

Hockey as it was played at the Dower House at Matching's Easy before the war, was a game combining danger, physical exercise and kindness in a very high degree. Except for the infant in the perambulator and the outwardly calm but inwardly resentful aunt, who wheeled the child up and down in a position of maximum danger just behind the unnetted goal, every one was involved. Quite able-bodied people acquainted with the game played forward, the less well-informed played a defensive game behind the forward line, elderly, infirm, and bulky persons were used chiefly as obstacles in goal. Several players wore padded leg-guards, and all players were assumed to have them and expected to behave accordingly.

Proceedings began with an invidious ceremony called picking up. This was heralded by Mr. Britling, clad in the diaphanous flannels and bearing a hockey stick, advancing with loud shouts to the centre of the hockey field. "Pick up! Pick up!" echoed the young Britlings.

Mr. Direck became aware of a tall, drooping man with long hair and long digressive legs in still longer white flannel trousers, and a face that was somehow familiar. He was talking with affectionate intimacy to Manning, and suddenly Mr. Direck remembered that it was in Manning's weekly paper, *The Sectarian*, in which a bitter caricaturist enlivened a biting text, that he had become familiar with the features of Manning's companion. It was Raeburn, Raeburn the insidious, Raeburn the completest product of the party system.... Well, that was the English way. "Come for the pick up!" cried the youngest Britling, seizing upon Mr. Direck's elbow. It appeared that Mr. Britling and the overnight dinner guest—Mr. Direck never learnt his name—were picking up.

Names were shouted. "I'll take Cecily!" Mr. Direck heard Mr. Britling say quite early. The opposing sides as they were picked fell into two groups. There seemed to be difficulties about some of the names. Mr. Britling, pointing to the more powerful looking of the Indian gentlemen, said, "*You*, Sir."

"I'm going to speculate on Mr. Dinks," said Mr. Britling's opponent.

Mr. Direck gathered that Mr. Dinks was to be his hockey name.

"You're on *our* side," said Mrs. Teddy. "I think you'll have to play forward, outer right, and keep a sharp eye on Cissie."

"I'll do what I can," said Mr. Direck.

His captain presently confirmed this appointment.

His stick was really a sort of club and the ball was a firm hard cricket ball.... He resolved to be very gentle with Cecily, and see that she didn't get hurt.

The sides took their places for the game, and a kind of order became apparent to Mr. Direck. In the centre stood Mr. Britling and the opposing captain, and the ball lay between them. They were preparing to "bully off" and start the game. In a line with each of them were four other forwards. They all looked spirited and intent young people, and Mr. Direck wished he had had more exercise to justify his own alert appearance. Behind each centre forward hovered one of the Britling boys. Then on each side came a vaguer row of three backs, persons of gentler disposition or maturer years. They included Mr. Raeburn, who was considered to have great natural abilities for hockey but little experience. Mr. Raeburn was behind Mr. Direck. Mrs. Britling was the centre back. Then in a corner of Mr. Direck's side was a small girl of six or seven, and in the half-circle about the goal a lady in a motoring dust coat and a very short little man whom Mr. Direck had not previously remarked. Mr. Lawrence Carmine, stripped to the braces, which were richly ornamented with Oriental embroidery, kept goal for our team.

The centre forwards went through a rapid little ceremony. They smote their sticks on the ground, and then hit the sticks together. "One," said Mr. Britling. The operation was repeated. "Two," ... "Three."

Smack, Mr. Britling had got it and the ball had gone to the shorter and sturdier of the younger Britlings, who had been standing behind Mr. Direck's captain. Crack, and it was away to Teddy; smack, and it was coming right at Direck.

"Lordy!" he said, and prepared to smite it.

Then something swift and blue had flashed before him, intercepted the ball and shot it past him. This was Cecily Corner, and she and Teddy were running abreast like the wind towards Mr. Raeburn.

"Hey!" cried Mr. Raeburn, "stop!" and advanced, as it seemed to Mr. Direck, with unseemly and threatening gestures towards Cissie.

But before Mr. Direck could adjust his mind to this new phase of affairs, Cecily had passed the right honourable gentleman with the same mysterious ease with which she had flashed by Mr. Direck, and was bearing down upon the miscellaneous Landwehr which formed the "backs" of Mr. Direck's side.

