother's father's people were very early New England people indeed.... Well, no. If I said *Mayflower* it wouldn't be true. But it would approximate. They were Essex Hinkinsons. That's what they were. I must be a good third of me at least Essex. My grandmother was an Essex Corner, I must confess I've had some thought—"

"Corner?" said the young lady at his elbow sharply.

"I was telling Mrs. Britling I had some thought—"

"But about those Essex relatives of yours?"

"Well, of finding if they were still about in these parts.... Say! I haven't dropped a brick, have I?"

He looked from one face to another.

"*She's* a Corner," said Mrs. Britling.

"Well," said Mr. Direck, and hesitated for a moment. It was so delightful that one couldn't go on being just discreet. The atmosphere was free and friendly. His intonation disarmed offence. And he gave the young lady the full benefit of a quite expressive eye. "I'm very pleased to meet you, Cousin Corner. How are the old folks at home?"

§ 10

The bright interest of this consulship helped Mr. Direck more than anything to get the better of his Robinson-anecdote crave, and when presently he found his dialogue with Mr. Britling resumed, he turned at once to this remarkable discovery of his long lost and indeed hitherto unsuspected relative. "It's an American sort of thing to do, I suppose," he said apologetically, "but I almost thought of going on, on Monday, to

Market Saffron, which was the locality of the Hinkinsons, and just looking about at the tombstones in the churchyard for a day or so."

"Very probably," said Mr. Britling, "you'd find something about them in the parish registers. Lots of our registers go back three hundred years or more. I'll drive you over in my lil' old car."

"Oh! I wouldn't put you to that trouble," said Mr. Direck hastily.

"It's no trouble. I like the driving. What I have had of it. And while we're at it, we'll come back by Harborough High Oak and look up the Corner pedigree. They're all over that district still. And the road's not really difficult; it's only a bit up and down and roundabout."

"I couldn't think, Mr. Britling, of putting you to that much trouble."

"It's no trouble. I want a day off, and I'm dying to take Gladys——"

"Gladys?" said Mr. Direck with sudden hope.

"That's my name for the lil' car. I'm dying to take her for something like a decent run. I've only had her out four times altogether, and I've not got her up yet to forty miles. Which I'm told she ought to do easily. We'll consider that settled."

For the moment Mr. Direck couldn't think of any further excuse. But it was very clear in his mind that something must happen; he wished he knew of somebody who could send a recall telegram from London, to prevent him committing himself to the casual destinies of Mr. Britling's car again. And then another interest became uppermost in his mind.

"You'd hardly believe me," he said, "if I told you that that Miss Corner of yours has a quite extraordinary resemblance to a miniature I've got away there in America of a cousin of my maternal grandmother's. She seems a very pleasant young lady."

But Mr. Britling supplied no further information about Miss Corner.

"It must be very interesting," he said, "to come over here and pick up these American families of yours on the monuments and tombstones. You know, of course, that district south of Evesham where every other church monument bears the stars and stripes, the arms of departed Washingtons. I doubt though if you'll still find the name about there. Nor will you find many Hinkinsons in Market Saffron. But lots of this country here has five or six hundred-year-old families still flourishing. That's why Essex is so much more genuinely Old England than Surrey, say, or Kent. Round here you'll find Corners and Fairlies, and then you get Capels, and then away down towards

Dunmow and Braintree Maynards and Byngs. And there are oaks and hornbeams in the park about Claverings that have echoed to the howling of wolves and the clank of men in armour. All the old farms here are moated—because of the wolves. Claverings itself is Tudor, and rather fine too. And the cottages still wear thatch...."

He reflected. "Now if you went south of London instead of northward it's all different. You're in a different period, a different society. You're in London suburbs right down to the sea. You'll find no genuine estates left, not of our deep-rooted familiar sort. You'll find millionaires and that sort of people, sitting in the old places. Surrey is full of rich stockbrokers, company-promoters, bookies, judges, newspaper proprietors. Sort of people who fence the paths across their parks. They do something to the old places—I don't know what they do—but instantly the countryside becomes a villadom. And little sub-estates and red-brick villas and art cottages spring up. And a kind of new, hard neatness. And pneumatic tyre and automobile spirit advertisements, great glaring boards by the roadside. And all the poor people are inspected and rushed about until they forget who their grandfathers were. They become villa parasites and odd-job men, and grow basely rich and buy gramophones. This Essex and yonder Surrey are as different as Russia and Germany. But for one American who comes to look at Essex, twenty go to Godalming and Guildford and Dorking and Lewes and Canterbury. Those Surrey people are not properly English at all. They are strenuous. You have to get on or get out. They drill their gardeners, lecture very fast on agricultural efficiency, and have miniature rifle ranges in every village. It's a county of new notice-boards and barbed-wire fences; there's always a policeman round the corner. They dress for dinner. They dress for everything. If a man gets up in the night to look for a burglar he puts on the correct costume—or doesn't go. They've got a special scientific system for urging on their tramps. And they lock up their churches on a week-day. Half their soil is hard chalk or a rationalistic sand, only suitable for bunkers and villa foundations. And they play golf in a large, expensive, thorough way because it's the thing to do.... Now here in Essex we're as lax as the eighteenth century. We hunt in any old clothes. Our soil is a rich succulent clay; it becomes semi-fluid in winter—when we go about in waders shooting duck. All our fingerposts have been twisted round by facetious men years ago. And we pool our breeds of hens and pigs. Our roses and oaks are wonderful; that alone shows that this is the real England. If I wanted to play golf—which I don't, being a decent Essex man—I should have to motor ten miles into Hertfordshire. And for rheumatics and longevity Surrey can't touch us. I want you to be clear on these points, because they really will affect your impressions of this place.... This country is a part of the real England—England outside London and outside manufactures. It's one with

Wessex and Mercia or old Yorkshire—or for the matter of that with Meath or Lothian. And it's the essential England still...."

§ 11

It detracted a little from Mr. Direck's appreciation of this flow of information that it was taking them away from the rest of the company. He wanted to see more of his new-found cousin, and what the baby and the Bengali gentleman—whom manifestly one mustn't call "coloured"—and the large-nosed lady and all the other inexplicables would get up to. Instead of which Mr. Britling was leading him off alone with an air of showing him round the premises, and talking too rapidly and variously for a question to be got in edgeways, much less any broaching of the matter that Mr. Direck had come over to settle.

There was quite a lot of rose garden, it made the air delicious, and it was full of great tumbling bushes of roses and of neglected standards, and it had a long pergola of creepers and trailers and a great arbour, and underneath over the beds everywhere, contrary to all the rules, the blossom of a multitude of pansies and stock and little trailing plants swarmed and crowded and scrimmaged and drilled and fought great massed attacks. And then Mr. Britling talked their way round a red-walled vegetable garden with an abundance of fruit trees, and through a door into a terraced square that had once been a farmyard, outside the converted barn. The barn doors had been replaced by a door-pierced window of glass, and in the middle of the square space a deep tank had been made, full of rainwater, in which Mr. Britling remarked casually that "everybody" bathed when the weather was hot. Thyme and rosemary and suchlike sweet-scented things grew on the terrace about the tank, and ten trimmed little trees of *Arbor vitae* stood sentinel. Mr. Direck was tantalisingly aware that beyond some lilac bushes were his new-found cousin and the kindred young woman in blue playing tennis with the Indian and another young man, while whenever it was necessary the large-nosed lady crossed the stage and brooded soothingly over the perambulator. And Mr. Britling, choosing a seat from which Mr. Direck just couldn't look comfortably through the green branches at the flying glimpses of pink and blue and white and brown, continued to talk about England and America in relation to each other and everything else under the sun.

Presently through a distant gate the two small boys were momentarily visible wheeling small but serviceable bicycles, followed after a little interval by the German tutor.

Then an enormous grey cat came slowly across the garden court, and sat down to listen respectfully to Mr. Britling. The afternoon sky was an intense blue, with little puff-balls of cloud lined out across it.

Occasionally, from chance remarks of Mr. Britling's, Mr. Direck was led to infer that his first impressions as an American visitor were being related to his host, but as a matter of fact he was permitted to relate nothing; Mr. Britling did all the talking. He sat beside his guest and spirted and played ideas and reflections like a happy fountain in the sunshine.

Mr. Direck sat comfortably, and smoked with quiet appreciation the one after-lunch cigar he allowed himself. At any rate, if he himself felt rather word-bound, the fountain was nimble and entertaining. He listened in a general sort of way to the talk, it was quite impossible to follow it thoughtfully throughout all its chinks and turnings, while his eyes wandered about the garden and went ever and again to the flitting tennis-players beyond the green. It was all very gay and comfortable and complete; it was various and delightful without being in the least *opulent*; that was one of the little secrets America had to learn. It didn't look as though it had been made or bought or cost anything, it looked as though it had happened rather luckily....

Mr. Britling's talk became like a wide stream flowing through Mr. Direck's mind, bearing along momentary impressions and observations, drifting memories of all the crowded English sights and sounds of the last five days, filmy imaginations about ancestral names and pretty cousins, scraps of those prepared conversational openings on Mr. Britling's standing in America, the explanation about the lecture club, the still incompletely forgotten purport of the Robinson anecdote....

"Nobody planned the British estate system, nobody planned the British aristocratic system, nobody planned the confounded constitution, it came about, it was like layer after layer wrapping round an agate, but you see it came about so happily in a way, it so suited the climate and the temperament of our people and our island, it was on the whole so cosy, that our people settled down into it, you can't help settling down into it, they had already settled down by the days of Queen Anne, and Heaven knows if we shall ever really get away again. We're like that little shell the *Lingula*, that is found in the oldest rocks and lives to-day: it fitted its easy conditions, and it has never modified since. Why should it? It excretes all its disturbing forces. Our younger sons go away and found colonial empires. Our surplus cottage children emigrate to Australia and Canada or migrate into the towns. It doesn't alter *this*...."

§ 12

Mr. Direck's eye had come to rest upon the barn, and its expression changed slowly from lazy appreciation to a brightening intelligence. Suddenly he resolved to say something. He resolved to say it so firmly that he determined to say it even if Mr. Britling went on talking all the time.

"I suppose, Mr. Britling," he said, "this barn here dates from the days of Queen Anne."

"The walls of the yard here are probably earlier: probably monastic. That grey patch in the corner, for example. The barn itself is Georgian."

"And here it is still. And this farmyard, here it is still."

Mr. Britling was for flying off again, but Mr. Direck would not listen; he held on like a man who keeps his grip on a lasso.

"There's one thing I would like to remark about your barn, Mr. Britling, and I might, while I am at it, say the same thing about your farmyard."

Mr. Britling was held. "What's that?" he asked.

"Well," said Mr. Direck, "the point that strikes me most about all this is that that barn isn't a barn any longer, and that this farmyard isn't a farmyard. There isn't any wheat or chaff or anything of that sort in the barn, and there never will be again: there's just a pianola and a dancing floor, and if a cow came into this farmyard everybody in the place would be shooing it out again. They'd regard it as a most unnatural object."

He had a pleasant sense of talking at last. He kept right on. He was moved to a sweeping generalisation.

"You were so good as to ask me, Mr. Britling, a little while ago, what my first impression of England was. Well, Mr. Britling, my first impression of England that seems to me to matter in the least is this: that it looks and feels more like the traditional Old England than any one could possibly have believed, and that in reality it is less like the traditional Old England than any one would ever possibly have imagined."

He was carried on even further. He made a tremendous literary epigram. "I thought," he said, "when I looked out of the train this morning that I had come to the England of Washington Irving. I find it is not even the England of Mrs. Humphry Ward."

CHAPTER THE SECOND

MR. BRITLING CONTINUES HIS EXPOSITION

§ 1

Mr. Direck found little reason to revise his dictum in the subsequent experiences of the afternoon. Indeed the afternoon and the next day were steadily consistent in confirming what a very good dictum it had been. The scenery was the traditional scenery of England, and all the people seemed quicker, more irresponsible, more chaotic, than any one could have anticipated, and entirely inexplicable by any recognised code of English relationships....

"You think that John Bull is dead and a strange generation is wearing his clothes," said Mr. Britling. "I think you'll find very soon it's the old John Bull. Perhaps not Mrs. Humphry Ward's John Bull, or Mrs. Henry Wood's John Bull but true essentially to Shakespeare, Fielding, Dickens, Meredith...."

"I suppose," he added, "there are changes. There's a new generation grown up...."

He looked at his barn and the swimming pool. "It's a good point of yours about the barn," he said. "What you say reminds me of that very jolly thing of Kipling's about the old mill-wheel that began by grinding corn and ended by driving dynamos....

"Only I admit that barn doesn't exactly drive a dynamo....

"To be frank, it's just a pleasure barn....

"The country can afford it...."

§ 2

He left it at that for the time, but throughout the afternoon Mr. Direck had the gratification of seeing his thought floating round and round in the back-waters of Mr. Britling's mental current. If it didn't itself get into the stream again its reflection at any rate appeared and reappeared. He was taken about with great assiduity throughout the afternoon, and he got no more than occasional glimpses of the rest of the Dower House circle until six o'clock in the evening.

Meanwhile the fountains of Mr. Britling's active and encyclopædic mind played steadily.

He was inordinately proud of England, and he abused her incessantly. He wanted to state England to Mr. Direck as the amiable summation of a grotesque assembly of faults. That was the view into which the comforts and prosperities of his middle age had brought him from a radicalism that had in its earlier stages been angry and bitter. And for Mr. Britling England was "here." Essex was the county he knew. He took Mr. Direck out from his walled garden by a little door into a trim paddock with two white goals. "We play hockey here on Sundays," he said in a way that gave Mr. Direck no hint of the practically compulsory participation of every visitor to Matching's Easy in this violent and dangerous exercise, and thence they passed by a rich deep lane and into a high road that ran along the edge of the deer park of Claverings. "We will call in on Claverings later," said Mr. Britling. "Lady Homartyn has some people there for the week-end, and you ought to see the sort of thing it is and the sort of people they are. She wanted us to lunch there to-morrow, but I didn't accept that because of our afternoon hockey."

Mr. Direck received this reason uncritically.

The village reminded Mr. Direck of Abbey's pictures. There was an inn with a sign standing out in the road, a painted sign of the Clavering Arms; it had a water trough (such as Mr. Weller senior ducked the dissenter in) and a green painted table outside its inviting door. There were also a general shop and a number of very pleasant cottages, each marked with the Mainstay crest. All this was grouped about a green with real geese drilling thereon. Mr. Britling conducted his visitor (through a lych gate) into the church-yard, and there they found mossy, tumble-down tombstones, one with a skull and cross-bones upon it, that went back to the later seventeenth century. In the aisle of the church were three huge hatchments, and there was a side chapel devoted to the Mainstay family and the Barons Homartyn, with a series of monuments that began with painted Tudor effigies and came down to a vast stained glass window of the vilest commercial Victorian. There were also mediæval brasses of parish priests, and a marble crusader and his lady of some extinguished family which had ruled Matching's Easy before the Mainstays came. And as the two gentlemen emerged from the church they ran against the perfect vicar, Mr. Dimple, ample and genial, with an embracing laugh and an enveloping voice. "Come to see the old country," he said to Mr. Direck. "So Good of you Americans to do that! So Good of you...."

There was some amiable sparring between the worthy man and Mr. Britling about bringing Mr. Direck to church on Sunday morning. "He's terribly Lax," said Mr. Dimple

to Mr. Direck, smiling radiantly. "Terribly Lax. But then nowadays Everybody *is* so Lax. And he's very Good to my Coal Club; I don't know what we should do without him. So I just admonish him. And if he doesn't go to church, well, anyhow he doesn't go anywhere else. He may be a poor churchman, but anyhow he's not a dissenter...."

"In England, you see," Mr. Britling remarked, after they had parted from the reverend gentleman, "we have domesticated everything. We have even domesticated God."

For awhile Mr. Britling showed Mr. Direck English lanes, and then came back along narrow white paths across small fields of rising wheat, to the village and a little gate that led into the park.

"Well," said Mr. Direck, "what you say about domestication does seem to me to be very true indeed. Why! even those clouds up there look as though they had a shepherd and were grazing."

"Ready for shearing almost," said Mr. Britling.

"Indeed," said Mr. Direck, raising his voice a little, "I've seen scarcely anything in England that wasn't domesticated, unless it was some of your back streets in London."

Mr. Britling seemed to reflect for a moment. "They're an excrescence," he said....

§ 3

The park had a trim wildness like nature in an old Italian picture; dappled fallow deer grouped close at hand and looked at the two men fearlessly; the path dropped through oak trees and some stunted bracken to a little loitering stream, that paused ever and again to play at ponds and waterfalls and bear a fleet of water-lily leaves; and then their way curved round in an indolent sweep towards the cedars and shrubberies of the great house. The house looked low and extensive to an American eye, and its red-brick chimneys rose like infantry in open order along its extended line. There was a glimpse of flower-bright garden and terraces to the right as they came round the corner to the front of the house through a path cut in the laurel bushes.

Mr. Britling had a moment of exposition as they approached the entrance.

"I expect we shall find Philbert from the Home Office—or is it the Local Government Board?—and Sir Thomas Loot, the Treasury man. There may be some other people of

that sort, the people we call the Governing Class. Wives also. And I rather fancy the Countess of Frensham is coming, she's strong on the Irish Question, and Lady Venetia Trumpington, who they say is a beauty—I've never seen her. It's Lady Homartyn's way to expect me to come in—not that I'm an important item at these week-end social feasts—but she likes to see me on the table—to be nibbled at if any one wants to do so—like the olives and the salted almonds. And she always asks me to lunch on Sunday and I always refuse—because of the hockey. So you see I put in an appearance on the Saturday afternoon...."

They had reached the big doorway.

It opened into a large cool hall adorned with the heads of hippopotami and rhinoceroses and a stuffed lion, and furnished chiefly with a vast table on which hats and sticks and newspapers were littered. A manservant with a subdued, semi-confidential manner, conveyed to Mr. Britling that her ladyship was on the terrace, and took the hats and sticks that were handed to him and led the way through the house. They emerged upon a broad terrace looking out under great cedar trees upon flower beds and stone urns and tennis lawns and yew hedges that dipped to give a view of distant hills. On the terrace were grouped perhaps a dozen people for the most part holding teacups, they sat in deck chairs and folding seats about a little table that bore the tea-things. Lady Homartyn came forward to welcome the newcomers.

Mr. Direck was introduced as a travelling American gratified to see a typical English country house, and Lady Homartyn in an habituated way ran over the points of her Tudor specimen. Mr. Direck was not accustomed to titled people, and was suddenly in doubt whether you called a baroness "My Lady" or "Your Ladyship," so he wisely avoided any form of address until he had a lead from Mr. Britling. Mr. Britling presently called her "Lady Homartyn." She took Mr. Direck and sat him down beside a lady whose name he didn't catch, but who had had a lot to do with the British Embassy at Washington, and then she handed Mr. Britling over to the Rt. Honble. George Philbert, who was anxious to discuss certain points in the latest book of essays. The conversation of the lady from Washington was intelligent but not exacting, and Mr. Direck was able to give a certain amount of attention to the general effect of the scene.

He was a little disappointed to find that the servants didn't wear livery. In American magazine pictures and in American cinematograph films of English stories and in the houses of very rich Americans living in England, they do so. And the Mansion House is misleading; he had met a compatriot who had recently dined at the Mansion House, and who had described "flunkeys" in hair-powder and cloth of gold—like Thackeray's

Jeames Yellowplush. But here the only servants were two slim, discreet and attentive young gentlemen in black coats with a gentle piety in their manner instead of pride. And he was a little disappointed too by a certain lack of splendour in the company. The ladies affected him as being ill-dressed; there was none of the hard snap, the "*There!* and what do you say to it?" about them of the well-dressed American woman, and the men too were not so much tailored as unobtrusively and yet grammatically clothed.

§ 4

He was still only in the fragmentary stage of conversation when everything was thrown into commotion by the important arrival of Lady Frensham, and there was a general reshuffling of places. Lady Frensham had arrived from London by automobile; she appeared in veils and swathings and a tremendous dust cloak, with a sort of nephew in her train who had driven the car. She was manifestly a constitutionally triumphant woman. A certain afternoon lassitude vanished in the swirl of her arrival. Mr. Philbert removed wrappings and handed them to the manservant.