"*You* rabbit!" cried Mr. Raeburn, and became extraordinarily active in pursuit, administering great lengths of arm and leg with a centralised efficiency he had not hitherto displayed.

Running hard to the help of Mr. Raeburn was the youngest Britling boy, a beautiful contrast. It was like a puff ball supporting and assisting a conger eel. In front of Mr. Direck the little stout man was being alert. Teddy was supporting the attack near the middle of the field, crying "Centre!" while Mr. Britling, very round and resolute, was bouncing straight towards the threatened goal. But Mrs. Teddy, running as swiftly as her sister, was between Teddy and the ball. Whack! the little short man's stick had clashed with Cecily's. Confused things happened with sticks and feet, and the little short man appeared to be trying to cut down Cecily as one cuts down a tree, she tried to pass the ball to her centre forward—too late, and then Mrs. Teddy had intercepted it, and was flickering back towards Mr. Britling's goal in a rush in which Mr. Direck perceived it was his duty to join.

Yes, he had to follow up Mrs. Teddy and pick up the ball if he had a chance and send it in to her or the captain or across to the left forwards, as circumstances might decide. It was perfectly clear.

Then came his moment. The little formidably padded lady who had dined at the Dower House overnight, made a gallant attack upon Mrs. Teddy. Out of the confusion of this clash the ball spun into Mr. Direck's radius. Where should he smite and how? A moment of reflection was natural.

But now the easy-fitting discipline of the Dower House style of hockey became apparent. Mr. Direck had last observed the tall young Indian gentleman, full of vitality and anxious for destruction, far away in the distance on the opposing right wing. But now, regardless of the more formal methods of the game, this young man had resolved, without further delay and at any cost, to hit the ball hard, and he was travelling like some Asiatic typhoon with an extreme velocity across the remonstrances of Mr. Britling and the general order of his side. Mr. Direck became aware of him just before his impact. There was a sort of collision from which Mr. Direck emerged with a feeling that one side of his face was permanently flattened, but still gallantly resolved to hit the comparatively lethargic ball. He and the staggered but resolute Indian clashed sticks again. And Mr. Direck had the best of it. Years of experience couldn't have produced a better pass to the captain....

"Good pass!"

Apparently from one of the London visitors.

But this was *some* game!

The ball executed some rapid movements to and fro across the field. Our side was pressing hard. There was a violent convergence of miscellaneous backs and suchlike irregulars upon the threatened goal. Mr. Britling's dozen was rapidly losing its disciplined order. One of the sidecar ladies and the gallant Indian had shifted their activities to the defensive back, and with them was a spectacled gentleman waving his stick, high above all recognised rules. Mr. Direck's captain and both Britling boys hurried to join the fray. Mr. Britling, who seemed to Mr. Direck to be for a captain rather too demagogic, also ran back to rally his forces by loud cries. "Pass outwardly!" was the burthen of his contribution.

The struggle about the Britling goal ceased to be a game and became something between a fight and a social gathering. Mr. Britling's goal-keeper could be heard shouting, "I can't see the ball! *Lift your feet!*" The crowded conflict lurched towards the goal posts. "My shin!" cried Mr. Manning. "No, you *don't!*"

Whack, but again whack!

Whack! "Ah! *would* you?" Whack.

"Goal!" cried the side-car gentleman.

"Goal!" cried the Britling boys....

Mr. Manning, as goal-keeper, went to recover the ball, but one of the Britling boys politely anticipated him.

The crowd became inactive, and then began to drift back to loosely conceived positions.

"It's no good swarming into goal like that," Mr. Britling, with a faint asperity in his voice, explained to his followers. "We've got to keep open and not *crowd* each other."

Then he went confidentially to the energetic young Indian to make some restrictive explanation of his activities.

Mr. Direck strolled back towards Cecily. He was very warm and a little blown, but not, he felt, disgraced. He was winning.

"You'll have to take your coat off," she said.

It was a good idea.

It had occurred to several people and the boundary line was already dotted with hastily discarded jackets and wraps and so forth. But the lady in the motoring dust coat was buttoning it to the chin.

"One goal love," said the minor Britling boy.