"I lunched with Sir Edward Carson to-day, my dear," she told Lady Homartyn, and rolled a belligerent eye at Philbert.

"And is he as obdurate as ever?" asked Sir Thomas.

"Obdurate! It's Redmond who's obdurate," cried Lady Frensham. "What do you say, Mr. Britling?"

"A plague on both your parties," said Mr. Britling.

"You can't keep out of things like that," said Lady Frensham with the utmost gusto, "when the country's on the very verge of civil war.... You people who try to pretend there isn't a grave crisis when there is one, will be more accountable than any one—when the civil war does come. It won't spare you. Mark my words!"

The party became a circle.

Mr. Direck found himself the interested auditor of a real English country-house week-end political conversation. This at any rate was like the England of which Mrs. Humphry Ward's novels had informed him, but yet not exactly like it. Perhaps that was due to the fact that for the most part these novels dealt with the England of the

'nineties, and things had lost a little in dignity since those days. But at any rate here were political figures and titled people, and they were talking about the "country."...

Was it possible that people of this sort did "run" the country, after all?... When he had read Mrs. Humphry Ward in America he had always accepted this theory of the story quite easily, but now that he saw and heard them—!

But all governments and rulers and ruling classes when you look at them closely are incredible....

"I don't believe the country is on the verge of civil war," said Mr. Britling.

"Facts!" cried Lady Frensham, and seemed to wipe away delusions with a rapid gesture of her hands.

"You're interested in Ireland, Mr. Dirks?" asked Lady Homartyn.

"We see it first when we come over," said Mr. Direck rather neatly, and after that he was free to attend to the general discussion.

Lady Frensham, it was manifest, was one of that energetic body of aristocratic ladies who were taking up an irreconcilable attitude against Home Rule "in any shape or form" at that time. They were rapidly turning British politics into a system of bitter personal feuds in which all sense of imperial welfare was lost. A wild ambition to emulate the extremest suffragettes seems to have seized upon them. They insulted, they denounced, they refused every invitation lest they should meet that "traitor" the Prime Minister, they imitated the party hatreds of a fiercer age, and even now the moderate and politic Philbert found himself treated as an invisible object. They were supported by the extremer section of the Tory press, and the most extraordinary writers were set up to froth like lunatics against the government as "traitors," as men who "insulted the King"; the *Morning Post* and the lighter-witted side of the Unionist press generally poured out a torrent of partisan nonsense it is now almost incredible to recall. Lady Frensham, bridling over Lady Homartyn's party, and for a time leaving Mr. Britling, hurried on to tell of the newest developments of the great feud. She had a wonderful description of Lady Londonderry sitting opposite "that old rascal, the Prime Minister," at a performance of Mozart's *Zauberflöte*.

"If looks could kill!" cried Lady Frensham with tremendous gusto.

"Sir Edward is quite firm that Ulster means to fight. They have machine-guns—ammunition. And I am sure the army is with us...."

"Where did they get those machine-guns and ammunition?" asked Mr. Britling suddenly.

"Ah! that's a secret," cried Lady Frensham.

"Um," said Mr. Britling.

"You see," said Lady Frensham; "it *will* be civil war! And yet you writing people who have influence do nothing to prevent it!"

"What are we to do, Lady Frensham?"

"Tell people how serious it is."

"You mean, tell the Irish Nationalists to lie down and be walked over. They won't be...."

"We'll see about that," cried Lady Frensham, "we'll see about that!"

She was a large and dignified person with a kind of figure-head nobility of carriage, but Mr. Direck was suddenly reminded of a girl cousin of his who had been expelled from college for some particularly elaborate and aimless rioting....

"May I say something to you, Lady Frensham," said Mr. Britling, "that you have just said to me? Do you realise that this Carsonite campaign is dragging these islands within a measurable distance of civil war?"

"It's the fault of your Lloyd George and his government. It's the fault of your Socialists and sentimentalists. You've made the mischief and you have to deal with it."

"Yes. But do you really figure to yourself what a civil war may mean for the empire? Surely there are other things in the world besides this quarrel between the 'loyalists' of Ulster and the Liberal government; there are other interests in this big empire than party advantages? Yon think you are going to frighten this Home Rule government into some ridiculous sort of collapse that will bring in the Tories at the next election. Well, suppose you don't manage that. Suppose instead that you really do contrive to bring about a civil war. Very few people here or in Ireland want it—I was over there not a month ago—but when men have loaded guns in their hands they sometimes go off. And then people see red. Few people realise what an incurable sore opens when fighting begins. Suppose part of the army revolts and we get some extraordinary and demoralising fighting over there. India watches these things. Bengal may imitate Ireland. At that distance rebellion and treason are rebellion and treason whether they are coloured orange or green. And then suppose the Germans see fit to attack us!"

Lady Frensham had a woman's elusiveness. "Your Redmondites would welcome them with open arms."

"It isn't the Redmondites who invite them now, anyhow," said Mr. Britling, springing his mine. "The other day one of your 'loyalists,' Andrews, was talking in the *Morning Post* of preferring conquest by Germany to Home Rule; Craig has been at the same game; Major Crawford, the man who ran the German Mausers last April, boasted that he would transfer his allegiance to the German Emperor rather than see Redmond in power."

"Rhetoric!" said Lady Frensham. "Rhetoric!"

"But one of your Ulster papers has openly boasted that arrangements have been made for a 'powerful Continental monarch' to help an Ulster rebellion."

"Which paper?" snatched Lady Frensham.

Mr. Britling hesitated.

Mr. Philbert supplied the name. "I saw it. It was the *Irish Churchman*."

"You two have got your case up very well," said Lady Frensham. "I didn't know Mr. Britling was a party man."

"The Nationalists have been circulating copies," said Philbert. "Naturally."

"They make it look worse than mere newspaper talk and speeches," Mr. Britling pressed. "Carson, it seems, was lunching with the German Emperor last autumn. A fine fuss you'd make if Redmond did that. All this gun-running, too, is German gun-running."

"What does it matter if it is?" said Lady Frensham, allowing a belligerent eye to rest for the first time on Philbert. "You drove us to it. One thing we are resolved upon at any cost. Johnny Redmond may rule England if he likes; he shan't rule Ireland...."

Mr. Britling shrugged his shoulders, and his face betrayed despair.

"My one consolation," he said, "in this storm is a talk I had last month with a young Irishwoman in Meath. She was a young person of twelve, and she took a fancy to me—I think because I went with her in an alleged dangerous canoe she was forbidden to navigate alone. All day the eternal Irish Question had banged about over her observant head. When we were out on the water she suddenly decided to set me right upon a disregarded essential. 'You English,' she said, 'are just a bit disposed to take all this

trouble seriously. Don't you fret yourself about it... Half the time we're just laffing at you. You'd best leave us all alone....'"

And then he went off at a tangent from his own anecdote.

"But look at this miserable spectacle!" he cried. "Here is a chance of getting something like a reconciliation of the old feud of English and Irish, and something like a settlement of these ancient distresses, and there seems no power, no conscience, no sanity in any of us, sufficient to save it from this cantankerous bitterness, this sheer wicked mischief of mutual exasperation.... Just when Ireland is getting a gleam of prosperity.... A murrain on both your parties!"

"I see, Mr. Britling, you'd hand us all over to Jim Larkin!"

"I'd hand you all over to Sir Horace Plunkett—"

"That doctrinaire dairyman!" cried Lady Frensham, with an air of quite conclusive repartee. "You're hopeless, Mr. Britling. You're hopeless."

And Lady Homartyn, seeing that the phase of mere personal verdicts drew near, created a diversion by giving Lady Frensham a second cup of tea, and fluttering like a cooling fan about the heated brows of the disputants. She suggested tennis....

§ 5

Mr. Britling was still flushed and ruffled as he and his guest returned towards the Dower House. He criticised England himself unmercifully, but he hated to think that in any respect she fell short of perfection; even her defects he liked to imagine were just a subtler kind of power and wisdom. And Lady Frensham had stuck her voice and her gestures through all these amiable illusions. He was like a lover who calls his lady a foolish rogue, and is startled to find that facts and strangers do literally agree with him.

But it was so difficult to resolve Lady Frensham and the Irish squabble generally into anything better than idiotic mischief, that for a time he was unusually silent—wrestling with the problem, and Mr. Direck got the conversational initiative.

"To an American mind it's a little—startling," said Mr. Direck, "to hear ladies expressing such vigorous political opinions."

"I don't mind that," said Mr. Britling. "Women over here go into politics and into public-houses—I don't see why they shouldn't. If such things are good enough for men they

are good enough for women; we haven't your sort of chivalry. But it's the peculiar malignant silliness of this sort of Toryism that's so discreditable. It's discreditable. There's no good in denying it. Those people you have heard and seen are a not unfair sample of our governing class—of a certain section of our governing class—as it is to-day. Not at all unfair. And you see how amazingly they haven't got hold of anything. There was a time when they could be politic.... Hidden away they have politic instincts even now.... But it makes me sick to think of this Irish business. Because, you know, it's true—we *are* drifting towards civil war there."

"You are of that opinion?" said Mr. Direck.

"Well, isn't it so? Here's all this Ulster gun-running—you heard how she talked of it? Isn't it enough to drive the south into open revolt?..."

"Is there very much, do you think, in the suggestion that some of this Ulster trouble is a German intrigue? You and Mr. Philbert were saying things—"

"I don't know," said Mr. Britling shortly.

"I don't know," he repeated. "But it isn't because I don't think our Unionists and their opponents aren't foolish enough for anything of the sort. It's only because I don't believe that the Germans are so stupid as to do such things.... Why should they?...

"It makes me—expressionless with anger," said Mr. Britling after a pause, reverting to his main annoyance. "They won't consider any compromise. It's sheer love of quarrelling.... Those people there think that nothing can possibly happen. They are like children in a nursery playing at rebellion. Unscathed and heedless. Until there is death at their feet they will never realise they are playing with loaded guns...."