"We haven't begun yet, Sunny," said Cecily.

"Sonny! That's American," said Mr. Direck.

"No. We call him Sunny Jim," said Cecily. "They're bullying off again."

"Sunny Jim's American too," said Mr. Direck, returning to his place....

The struggle was resumed. And soon it became clear that the first goal was no earnest of the quality of the struggle. Teddy and Cecily formed a terribly efficient combination. Against their brilliant rushes, supported in a vehement but effective manner by the Indian to their right and guided by loud shoutings from Mr. Britling (centre), Mr. Direck and the side-car lady and Mr. Raeburn struggled in vain. One swift advance was only checked by the dust cloak, its folds held the ball until help arrived; another was countered by a tremendous swipe of Mr. Raeburn's that sent the ball within an inch of the youngest Britling's head and right across the field; the third resulted in a swift pass from Cecily to the elder Britling son away on her right, and he shot the goal neatly and swiftly through the lattice of Mr. Lawrence Carmine's defensive movements. And after that very rapidly came another goal for Mr. Britling's side and then another.

Then Mr. Britling cried out that it was "Half Time," and explained to Mr. Direck that whenever one side got to three goals they considered it was half time and had five minutes' rest and changed sides. Everybody was very hot and happy, except the lady in the dust cloak who was perfectly cool. In everybody's eyes shone the light of battle, and not a shadow disturbed the brightness of the afternoon for Mr. Direck except a certain unspoken anxiety about Mr. Raeburn's trousers.

You see Mr. Direck had never seen Mr. Raeburn before, and knew nothing about his trousers.

They appeared to be coming down.

To begin with they had been rather loose over the feet and turned up, and as the game progressed, fold after fold of concertina-ed flannel gathered about his ankles. Every now and then Mr. Raeburn would seize the opportunity of some respite from the game to turn up a fresh six inches or so of this accumulation. Naturally Mr. Direck expected

this policy to end unhappily. He did not know that the flannel trousers of Mr. Raeburn were like a river, that they could come down forever and still remain inexhaustible....

He had visions of this scene of happy innocence being suddenly blasted by a monstrous disaster....

Apart from this worry Mr. Direck was as happy as any one there!

Perhaps these apprehensions affected his game. At any rate he did nothing that pleased him in the second half, Cecily danced all over him and round and about him, and in the course of ten minutes her side had won the two remaining goals with a score of Five-One; and five goals is "game" by the standards of Matching's Easy.

And then with the very slightest of delays these insatiable people picked up again. Mr. Direck slipped away and returned in a white silk shirt, tennis trousers and a belt. This time he and Cecily were on the same side, the Cecily-Teddy combination was broken, and he it seemed was to take the place of the redoubtable Teddy on the left wing with her.

This time the sides were better chosen and played a long, obstinate, even game. One-One. One-Two. One-Three. (Half Time.) Two-Three. Three all. Four-Three. Four all....

By this time Mr. Direck was beginning to master the simple strategy of the sport. He was also beginning to master the fact that Cecily was the quickest, nimblest, most indefatigable player on the field. He scouted for her and passed to her. He developed tacit understandings with her. Ideas of protecting her had gone to the four winds of Heaven. Against them Teddy and a sidecar girl with Raeburn in support made a memorable struggle. Teddy was as quick as a cat. "Four-Three" looked like winning, but then Teddy and the tall Indian and Mrs. Teddy pulled square. They almost repeated this feat and won, but Mr. Manning saved the situation with an immense oblique hit that sent the ball to Mr. Direck. He ran with the ball up to Raeburn and then dodged and passed to Cecily. There was a lively struggle to the left; the ball was hit out by Mr. Raeburn and thrown in by a young Britling; lost by the forwards and rescued by the padded lady. Forward again! This time will do it!

Cecily away to the left had worked round Mr. Raeburn once more. Teddy, realising that things were serious, was tearing back to attack her.

Mr. Direck supported with silent intentness. "Centre!" cried Mr. Britling. "Cen-tre!"

"Mr. Direck!" came her voice, full of confidence. (Of such moments is the heroic life.) The ball shot behind the hurtling Teddy. Mr. Direck stopped it with his foot, a trick he had just learnt from the eldest Britling son. He was neither slow nor hasty. He was in

the half-circle, and the way to the goal was barred only by the dust-cloak lady and Mr. Lawrence Carmine. He made as if to shoot to Mr. Carmine's left and then smacked the ball, with the swiftness of a serpent's stroke, to his right.

He'd done it! Mr. Carmine's stick and feet were a yard away.

Then hard on this wild triumph came a flash of horror. One can't see everything. His eye following the ball's trajectory....

Directly in its line of flight was the perambulator.

The ball missed the legs of the lady with the noble nose by a kind of miracle, hit and glanced off the wheel of the perambulator, and went spinning into a border of antirrhinums.

"Good!" cried Cecily. "Splendid shot!"

He'd shot a goal. He'd done it well. The perambulator it seemed didn't matter. Though apparently the impact had awakened the baby. In the margin of his consciousness was the figure of Mr. Britling remarking: "Aunty. You really mustn't wheel the perambulator—*just* there."

"I thought," said the aunt, indicating the goal posts by a facial movement, "that those two sticks would be a sort of protection.... Aah! *Did* they then?"

Never mind that.

"That's *game!*" said one of the junior Britlings to Mr. Direck with a note of high appreciation, and the whole party, relaxing and crumpling like a lowered flag, moved towards the house and tea.

§ 5

"We'll play some more after tea," said Cecily. "It will be cooler then."

"My word, I'm beginning to like it," said Mr. Direck.

"You're going to play very well," she said.

And such is the magic of a game that Mr. Direck was humbly proud and grateful for her praise, and trotted along by the side of this creature who had revealed herself so swift and resolute and decisive, full to overflowing of the mere pleasure of just trotting

along by her side. And after tea, which was a large confused affair, enlivened by wonderful and entirely untruthful reminiscences of the afternoon by Mr. Raeburn, they played again, with fewer inefficients and greater skill and swiftness, and Mr. Direck did such quick and intelligent things that everybody declared that he was a hockey player straight from heaven. The dusk, which at last made the position of the ball too speculative for play, came all too soon for him. He had played in six games, and he knew he would be as stiff as a Dutch doll in the morning. But he was very, very happy.

The rest of the Sunday evening was essentially a sequel to the hockey.

Mr. Direck changed again, and after using some embrocation that Mrs. Britling recommended very strongly, came down in a black jacket and a cheerfully ample black tie. He had a sense of physical well-being such as he had not experienced since he came aboard the liner at New York. The curious thing was that it was not quite the same sense of physical well-being that one had in America. That is bright and clear and a little dry, this was—humid. His mind quivered contentedly, like sunset midges over a lake—it had no hard bright flashes—and his body wanted to sit about. His sense of intimacy with Cecily increased each time he looked at her. When she met his eyes she smiled. He'd caught her style now, he felt; he attempted no more compliments and was frankly her pupil at hockey and Badminton. After supper Mr. Britling renewed his suggestion of an automobile excursion on the Monday.

"There's nothing to take you back to London," said Mr. Britling, "and we could just hunt about the district with the little old car and see everything you want to see...."

Mr. Direck did not hesitate three seconds. He thought of Gladys; he thought of Miss Cecily Corner.

"Well, indeed," he said, "if it isn't burthening you, if I'm not being any sort of inconvenience here for another night, I'd be really very glad indeed of the opportunity of going around and seeing all these ancient places...."

§ 6

The newspapers came next morning at nine, and were full of the Sarajevo Murders. Mr. Direck got the *Daily Chronicle* and found quite animated headlines for a British paper.

"Who's this Archduke," he asked, "anyhow? And where is this Bosnia? I thought it was a part of Turkey."

"It's in Austria," said Teddy.

"It's in the middle ages," said Mr. Britling. "What an odd, pertinacious business it seems to have been. First one bomb, then another; then finally the man with the pistol. While we were strolling about the rose garden. It's like something out of 'The Prisoner of Zenda.'"

"Please," said Herr Heinrich.

Mr. Britling assumed an attentive expression.

"Will not this generally affect European politics?"

"I don't know. Perhaps it will."

"It says in the paper that Serbia has sent those bombs to Sarajevo."