For a time he said no more; and listened perfunctorily while Mr. Direck tried to indicate the feeling in New England towards the Irish Question and the many difficult propositions an American politician has to face in that respect. And when Mr. Britling took up the thread of speech again it had little or no relation to Mr. Direck's observations.

"The psychology of all this recent insubordination and violence is—curious. Exasperating too.... I don't quite grasp it.... It's the same thing whether you look at the suffrage business or the labour people or at this Irish muddle. People may be too safe. You see we live at the end of a series of secure generations in which none of the great things of life have changed materially. We've grown up with no sense of danger—that is to say, with no sense of responsibility. None of us, none of us—for though I talk my actions belie me—really believe that life can change very fundamentally any more

forever. All this",—Mr. Britling waved his arm comprehensively—"looks as though it was bound to go on steadily forever. It seems incredible that the system could be smashed. It seems incredible that anything we can do will ever smash the system. Lady Homartyn, for example, is incapable of believing that she won't always be able to have week-end parties at Claverings, and that the letters and the tea won't come to her bedside in the morning. Or if her imagination goes to the point of supposing that some day *she* won't be there to receive the tea, it means merely that she supposes somebody else will be. Her pleasant butler may fear to lose his 'situation,' but nothing on earth could make him imagine a time when there will not be a 'situation' for him to lose. Old Asquith thinks that we always have got along, and that we always shall get along by being quietly artful and saying, 'Wait and see.' And it's just because we are all convinced that we are so safe against a general breakdown that we are able to be so recklessly violent in our special cases. Why shouldn't women have the vote? they argue. What does it matter? And bang goes a bomb in Westminster Abbey. Why shouldn't Ulster create an impossible position? And off trots some demented Carsonite to Germany to play at treason on some half word of the German Emperor's and buy half a million rifles....

"Exactly like children being very, very naughty....

"And," said Mr. Britling with a gesture to round off his discourse, "we do go on. We shall go on—until there is a spark right into the magazine. We have lost any belief we ever had that fundamental things happen. We are everlasting children in an everlasting nursery...."

And immediately he broke out again.

"The truth of the matter is that hardly any one has ever yet mastered the fact that the world is round. The world is round—like an orange. The thing is told us—like any old scandal—at school. For all practical purposes we forget it. Practically we all live in a world as flat as a pancake. Where time never ends and nothing changes. Who really believes in any world outside the circle of the horizon? Here we are and visibly nothing is changing. And so we go on to—nothing will ever change. It just goes on—in space, in time. If we could realise that round world beyond, then indeed we should go circumspectly.... If the world were like a whispering gallery, what whispers might we not hear now—from India, from Africa, from Germany, warnings from the past, intimations of the future....

"We shouldn't heed them...."

§ 6

And indeed at the very moment when Mr. Britling was saying these words, in Sarajevo in Bosnia, where the hour was somewhat later, men whispered together, and one held nervously to a black parcel that had been given him and nodded as they repeated his instructions, a black parcel with certain unstable chemicals and a curious arrangement of detonators therein, a black parcel destined ultimately to shatter nearly every landmark of Mr. Britling's and Lady Frensham's cosmogony....

§ 7

When Mr. Direck and Mr. Britling returned to the Dower House the guest was handed over to Mrs. Britling and Mr. Britling vanished, to reappear at supper time, for the Britlings had a supper in the evening instead of dinner. When Mr. Britling did reappear every trace of his vexation with the levities of British politics and the British ruling class had vanished altogether, and he was no longer thinking of all that might be happening in Germany or India....

While he was out of the way Mr. Direck extended his acquaintance with the Britling household. He was taken round the garden and shown the roses by Mrs. Britling, and beyond the rose garden in a little arbour they came upon Miss Corner reading a book. She looked very grave and pretty reading a book. Mr. Direck came to a pause in front of her, and Mrs. Britling stopped beside him. The young lady looked up and smiled.

"The last new novel?" asked Mr. Direck pleasantly.

"Campanella's 'City of the Sun.'"

"My word! but isn't that stiff reading?"

"You haven't read it," said Miss Corner.

"It's a dry old book anyhow."

"It's no good pretending you have," she said, and there Mr. Direck felt the conversation had to end.

"That's a very pleasant young lady to have about," he said to Mrs. Britling as they went on towards the barn court.

"She's all at loose ends," said Mrs. Britling. "And she reads like a—Whatever does read? One drinks like a fish. One eats like a wolf."

They found the German tutor in a little court playing Badminton with the two younger boys. He was a plump young man with glasses and compact gestures; the game progressed chiefly by misses and the score was counted in German. He won thoughtfully and chiefly through the ardour of the younger brother, whose enthusiastic returns invariably went out. Instantly the boys attacked Mrs. Britling with a concerted enthusiasm. "Mummy! Is it to be dressing-up supper?"

Mrs. Britling considered, and it was manifest that Mr. Direck was material to her answer.

"We wrap ourselves up in curtains and bright things instead of dressing," she explained. "We have a sort of wardrobe of fancy dresses. Do you mind?"

Mr. Direck was delighted.

And this being settled, the two small boys went off with their mother upon some special decorative project they had conceived and Mr. Direck was left for a time to Herr Heinrich.

Herr Heinrich suggested a stroll in the rose garden, and as Mr. Direck had not hitherto been shown the rose garden by Herr Heinrich, he agreed. Sooner or later everybody, it was evident, had got to show him that rose garden.

"And how do you like living in an English household?" said Mr. Direck, getting to business at once. "It's interesting to an American to see this English establishment, and it must be still more interesting to a German."

"I find it very different from Pomerania," said Herr Heinrich. "In some respects it is more agreeable, in others less so. It is a pleasant life but it is not a serious life.

"At any time," continued Herr Heinrich, "some one may say, 'Let us do this thing,' or 'Let us do that thing,' and then everything is disarranged.

"People walk into the house without ceremony. There is much kindness but no politeness. Mr. Britling will go away for three or four days, and when he returns and I come forward to greet him and bow, he will walk right past me, or he will say just like this, 'How do, Heinrich?'"

"Are you interested in Mr. Britling's writings?" Mr. Direck asked.

"There again I am puzzled. His work is known even in Germany. His articles are reprinted in German and Austrian reviews. You would expect him to have a certain authority of manner. You would expect there to be discussion at the table upon questions of philosophy and aesthetics.... It is not so. When I ask him questions it is often that they are not seriously answered. Sometimes it is as if he did not like the questions I askt of him. Yesterday I askt of him did he agree or did he not agree with Mr. Bernard Shaw. He just said—I wrote it down in my memoranda—he said: 'Oh! Mixt Pickles.' What can one understand of that?—Mixt Pickles!"...

The young man's sedulous blue eyes looked out of his pink face through his glasses at Mr. Direck, anxious for any light he could offer upon the atmospheric vagueness of this England.

He was, he explained, a student of philology preparing for his doctorate. He had not yet done his year of military service. He was studying the dialects of East Anglia—

"You go about among the people?" Mr. Direck inquired.

"No, I do not do that. But I ask Mr. Carmine and Mrs. Britling and the boys many questions. And sometimes I talk to the gardener."

He explained how he would prepare his thesis and how it would be accepted, and the nature of his army service and the various stages by which he would subsequently ascend in the orderly professorial life to which he was destined. He confessed a certain lack of interest in philology, but, he said, "it is what I have to do." And so he was going to do it all his life through. For his own part he was interested in ideas of universal citizenship, in Esperanto and Ido and universal languages and such-like attacks upon the barriers between man and man. But the authorities at home did not favour cosmopolitan ideas, and so he was relinquishing them. "Here, it is as if there were no authorities," he said with a touch of envy.

Mr. Direck induced him to expand that idea.

Herr Heinrich made Mr. Britling his instance. If Mr. Britling were a German he would certainly have some sort of title, a definite position, responsibility. Here he was not even called Herr Doktor. He said what he liked. Nobody rewarded him; nobody reprimanded him. When Herr Heinrich asked him of his position, whether he was above or below Mr. Bernard Shaw or Mr. Arnold White or Mr. Garvin or any other publicist, he made jokes. Nobody here seemed to have a title and nobody seemed to have a definite place. There was Mr. Lawrence Carmine; he was a student of Oriental questions; he had to do with some public institution in London that welcomed Indian students; he was a Geheimrath—

"Eh?" said Mr. Direck.

"It is—what do they call it? the Essex County Council." But nobody took any notice of that. And when Mr. Philbert, who was a minister in the government, came to lunch he was just like any one else. It was only after he had gone that Herr Heinrich had learnt by chance that he was a minister and "Right Honourable...."

"In Germany everything is definite. Every man knows his place, has his papers, is instructed what to do...."

"Yet," said Mr. Direck, with his eyes on the glowing roses, the neat arbour, the long line of the red wall of the vegetable garden and a distant gleam of cornfield, "it all looks orderly enough."

"It is as if it had been put in order ages ago," said Herr Heinrich.

"And was just going on by habit," said Mr. Direck, taking up the idea.

Their comparisons were interrupted by the appearance of "Teddy," the secretary, and the Indian young gentleman, damp and genial, as they explained, "from the boats." It seemed that "down below" somewhere was a pond with a punt and an island and a toy dinghy. And while they discussed swimming and boating, Mr. Carmine appeared from the direction of the park conversing gravely with the elder son. They had been for a walk and a talk together. There were proposals for a Badminton foursome. Mr. Direck emerged from the general interchange with Mr. Lawrence Carmine, and then strolled through the rose garden to see the sunset from the end. Mr. Direck took the opportunity to verify his impression that the elder son was the present Mrs. Britling's stepson, and he also contrived by a sudden admiration for a distant row of evening primroses to deflect their path past the arbour in which the evening light must now be getting a little too soft for Miss Corner's book.

Miss Corner was drawn into the sunset party. She talked to Mr. Carmine and displayed, Mr. Direck thought, great originality of mind. She said "The City of the Sun" was like the cities the boys sometimes made on the playroom floor. She said it was the dearest little city, and gave some amusing particulars. She described the painted walls that made the tour of the Civitas Solis a liberal education. She asked Mr. Carmine, who was an authority on Oriental literature, why there were no Indian nor Chinese Utopias.

Now it had never occurred to Mr. Direck to ask why there were no Indian nor Chinese Utopias, and even Mr. Carmine seemed surprised to discover this deficiency.

"The primitive patriarchal village *is* Utopia to India and China," said Mr. Carmine, when they had a little digested the inquiry. "Or at any rate it is their social ideal. They want no Utopias."

"Utopias came with cities," he said, considering the question. "And the first cities, as distinguished from courts and autocratic capitals, came with ships. India and China belong to an earlier age. Ships, trade, disorder, strange relationships, unofficial literature, criticism—and then this idea of some novel remaking of society...."

§ 8

Then Mr. Direck fell into the hands of Hugh, the eldest son, and anticipating the inevitable, said that he liked to walk in the rose garden. So they walked in the rose garden.

"Do you read Utopias?" said Mr. Direck, cutting any preface, in the English manner.

"Oh, *rather*!" said Hugh, and became at once friendly and confidential.

"We all do," he explained. "In England everybody talks of change and nothing ever changes."

"I found Miss Corner reading—what was it? the Sun People?—some old classical Italian work."

"Campanella," said Hugh, without betraying the slightest interest in Miss Corner. "Nothing changes in England, because the people who want to change things change their minds before they change anything else. I've been in London talking for the last half-year. Studying art they call it. Before that I was a science student, and I want to be one again. Don't you think, Sir, there's something about science—it's steadier than anything else in the world?"

Mr. Direck thought that the moral truths of human nature were steadier than science, and they had one of those little discussions of real life that begin about a difference inadequately apprehended, and do not so much end as are abandoned. Hugh struck him as being more speculative and detached than any American college youth of his age that he knew—but that might not be a national difference but only the Britling strain. He seemed to have read more and more independently, and to be doing less. And he was rather more restrained and self-possessed.

Before Mr. Direck could begin a proper inquiry into the young man's work and outlook, he had got the conversation upon America. He wanted tremendously to see America. "The dad says in one of his books that over here we are being and that over there you are beginning. It must be tremendously stimulating to think that your country is still being made...."

Mr. Direck thought that an interesting point of view. "Unless something tumbles down here, we never think of altering it," the young man remarked. "And even then we just shore it up."

His remarks had the effect of floating off from some busy mill of thought within him. Hitherto Mr. Direck had been inclined to think this silent observant youth, with his hands in his pockets and his shoulders a little humped, as probably shy and adolescently ineffective. But the head was manifestly quite busy....

"Miss Corner," he began, taking the first thing that came into his head, and then he remembered that he had already made the remark he was going to make not five minutes ago.

"What form of art," he asked, "are you contemplating in your studies at the present time in London?"....

Before this question could be dealt with at all adequately, the two small boys became active in the garden beating in everybody to "dress-up" before supper. The secretary, Teddy, came in a fatherly way to look after Mr. Direck and see to his draperies.

§ 9

Mr. Direck gave his very best attention to this business of draping himself, for he had not the slightest intention of appearing ridiculous in the eyes of Miss Corner. Teddy came with an armful of stuff that he thought "might do."

"What'll I come as?" asked Mr. Direck.

"We don't wear costumes," said Teddy. "We just put on all the brightest things we fancy. If it's any costume at all, it's Futurist."

"And surely why shouldn't one?" asked Mr. Direck, greatly struck by this idea. "Why should we always be tied by the fashions and periods of the past?"

He rejected a rather Mephistopheles-like costume of crimson and a scheme for a brigand-like ensemble based upon what was evidently an old bolero of Mrs. Britling's, and after some reflection he accepted some black silk tights. His legs were not legs to be ashamed of. Over this he tried various brilliant wrappings from the Dower House *armoire*, and chose at last, after some hesitation in the direction of a piece of gold and purple brocade, a big square of green silk curtain stuff adorned with golden pheasants and other large and dignified ornaments; this he wore toga fashion over his light silken under-vest—Teddy had insisted on the abandonment of his shirt "if you want to dance at all"—and fastened with a large green glass-jewelled brooch. From this his head and neck projected, he felt, with a tolerable dignity. Teddy suggested a fillet of green ribbon, and this Mr. Direck tried, but after prolonged reflection before the glass rejected. He was still weighing the effect of this fillet upon the mind of Miss Corner when Teddy left him to make his own modest preparations. Teddy's departure gave him a chance for profile studies by means of an arrangement of the long mirror and the table looking-glass that he had been too shy to attempt in the presence of the secretary. The general effect was quite satisfactory.

"Wa-a-a-l," he said with a quaver of laughter, "now who'd have thought it?" and smiled a consciously American smile at himself before going down.

The company was assembling in the panelled hall, and made a brilliant show in the light of the acetylene candles against the dark background. Mr. Britling in a black velvet cloak and black silk tights was a deeper shade among the shadows; the high lights were Miss Corner and her sister, in glittering garments of peacock green and silver that gave a snake-like quality to their lithe bodies. They were talking to the German tutor, who had become a sort of cotton Cossack, a spectacled Cossack in buff and bright green. Mrs. Britling was dignified and beautiful in a purple djibbah, and her stepson had become a handsome still figure of black and crimson. Teddy had contrived something elaborate and effective in the Egyptian style, with a fish-basket and a cuirass of that thin matting one finds behind washstands; the small boys were brigands, with immensely baggy breeches and cummerbunds in which they had stuck a selection of paper-knives and toy pistols and similar weapons. Mr. Carmine and his young man had come provided with real Indian costumes; the feeling of the company was that Mr. Carmine was a mullah. The aunt-like lady with the noble nose stood out amidst these levities in a black silk costume with a gold chain. She refused, it seemed, to make herself absurd, though she encouraged the others to extravagance by nods and enigmatical smiles. Nevertheless she had put pink ribbons in her cap. A family of father, golden-haired mother, and two young daughters, sympathetically

attired, had just arrived, and were discarding their outer wrappings with the assistance of host and hostess.

It was all just exactly what Mr. Direck had never expected in England, and equally unexpected was the supper on a long candle-lit table without a cloth. No servants were present, but on a sideboard stood a cold salmon and cold joints and kalter aufschnitt and kartoffel salat, and a variety of other comestibles, and many bottles of beer and wine and whisky. One helped oneself and anybody else one could, and Mr. Direck did his best to be very attentive to Mrs. Britling and Miss Corner, and was greatly assisted by the latter.

Everybody seemed unusually gay and bright-eyed. Mr. Direck found something exhilarating and oddly exciting in all this unusual bright costume and in this easy mutual service; it made everybody seem franker and simpler. Even Mr. Britling had revealed a sturdy handsomeness that had not been apparent to Mr. Direck before, and young Britling left no doubts now about his good looks. Mr. Direck forgot his mission and his position, and indeed things generally, in an irrational satisfaction that his golden pheasants harmonised with the glitter of the warm and smiling girl beside him. And he sat down beside her—"You sit anywhere," said Mrs. Britling—with far less compunction than in his ordinary costume he would have felt for so direct a confession of preference. And there was something in her eyes, it was quite indefinable and yet very satisfying, that told him that now he escaped from the stern square imperatives of his patriotic tailor in New York she had made a discovery of him.

Everybody chattered gaily, though Mr. Direck would have found it difficult to recall afterwards what it was they chattered about, except that somehow he acquired the valuable knowledge that Miss Corner was called Cecily, and her sister Letty, and then—so far old Essex custom held—the masculine section was left for a few minutes for some imaginary drinking, and a lighting of cigars and cigarettes, after which everybody went through interwoven moonlight and afterglow to the barn. Mr. Britling sat down to a pianola in the corner and began the familiar cadences of "Whistling Rufus."

"You dance?" said Miss Cecily Corner.

"I've never been much of a dancing man," said Mr. Direck. "What sort of dance is this?"

"Just anything. A two-step."

Mr. Direck hesitated and regretted a well-spent youth, and then Hugh came prancing forward with outstretched hands and swept her away.

Just for an instant Mr. Direck felt that this young man was a trifle superfluous....

But it was very amusing dancing.

It wasn't any sort of taught formal dancing. It was a spontaneous retort to the leaping American music that Mr. Britling footed out. You kept time, and for the rest you did as your nature prompted. If you had a partner you joined hands, you fluttered to and from one another, you paced down the long floor together, you involved yourselves in romantic pursuits and repulsions with other couples. There was no objection to your dancing alone. Teddy, for example, danced alone in order to develop certain Egyptian gestures that were germinating in his brain. There was no objection to your joining hands in a cheerful serpent....

Mr. Direck hung on to Cissie and her partner. They danced very well together; they seemed to like and understand each other. It was natural of course for two young people like that, thrown very much together, to develop an affection for one another.... Still, she was older by three or four years.

It seemed unreasonable that the boy anyhow shouldn't be in love with her....

It seemed unreasonable that any one shouldn't be in love with her....

Then Mr. Direck remarked that Cissie was watching Teddy's manoeuvres over her partner's shoulder with real affection and admiration....

But then most refreshingly she picked up Mr. Direck's gaze and gave him the slightest of smiles. She hadn't forgotten him.

The music stopped with an effect of shock, and all the bobbing, whirling figures became walking glories.

"Now that's not difficult, is it?" said Miss Corner, glowing happily.

"Not when you do it," said Mr. Direck.

"I can't imagine an American not dancing a two-step. You must do the next with me. Listen! It's 'Away Down Indiana' ... ah! I knew you could."

Mr. Direck, too, understood now that he could, and they went off holding hands rather after the fashion of two skaters.

"My word!" said Mr. Direck. "To think I'd be dancing."

But he said no more because he needed his breath.

He liked it, and he had another attempt with one of the visitor daughters, who danced rather more formally, and then Teddy took the pianola and Mr. Direck was astonished by the spectacle of an eminent British thinker in a whirl of black velvet and extremely active black legs engaged in a kind of Apache dance in pursuit of the visitor wife. In which Mr. Lawrence Carmine suddenly mingled.

"In Germany," said Herr Heinrich, "we do not dance like this. It could not be considered seemly. But it is very pleasant."