"It's like another world," said Mr. Britling, over his paper. "Assassination as a political method. Can you imagine anything of the sort happening nowadays west of the Adriatic? Imagine some one assassinating the American Vice-President, and the bombs being at once ascribed to the arsenal at Toronto!... We take our politics more sadly in the West.... Won't you have another egg, Direck?"

"Please! Might this not lead to a war?"

"I don't think so. Austria may threaten Serbia, but she doesn't want to provoke a conflict with Russia. It would be going too near the powder magazine. But it's all an extraordinary business."

"But if she did?" Herr Heinrich persisted.

"She won't.... Some years ago I used to believe in the inevitable European war," Mr. Britling explained to Mr. Direck, "but it's been threatened so long that at last I've lost all belief in it. The Powers wrangle and threaten. They're far too cautious and civilised to let the guns go off. If there was going to be a war it would have happened two years ago when the Balkan League fell upon Turkey. Or when Bulgaria attacked Serbia...."

Herr Heinrich reflected, and received these conclusions with an expression of respectful edification.

"I am naturally anxious," he said, "because I am taking tickets for my holidays at an Esperanto Conference at Boulogne."

"There is only one way to master such a thing as driving an automobile," said Mr. Britling outside his front door, as he took his place in the driver's seat, "and that is to resolve that from the first you will take no risks. Be slow if you like. Stop and think when you are in doubt. But do nothing rashly, permit no mistakes."

It seemed to Mr. Direck as he took his seat beside his host that this was admirable doctrine.

They started out of the gates with an extreme deliberation. Indeed twice they stopped dead in the act of turning into the road, and the engine had to be restarted.

"You will laugh at me," said Mr. Britling; "but I'm resolved to have no blunders this time."

"I don't laugh at you. It's excellent," said Mr. Direck.

"It's the right way," said Mr. Britling. "Care—oh damn! I've stopped the engine again. Ugh!—ah!—so!—Care, I was saying—and calm."

"Don't think I want to hurry you," said Mr. Direck. "I don't..."

They passed through the tillage at a slow, agreeable pace, tooting loudly at every corner, and whenever a pedestrian was approached. Mr. Direck was reminded that he had still to broach the lecture project to Mr. Britling. So much had happened—

The car halted abruptly and the engine stopped.

"I thought that confounded hen was thinking of crossing the road," said Mr. Britling. "Instead of which she's gone through the hedge. She certainly looked this way.... Perhaps I'm a little fussy this morning.... I'll warm up to the work presently."

"I'm convinced you can't be too careful," said Mr. Direck. "And this sort of thing enables one to see the country better...."

Beyond the village Mr. Britling seemed to gather confidence. The pace quickened. But whenever other traffic or any indication of a side way appeared discretion returned. Mr. Britling stalked his sign posts, crawling towards them on the belly of the lowest gear; he drove all the morning like a man who is flushing ambuscades. And yet accident overtook him. For God demands more from us than mere righteousness.

He cut through the hills to Market Saffron along a lane-road with which he was unfamiliar. It began to go up hill. He explained to Mr. Direck how admirably his engine would climb hills on the top gear.

They took a curve and the hill grew steeper, and Mr. Direck opened the throttle.

They rounded another corner, and still more steeply the hill rose before them.

The engine began to make a chinking sound, and the car lost pace. And then Mr. Britling saw a pleading little white board with the inscription "Concealed Turning." For the moment he thought a turning might be concealed anywhere. He threw out his clutch and clapped on his brake. Then he repented of what he had done. But the engine, after three Herculean throbs, ceased to work. Mr. Britling with a convulsive clutch at his steering wheel set the electric hooter snarling, while one foot released the clutch again and the other, on the accelerator, sought in vain for help. Mr. Direck felt they were going back, back, in spite of all this vocalisation. He clutched at the emergency brake. But he was too late to avoid misfortune. With a feeling like sitting gently in butter, the car sank down sideways and stopped with two wheels in the ditch.

Mr. Britling said they were in the ditch—said it with quite unnecessary violence....

This time two cart horses and a retinue of five men were necessary to restore Gladys to her self-respect....

After that they drove on to Market Saffron, and got there in time for lunch, and after lunch Mr. Direck explored the church and the churchyard and the parish register....