And then there was a waltz, and Herr Heinrich bowed to and took the visitor wife round three times, and returned her very punctually and exactly to the point whence he had taken her, and the Indian young gentleman (who must not be called "coloured") waltzed very well with Cecily. Mr. Direck tried to take a tolerant European view of this brown and white combination. But he secured her as soon as possible from this Asiatic entanglement, and danced with her again, and then he danced with her again.

"Come and look at the moonlight," cried Mrs. Britling.

And presently Mr. Direck found himself strolling through the rose garden with Cecily. She had the sweetest moonlight face, her white shining robe made her a thing of moonlight altogether. If Mr. Direck had not been in love with her before he was now altogether in love. Mamie Nelson, whose freakish unkindness had been rankling like a poisoned thorn in his heart all the way from Massachusetts, suddenly became Ancient History.

A tremendous desire for eloquence arose in Mr. Direck's soul, a desire so tremendous that no conceivable phrase he could imagine satisfied it. So he remained tongue-tied. And Cecily was tongue-tied, too. The scent of the roses just tinted the clear sweetness of the air they breathed.

Mr. Direck's mood was an immense solemnity, like a dark ocean beneath the vast dome of the sky, and something quivered in every fibre of his being, like moonlit ripples on the sea. He felt at the same time a portentous stillness and an immense enterprise....

Then suddenly the pianola, pounding a cake walk, burst out into ribald invitation....

"Come back to dance!" cried Cecily, like one from whom a spell has just been broken. And Mr. Direck, snatching at a vanishing scrap of everything he had not said, remarked, "I shall never forget this evening."

She did not seem to hear that.

They danced together again. And then Mr. Direck danced with the visitor lady, whose name he had never heard. And then he danced with Mrs. Britling, and then he danced with Letty. And then it seemed time for him to look for Miss Cecily again.

And so the cheerful evening passed until they were within a quarter of an hour of Sunday morning. Mrs. Britling went to exert a restraining influence upon the pianola.

"Oh! one dance more!" cried Cissie Corner.

"Oh! one dance more!" cried Letty.

"One dance more," Mr. Direck supported, and then things really *had* to end.

There was a rapid putting out of candles and a stowing away of things by Teddy and the sons, two chauffeurs appeared from the region of the kitchen and brought Mr. Lawrence Carmine's car and the visitor family's car to the front door, and everybody drifted gaily through the moonlight and the big trees to the front of the house. And Mr. Direck saw the perambulator waiting—the mysterious perambulator—a little in the dark beyond the front door.

The visitor family and Mr. Carmine and his young Indian departed. "Come to hockey!" shouted Mr. Britling to each departing car-load, and Mr. Carmine receding answered: "I'll bring three!"

Then Mr. Direck, in accordance with a habit that had been growing on him throughout the evening, looked around for Miss Cissie Corner and failed to find her. And then behold she was descending the staircase with the mysterious baby in her arms. She held up a warning finger, and then glanced at her sleeping burthen. She looked like a silvery Madonna. And Mr. Direck remembered that he was still in doubt about that baby....

Teddy, who was back in his flannels, seized upon the perambulator. There was much careful baby stowing on the part of Cecily; she displayed an infinitely maternal solicitude. Letty was away changing; she reappeared jauntily taking leave, disregarding the baby absolutely, and Teddy departed bigamously, wheeling the perambulator between the two sisters into the hazes of the moonlight. There was much crying of good nights. Mr. Direck's curiosities narrowed down to a point of great intensity....

Of course, Mr. Britling's circle must be a very "Advanced" circle...

§ 10

Mr. Direck found he had taken leave of the rest of the company, and drifted into a little parlour with Mr. Britling and certain glasses and siphons and a whisky decanter on a tray....

"It is a very curious thing," said Mr. Direck, "that in England I find myself more disposed to take stimulants and that I no longer have the need for iced water that one feels at home. I ascribe it to a greater humidity in the air. One is less dried and one is less braced. One is no longer pursued by a thirst, but one needs something to buck one up a little. Thank you. That is enough."

Mr. Direck took his glass of whisky and soda from Mr. Britling's hand.

Mr. Britling seated himself in an armchair by the fireplace and threw one leg carelessly over the arm. In his black velvet cloak and cap, and his black silk tights, he was very like a minor character, a court chamberlain for example, in some cloak and rapier drama. "I find this week-end dancing and kicking about wonderfully wholesome," he said. "That and our Sunday hockey. One starts the new week clear and bright about the mind. Friday is always my worst working day."

Mr. Direck leant against the table, wrapped in his golden pheasants, and appreciated the point.

"Your young people dance very cheerfully," he said.

"We all dance very cheerfully," said Mr. Britling.

"Then this Miss Corner," said Mr. Direck, "she is the sister, I presume, is she? of that pleasant young lady who is married—she is married, isn't she?—to the young man you call Teddy."

"I should have explained these young people. They're the sort of young people we are producing over here now in quite enormous quantity. They are the sort of equivalent of the Russian Intelligentsia, an irresponsible middle class with ideas. Teddy, you know, is my secretary. He's the son, I believe, of a Kilburn solicitor. He was recommended to me by Datcher of *The Times*. He came down here and lived in lodgings for a time. Then suddenly appeared the young lady."

"Miss Corner's sister?"

"Exactly. The village was a little startled. The cottager who had let the rooms came to me privately. Teddy is rather touchy on the point of his personal independence, he considers any demand for explanations as an insult, and probably all he had said to

the old lady was, 'This is Letty—come to share my rooms.' I put the matter to him very gently. 'Oh, yes,' he said, rather in the manner of some one who has overlooked a trifle. 'I got married to her in the Christmas holidays. May I bring her along to see Mrs. Britling?' We induced him to go into a little cottage I rent. The wife was the daughter of a Colchester journalist and printer. I don't know if you talked to her."

"I've talked to the sister rather."

"Well, they're both idea'd. They're highly educated in the sense that they do really think for themselves. Almost fiercely. So does Teddy. If he thinks he hasn't thought anything he thinks for himself, he goes off and thinks it different. The sister is a teacher who wants to take the B.A. degree in London University. Meanwhile she pays the penalty of her sex."

"Meaning—?" asked Mr. Direck, startled.

"Oh! that she puts in a great deal too much of her time upon housework and minding her sister's baby."

"She's a very interesting and charming young lady indeed," said Mr. Direck. "With a sort of Western college freedom of mind—and something about her that isn't American at all."

Mr. Britling was following the train of his own thoughts.

"My household has some amusing contrasts," he said. "I don't know if you have talked to that German.

"He's always asking questions. And you tell him any old thing and he goes and writes it down in his room upstairs, and afterwards asks you another like it in order to perplex himself by the variety of your answers. He regards the whole world with a methodical distrust. He wants to document it and pin it down. He suspects it only too justly of disorderly impulses, and a capacity for self-contradiction. He is the most extraordinary contrast to Teddy, whose confidence in the universe amounts almost to effrontery. Teddy carries our national laxness to a foolhardy extent. He is capable of leaving his watch in the middle of Claverings Park and expecting to find it a month later—being carefully taken care of by a squirrel, I suppose—when he happens to want it. He's rather like a squirrel himself—without the habit of hoarding. He is incapable of asking a question about anything; he would be quite sure it was all right anyhow. He would feel that asking questions betrayed a want of confidence—was a sort of incivility. But my German, if you notice,—his normal expression is one of grave solicitude. He is like a conscientious ticket-collector among his impressions. And did

you notice how beautifully my pianola rolls are all numbered and catalogued? He did that. He set to work and did it as soon as he got here, just as a good cat when you bring it into the house sets to work and catches mice. Previously the pianola music was chaos. You took what God sent you.

"And he *looks* like a German," said Mr. Britling.

"He certainly does that," said Mr. Direck.

"He has the fair type of complexion, the rather full habit of body, the temperamental disposition, but in addition that close-cropped head, it is almost as if it were shaved, the plumpness, the glasses—those are things that are made. And the way he carries himself. And the way he thinks. His meticulousness. When he arrived he was delightful, he was wearing a student's corps cap and a rucksack, he carried a violin; he seemed to have come out of a book. No one would ever dare to invent so German a German for a book. Now, a young Frenchman or a young Italian or a young Russian coming here might look like a foreigner, but he wouldn't have the distinctive national stamp a German has. He wouldn't be plainly French or Italian or Russian. Other peoples are not made; they are neither made nor created but proceeding—out of a thousand indefinable causes. The Germans are a triumph of directive will. I had to remark the other day that when my boys talked German they shouted. 'But when one talks German one *must* shout,' said Herr Heinrich. 'It is taught so in the schools.' And it is. They teach them to shout and to throw out their chests. Just as they teach them to read notice-boards and not think about politics. Their very ribs are not their own. My Herr Heinrich is comparatively a liberal thinker. He asked me the other day, 'But why should I give myself up to philology? But then,' he reflected, 'it is what I have to do.'"

Mr. Britling seemed to have finished, and then just as Mr. Direck was planning a way of getting the talk back by way of Teddy to Miss Corner, he snuggled more deeply into his chair, reflected and broke out again.

"This contrast between Heinrich's carefulness and Teddy's easy-goingness, come to look at it, is I suppose one of the most fundamental in the world. It reaches to everything. It mixes up with education, statecraft, morals. Will you make or will you take? Those are the two extreme courses in all such things. I suppose the answer of wisdom to that is, like all wise answers, a compromise. I suppose one must accept and then make all one can of it.... Have you talked at all to my eldest son?"

"He's a very interesting young man indeed," said Mr. Direck. "I should venture to say there's a very great deal in him. I was most impressed by the few words I had with him."

"There, for example, is one of my perplexities," said Mr. Britling.

Mr. Direck waited for some further light on this sudden transition.

"Ah! your troubles in life haven't begun yet. Wait till you're a father. That cuts to the bone. You have the most delicate thing in the world in hand, a young kindred mind. You feel responsible for it, you know you are responsible for it; and you lose touch with it. You can't get at it. Nowadays we've lost the old tradition of fatherhood by divine right—and we haven't got a new one. I've tried not to be a cramping ruler, a director, a domestic tyrant to that lad—and in effect it's meant his going his own way.... I don't dominate. I hoped to advise. But you see he loves my respect and good opinion. Too much. When things go well I know of them. When the world goes dark for him, then he keeps his trouble from me. Just when I would so eagerly go into it with him.... There's something the matter now, something—it may be grave. I feel he wants to tell me. And there it is!—it seems I am the last person to whom he can humiliate himself by a confession of blundering, or weakness.... Something I should just laugh at and say, 'That's in the blood of all of us, dear Spit of myself. Let's see what's to be done.'..."

He paused and then went on, finding in the unfamiliarity and transitoriness of his visitor a freedom he might have failed to find in a close friend.

"I am frightened at times at all I don't know about in that boy's mind. I know nothing of his religiosities. He's my son and he must have religiosities. I know nothing of his ideas or of his knowledge about sex and all that side of life. I do not know of the things he finds beautiful. I can guess at times; that's all; when he betrays himself.... You see, you don't know really what love is until you have children. One doesn't love women. Indeed you don't! One gives and gets; it's a trade. One may have tremendous excitements and expectations and overwhelming desires. That's all very well in its way. But the love of children is an exquisite tenderness: it rends the heart. It's a thing of God. And I lie awake at nights and stretch out my hands in the darkness to this lad—who will never know—until his sons come in their time...."

He made one of his quick turns again.

"And that's where our English way makes for distresses. Mr. Prussian respects and fears his father; respects authorities, attends, obeys and—*his father has a hold upon him*. But I said to myself at the outset, 'No, whatever happens, I will not usurp the place of God. I will not be the Priest-Patriarch of my children. They shall grow and I will grow beside them, helping but not cramping or overshadowing.' They grow more. But they blunder more. Life ceases to be a discipline and becomes an experiment...."

"That's very true," said Mr. Direck, to whom it seemed the time was ripe to say something. "This is the problem of America perhaps even more than of England. Though I have not had the parental experience you have undergone.... I can see very clearly that a son is a very serious proposition."

"The old system of life was organisation. That is where Germany is still the most ancient of European states. It's a reversion to a tribal cult. It's atavistic.... To organise or discipline, or mould characters or press authority, is to assume that you have reached finality in your general philosophy. It implies an assured end. Heinrich has his assured end, his philological professorship or thereabouts as a part of the Germanic machine. And that too has its assured end in German national assertion. Here, we have none of those convictions. We know we haven't finality, and so we are open and apologetic and receptive, rather than wilful.... You see all organisation, with its implication of finality, is death. We feel that. The Germans don't. What you organise you kill. Organised morals or organised religion or organised thought are dead morals and dead religion and dead thought. Yet some organisation you must have. Organisation is like killing cattle. If you do not kill some the herd is just waste. But you musn't kill all or you kill the herd. The unkilled cattle are the herd, the continuation; the unorganised side of life is the real life. The reality of life is adventure, not performance. What isn't adventure isn't life. What can be ruled about can be machined. But priests and schoolmasters and bureaucrats get hold of life and try to make it *all* rules, *all* etiquette and regulation and correctitude.... And parents and the love of parents make for the same thing. It is all very well to experiment for oneself, but when one sees these dear things of one's own, so young and inexperienced and so capable of every sort of gallant foolishness, walking along the narrow plank, going down into dark jungles, ah! then it makes one want to wrap them in laws and foresight and fence them about with 'Verboten' boards in all the conceivable aspects...."

"In America of course we do set a certain store upon youthful self-reliance," said Mr. Direck.

"As we do here. It's in your blood and our blood. It's the instinct of the English and the Irish anyhow to suspect government and take the risks of the chancy way.... And manifestly the Russians, if you read their novelists, have the same twist in them.... When we get this young Prussian here, he's a marvel to us. He really believes in Law. He *likes* to obey. That seems a sort of joke to us. It's curious how foreign these Germans are—to all the rest of the world. Because of their docility. Scratch the Russian and you get the Tartar. Educate the Russian or the American or the Englishman or the Irishman or Frenchman or any real northern European except the

German, and you get the Anarchist, that is to say the man who dreams of order without organisation—of something beyond organisation....

"It's one o'clock," said Mr. Britling abruptly, perceiving a shade of fatigue upon the face of his hearer and realising that his thoughts had taken him too far, "and Sunday. Let's go to bed."

§ 11

For a time Mr. Direck could not sleep. His mind had been too excited by this incessant day with all its novelties and all its provocations to comparison. The whole complicated spectacle grouped itself, with a naturalness and a complete want of logic that all who have been young will understand, about Cecily Corner.

She had to be in the picture, and so she came in as though she were the central figure, as though she were the quintessential England. There she was, the type, the blood, the likeness, of no end of Massachusetts families, the very same stuff indeed, and yet she was different....

For a time his thoughts hovered ineffectively about certain details of her ear and cheek, and one may doubt if his interest in these things was entirely international....

Then he found himself under way with an exposition of certain points to Mr. Britling. In the security of his bed he could imagine that he was talking very slowly and carefully while Mr. Britling listened; already he was more than half way to dreamland or he could not have supposed anything so incredible.

"There's a curious sort of difference," he was saying. "It is difficult to define, but on the whole I might express it by saying that such a gathering as this if it was in America would be drawn with harder lines, would show its bones more and have everything more emphatic. And just to take one illustrative point: in America in such a gathering as this there would be bound to be several jokes going on as it were, running jokes and running criticisms, from day to day and from week to week.... There would be jokes about your writing and your influence and jokes about Miss Corner's advanced reading.... You see, in America we pay much more attention to personal character. Here people, I notice, are not talked to about their personal characters at all, and many of them do not seem to be aware and do not seem to mind what personal characters they have....

"And another thing I find noteworthy is the way in which what I might call mature people seem to go on having a good time instead of standing by and applauding the young people having a good time.... And the young people do not seem to have set out to have a good time at all.... Now in America, a charming girl like Miss Corner would be distinctly more aware of herself and her vitality than she is here, distinctly more. Her peculiarly charming sidelong look, if I might make so free with her—would have been called attention to. It's a perfectly beautiful look, the sort of look some great artist would have loved to make immortal. It's a look I shall find it hard to forget.... But she doesn't seem to be aware in the least of it. In America she would be aware of it. She would be distinctly aware of it. She would have been *made* aware of it. She would have been advised of it. It would be looked for and she would know it was looked for. She would *give* it as a singer gives her most popular song. Mamie Nelson, for example, used to give a peculiar little throw back of the chin and a laugh.... It was talked about. People came to see it....

"Of course Mamie Nelson was a very brilliant girl indeed. I suppose in England you would say we spoilt her. I suppose we did spoil her...."

It came into Mr. Direck's head that for a whole day he had scarcely given a thought to Mamie Nelson. And now he was thinking of her—calmly. Why shouldn't one think of Mamie Nelson calmly?

She was a proud imperious thing. There was something Southern in her. Very dark blue eyes she had, much darker than Miss Corner's....

But how tortuous she had been behind that outward pride of hers! For four years she had let him think he was the only man who really mattered in the world, and all the time quite clearly and definitely she had deceived him. She had made a fool of him and she had made a fool of the others perhaps—just to have her retinue and play the queen in her world. And at last humiliation, bitter humiliation, and Mamie with her chin in the air and her bright triumphant smile looking down on him.

Hadn't he, she asked, had the privilege of loving her?

She took herself at the value they had set upon her.

Well—somehow—that wasn't right....

All the way across the Atlantic Mr. Direck had been trying to forget her downward glance with the chin up, during that last encounter—and other aspects of the same humiliation. The years he had spent upon her! The time! Always relying upon her assurance of a special preference for him. He tried to think he was suffering from the

pangs of unrequited love, and to conceal from himself just how bitterly his pride and vanity had been rent by her ultimate rejection. There had been a time when she had given him reason to laugh in his sleeve at Booth Wilmington.

Perhaps Booth Wilmington had also had reason for laughing in his sleeve....

Had she even loved Booth Wilmington? Or had she just snatched at him?...

Wasn't he, Direck, as good a man as Booth Wilmington anyhow?...

For some moments the old sting of jealousy rankled again. He recalled the flaring rivalry that had ended in his defeat, the competition of gifts and treats.... A thing so open that all Carrierville knew of it, discussed it, took sides.... And over it all Mamie with her flashing smile had sailed like a processional goddess....

Why, they had made jokes about him in the newspapers!

One couldn't imagine such a contest in Matching's Easy. Yet surely even in Matching's Easy there are lovers.

Is it something in the air, something in the climate that makes things harder and clearer in America?...

Cissie—why shouldn't one call her Cissie in one's private thoughts anyhow?—would never be as hard and clear as Mamie. She had English eyes—merciful eyes....

That was the word—*merciful*!

The English light, the English air, are merciful....

Merciful....

They tolerate old things and slow things and imperfect apprehensions. They aren't always getting at you....

They don't laugh at you.... At least—they laugh differently....

Was England the tolerant country? With its kind eyes and its wary sidelong look. Toleration. In which everything mellowed and nothing was destroyed. A soft country. A country with a passion for imperfection. A padded country....

England—all stuffed with soft feathers ... under one's ear. A pillow—with soft, kind Corners ... Beautiful rounded Corners.... Dear, dear Corners. Cissie Corners. Corners. Could there be a better family?

Massachusetts—but in heaven....

Harps playing two-steps, and kind angels wrapped in moonlight.

Very softly I and you,

One turn, two turn, three turn, too.

Off we go!....

CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE ENTERTAINMENT OF MR. DIRECK REACHES A CLIMAX

§ 1

Breakfast was in the open air, and a sunny, easy-going feast. Then the small boys laid hands on Mr. Direck and showed him the pond and the boats, while Mr. Britling strolled about the lawn with Hugh, talking rather intently. And when Mr. Direck returned from the boats in a state of greatly enhanced popularity he found Mr. Britling conversing over his garden railings to what was altogether a new type of Britisher in Mr. Direck's experience. It was a tall, lean, sun-bitten youngish man of forty perhaps, in brown tweeds, looking more like the Englishman of the American illustrations than anything Mr. Direck had met hitherto. Indeed he came very near to a complete realisation of that ideal except that there was a sort of intensity about him, and that his clipped moustache had the restrained stiffness of a wiry-haired terrier. This gentleman Mr. Direck learnt was Colonel Rendezvous. He spoke in clear short sentences, they had an effect of being punched out, and he was refusing to come into the garden and talk.