After lunch Mr. Britling became more cheerful about his driving. The road from Market Saffron to Blandish, whence one turns off to Matching's Easy, is the London and Norwich high road; it is an old Roman Stane Street and very straightforward and honest in its stretches. You can see the cross roads half a mile away, and the low hedges give you no chance of a surprise. Everybody is cheered by such a road, and everybody drives more confidently and quickly, and Mr. Britling particularly was heartened by it and gradually let out Gladys from the almost excessive restriction that had hitherto marked the day. "On a road like this nothing can happen," said Mr. Britling.

"Unless you broke an axle or burst a tyre," said Mr. Direck.

"My man at Matching's Easy is most careful in his inspection," said Mr. Britling, putting the accelerator well down and watching the speed indicator creep from forty to forty-five. "He went over the car not a week ago. And it's not one month old—in use that is."

Yet something did happen.

It was as they swept by the picturesque walls under the big old trees that encircle Brandismead Park. It was nothing but a slight miscalculation of distances. Ahead of

them and well to the left, rode a postman on a bicycle; towards them, with that curious effect of implacable fury peculiar to motor cycles, came a motor cyclist. First Mr. Britling thought that he would not pass between these two, then he decided that he would hurry up and do so, then he reverted to his former decision, and then it seemed to him that he was going so fast that he must inevitably run down the postman. His instinct not to do that pulled the car sharply across the path of the motor cyclist. "Oh, my God!" cried Mr. Britling. "My God!" twisted his wheel over and distributed his feet among his levers dementedly.

He had an imperfectly formed idea of getting across right in front of the motor cyclist, and then they were going down the brief grassy slope between the road and the wall, straight at the wall, and still at a good speed. The motor cyclist smacked against something and vanished from the problem. The wall seemed to rush up at them and then—collapse. There was a tremendous concussion. Mr. Direck gripped at his friend the emergency brake, but had only time to touch it before his head hit against the frame of the glass wind-screen, and a curtain fell upon everything....

He opened his eyes upon a broken wall, a crumpled motor car, and an undamaged motor cyclist in the aviator's cap and thin oilskin overalls dear to motor cyclists. Mr. Direck stared and then, still stunned and puzzled, tried to raise himself. He became aware of acute pain.

"Don't move for a bit," said the motor cyclist. "Your arm and side are rather hurt, I think...."

§ 8

In the course of the next twelve hours Mr. Direck was to make a discovery that was less common in the days before the war than it has been since. He discovered that even pain and injury may be vividly interesting and gratifying.

If any one had told him he was going to be stunned for five or six minutes, cut about the brow and face and have a bone in his wrist put out, and that as a consequence he would find himself pleased and exhilarated, he would have treated the prophecy with ridicule; but here he was lying stiffly on his back with his wrist bandaged to his side and smiling into the darkness even more brightly than he had smiled at the Essex landscape two days before. The fact is pain hurts or irritates, but in itself it does not make a healthily constituted man miserable. The expectation of pain, the certainty of

injury may make one hopeless enough, the reality rouses our resistance. Nobody wants a broken bone or a delicate wrist, but very few people are very much depressed by getting one. People can be much more depressed by smoking a hundred cigarettes in three days or losing one per cent. of their capital.

And everybody had been most delightful to Mr. Direck.

He had had the monopoly of damage. Mr. Britling, holding on to the steering wheel, had not even been thrown out. "Unless I'm internally injured," he said, "I'm not hurt at all. My liver perhaps—bruised a little...."

Gladys had been abandoned in the ditch, and they had been very kindly brought home by a passing automobile. Cecily had been at the Dower House at the moment of the rueful arrival. She had seen how an American can carry injuries. She had made sympathy and helpfulness more delightful by expressed admiration.

"She's a natural born nurse," said Mr. Direck, and then rather in the tone of one who addressed a public meeting: "But this sort of thing brings out all the good there is in a woman."

He had been quite explicit to them and more particularly to her, when they told him he must stay at the Dower House until his arm was cured. He had looked the application straight into her pretty eyes.

"If I'm to stay right here just as a consequence of that little shake up, may be for a couple of weeks, may be three, and if you're coming to do a bit of a talk to me ever and again, then I tell you I don't call this a misfortune. It isn't a misfortune. It's right down sheer good luck...."