"Have to do my fourteen miles before lunch," he said. "You haven't seen Manning about, have you?"

"He isn't here," said Mr. Britling, and it seemed to Mr. Direck that there was the faintest ambiguity in this reply.

"Have to go alone, then," said Colonel Rendezvous. "They told me that he had started to come here."

"I shall motor over to Bramley High Oak for your Boy Scout festival," said Mr. Britling.

"Going to have three thousand of 'em," said the Colonel. "Good show."

His steely eyes seemed to search the cover of Mr. Britling's garden for the missing Manning, and then he decided to give him up. "I must be going," he said. "So long. Come up!"

A well-disciplined dog came to heel, and the lean figure had given Mr. Direck a semi-military salutation and gone upon its way. It marched with a long elastic stride; it never looked back.

"Manning," said Mr. Britling, "is probably hiding up in my rose garden."

"Curiously enough, I guessed from your manner that that might be the case," said Mr. Direck.

"Yes. Manning is a London journalist. He has a little cottage about a mile over there"—Mr. Britling pointed vaguely—"and he comes down for the week-ends. And Rendezvous has found out he isn't fit. And everybody ought to be fit. That is the beginning and end of life for Rendezvous. Fitness. An almost mineral quality, an insatiable activity of body, great mental simplicity. So he takes possession of poor old Manning and trots him for that fourteen miles—at four miles an hour. Manning goes through all the agonies of death and damnation, he half dissolves, he pants and drags for the first eight or ten miles, and then I must admit he rather justifies Rendezvous' theory. He is to be found in the afternoon in a hammock suffering from blistered feet, but otherwise unusually well. But if he can escape it, he does. He hides."

"But if he doesn't want to go with Rendezvous, why does he?" said Mr. Direck.

"Well, Rendezvous is accustomed to the command of men. And Manning's only way of refusing things is on printed forms. Which he doesn't bring down to Matching's Easy. Ah! behold!"

Far away across the lawn between two blue cedars there appeared a leisurely form in grey flannels and a loose tie, advancing with manifest circumspection.

"He's gone," cried Britling.

The leisurely form, obviously amiable, obviously a little out of condition, became more confident, drew nearer.

"I'm sorry to have missed him," he said cheerfully. "I thought he might come this way. It's going to be a very warm day indeed. Let us sit about somewhere and talk.

"Of course," he said, turning to Direck, "Rendezvous is the life and soul of the country."

They strolled towards a place of seats and hammocks between the big trees and the rose garden, and the talk turned for a time upon Rendezvous. "They have the tidiest garden in Essex," said Manning. "It's not Mrs. Rendezvous' fault that it is so. Mrs. Rendezvous, as a matter of fact, has a taste for the picturesque. She just puts the things about in groups in the beds. She wants them, she says, to grow anyhow. She desires a romantic disorder. But she never gets it. When he walks down the path all the plants dress instinctively.... And there's a tree near their gate; it used to be a willow. You can ask any old man in the village. But ever since Rendezvous took the place it's been trying to present arms. With the most extraordinary results. I was passing the other day with old Windershin. 'You see that there old poplar,' he said. 'It's a willow,' said I. 'No,' he said, 'it did used to be a willow before Colonel Rendezvous he came. But now it's a poplar.'... And, by Jove, it is a poplar!"...

The conversation thus opened by Manning centred for a time upon Colonel Rendezvous. He was presented as a monster of energy and self-discipline; as the determined foe of every form of looseness, slackness, and easy-goingness.

"He's done wonderful work for the local Boy Scout movement," said Manning.

"It's Kitchenerism," said Britling.

"It's the army side of the efficiency stunt," said Manning.

There followed a digression upon the Boy Scout movement, and Mr. Direck made comparisons with the propaganda of Seton Thompson in America. "Colonel Teddyism," said Manning. "It's a sort of reaction against everything being too easy and too safe."

"It's got its anti-decadent side," said Mr. Direck.

"If there is such a thing as decadence," said Mr. Britling.

"If there wasn't such a thing as decadence," said Manning, "we journalists would have had to invent it."...

"There is something tragical in all this—what shall I call it?—Kitchenerism," Mr. Britling reflected "Here you have it rushing about and keeping itself—screwed up, and trying desperately to keep the country screwed up. And all because there may be a war some day somehow with Germany. Provided Germany *is* insane. It's that war, like some sort of bee in Rendezvous' brains, that is driving him along the road now to Market Saffron—he always keeps to the roads because they are severer—through all the dust and sunshine. When he might be here gossiping....

"And you know, I don't see that war coming," said Mr. Britling. "I believe Rendezvous sweats in vain. I can't believe in that war. It has held off for forty years. It may hold off forever."

He nodded his head towards the German tutor, who had come into view across the lawn, talking profoundly with Mr. Britling's eldest son.

"Look at that pleasant person. There he is—*Echt Deutsch*—if anything ever was. Look at my son there! Do you see the two of them engaged in mortal combat? The thing's too ridiculous. The world grows sane. They may fight in the Balkans still; in many ways the Balkan States are in the very rear of civilisation; but to imagine decent countries like this or Germany going back to bloodshed! No.... When I see Rendezvous keeping it up and keeping it up, I begin to see just how poor Germany must be keeping it up. I begin to realise how sick Germany must be getting of the high road and the dust and heat and the everlasting drill and restraint.... My heart goes out to the South Germans. Old Manning here always reminds me of Austria. Think of Germany coming like Rendezvous on a Sunday morning, and looking stiffly over Austria's fence. 'Come for a good hard walk, man. Keep Fit....'"

"But suppose this Balkan trouble becomes acute," said Manning.

"It hasn't; it won't. Even if it did we should keep out of it."

"But suppose Russia grappled Austria and Germany flung herself suddenly upon France—perhaps taking Belgium on the way."

"Oh!—we should fight. Of course we should fight. Could any one but a congenital idiot suppose we shouldn't fight? They know we should fight. They aren't altogether idiots in Germany. But the thing's absurd. Why *should* Germany attack France? It's as if Manning here took a hatchet suddenly and assailed Edith.... It's just the dream of their military journalists. It's such schoolboy nonsense. Isn't that a beautiful pillar rose? Edith only put it in last year.... I hate all this talk of wars and rumours of wars.... It's worried all my life. And it gets worse and it gets emptier every year...."

§ 2

Now just at that moment there was a loud report....

But neither Mr. Britling nor Mr. Manning nor Mr. Direck was interrupted or incommoded in the slightest degree by that report. Because it was too far off over the curve of this

round world to be either heard or seen at Matching's Easy. Nevertheless it was a very loud report. It occurred at an open space by a river that ran through a cramped Oriental city, a city spiked with white minarets and girt about by bare hills under a blazing afternoon sky. It came from a black parcel that the Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria, with great presence of mind, had just flung out from the open hood of his automobile, where, tossed from the side of the quay, it had descended a few seconds before. It exploded as it touched the cobbled road just under the front of the second vehicle in the procession, and it blew to pieces the front of the automobile and injured the aide-de-camp who was in it and several of the spectators. Its thrower was immediately gripped by the bystanders. The procession stopped. There was a tremendous commotion amongst that brightly-costumed crowd, a hot excitement in vivid contrast to the Sabbath calm of Matching's Easy....

Mr. Britling, to whom the explosion was altogether inaudible, continued his dissertation upon the common-sense of the world and the practical security of our Western peace.

§ 3

Lunch was an open-air feast again. Three visitors had dropped in; they had motored down from London piled up on a motor-cycle and a side-car; a brother and two sisters they seemed to be, and they had apparently reduced hilariousness to a principle. The rumours of coming hockey that had been floating on the outskirts of Mr. Direck's consciousness ever since his arrival, thickened and multiplied.... It crept into his mind that he was expected to play....

He decided he would not play. He took various people into his confidence. He told Mr. Britling, and Mr. Britling said, "We'll make you full back, where you'll get a hit now and then and not have very much to do. All you have to remember is to hit with the flat side of your stick and not raise it above your shoulders." He told Teddy, and Teddy said, "I strongly advise you to dress as thinly as you can consistently with decency, and put your collar and tie in your pocket before the game begins. Hockey is properly a winter game." He told the maiden aunt-like lady with the prominent nose, and she said almost enviously, "Every one here is asked to play except me. I assuage the perambulator. I suppose one mustn't be envious. I don't see why I shouldn't play. I'm not so old as all that." He told Hugh, and Hugh warned him to be careful not to get hold of one of the sprung sticks. He considered whether it wouldn't be wiser to go to

his own room and lock himself in, or stroll off for a walk through Claverings Park. But then he would miss Miss Corner, who was certain, it seemed, to come up for hockey. On the other hand, if he did not miss her he might make himself ridiculous in her eyes, and efface the effect of the green silk stuff with the golden pheasants.

He determined to stay behind until she arrived, and explain to her that he was not going to play. He didn't somehow want her to think he wasn't perfectly fit to play.

Mr. Carmine arrived in an automobile with two Indians and a gentleman who had been a prospector in Alaska, the family who had danced overnight at the Dower House reappeared, and then Mrs. Teddy, very detached with a special hockey stick, and Miss Corner wheeling the perambulator. Then came further arrivals. At the earliest opportunity Mr. Direck secured the attention of Miss Corner, and lost his interest in any one else.

"I can't play this hockey," said Mr. Direck. "I feel strange about it. It isn't an American game. Now if it were baseball—!"

He left her to suppose him uncommonly hot stuff at baseball.

"If you're on my side," said Cecily, "mind you pass to me."

It became evident to Mr. Direck that he was going to play this hockey after all.

"Well," he said, "if I've got to play hockey, I guess I've got to play hockey. But can't I just get a bit of practice somewhere before the game begins?"

So Miss Corner went off to get two sticks and a ball and came back to instruct Mr. Direck. She said he had a good eye. The two small boys scenting play in the air got sticks and joined them. The overnight visitor's wife appeared from the house in abbreviated skirts, and wearing formidable shin-guards. With her abundant fair hair, which was already breaking loose, so to speak, to join the fray, she looked like a short stout dismounted Valkyr. Her gaze was clear and firm.