And now he lay as straight as a mummy, with his soul filled with radiance of complete mental peace. After months of distress and confusion, he'd got straight again. He was in the middle of a real good story, bright and clean. He knew just exactly what he wanted.

"After all," he said, "it's true. There's ideals. *She's* an ideal. Why, I loved her before ever I set eyes on Mamie. I loved her before I was put into pants. That old portrait, there it was pointing my destiny.... It's affinity.... It's natural selection...."

"Well, I don't know what she thinks of me yet, but I do know very well what she's got to think of me. She's got to think all the world of me—if I break every limb of my body making her do it.

"I'd a sort of feeling it was right to go in that old automobile.

"Say what you like, there's a Guidance...."

He smiled confidentially at the darkness as if they shared a secret.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

MR. BRITLING IN SOLILOQUY

§ 1

Very different from the painful contentment of the bruised and broken Mr. Direck was the state of mind of his unwounded host. He too was sleepless, but sleepless without exaltation. The day had been too much for him altogether; his head, to borrow an admirable American expression, was "busy."

How busy it was, a whole chapter will be needed to describe....

The impression Mr. Britling had made upon Mr. Direck was one of indefatigable happiness. But there were times when Mr. Britling was called upon to pay for his general cheerful activity in lump sums of bitter sorrow. There were nights—and especially after seasons of exceptional excitement and nervous activity—when the reckoning would be presented and Mr. Britling would welter prostrate and groaning under a stormy sky of unhappiness—active insatiable unhappiness—a beating with rods.

The sorrows of the sanguine temperament are brief but furious; the world knows little of them. The world has no need to reckon with them. They cause no suicides and few crimes. They hurry past, smiting at their victim as they go. None the less they are misery. Mr. Britling in these moods did not perhaps experience the grey and hopeless desolations of the melancholic nor the red damnation of the choleric, but he saw a world that bristled with misfortune and error, with poisonous thorns and traps and swampy places and incurable blunderings. An almost insupportable remorse for being Mr. Britling would pursue him—justifying itself upon a hundred counts....

And for being such a Britling!...

Why—he revived again that bitter question of a thousand and one unhappy nights—why was he such a fool? Such a hasty fool? Why couldn't he look before he leapt? Why

did he take risks? Why was he always so ready to act upon the supposition that all was bound to go well? (He might as well have asked why he had quick brown eyes.)

Why, for instance, hadn't he adhered to the resolution of the early morning? He had begun with an extremity of caution....

It was a characteristic of these moods of Mr. Britling that they produced a physical restlessness. He kept on turning over and then turning over again, and sitting up and lying back, like a martyr on a gridiron....

This was just the latest instance of a life-long trouble. Will there ever be a sort of man whose thoughts are quick and his acts slow? Then indeed we shall have a formidable being. Mr. Britling's thoughts were quick and sanguine and his actions even more eager than his thoughts. Already while he was a young man Mr. Britling had found his acts elbow their way through the hurry of his ideas and precipitate humiliations. Long before his reasons were marshalled, his resolutions were formed. He had attempted a thousand remonstrances with himself; he had sought to remedy the defects in his own character by written inscriptions in his bedroom and memoranda inside his watch case. "Keep steady!" was one of them. "Keep the End in View." And, "Go steadfastly, coherently, continuously; only so can you go where you will." In distrusting all impulse, scrutinising all imagination, he was persuaded lay his one prospect of escape from the surprise of countless miseries. Otherwise he danced among glass bombs and barbed wire.

There had been a time when he could exhort himself to such fundamental charge and go through phases of the severest discipline. Always at last to be taken by surprise from some unexpected quarter. At last he had ceased to hope for any triumph so radical. He had been content to believe that in recent years age and a gathering habit of wisdom had somewhat slowed his leaping purpose. That if he hadn't overcome he had at least to a certain extent minimised it. But this last folly was surely the worst. To charge through this patient world with—how much did the car weigh? A ton certainly and perhaps more—reckless of every risk. Not only to himself but others. At this thought, he clutched the steering wheel again. Once more he saw the bent back of the endangered cyclist, once more he felt rather than saw the seething approach of the motor bicycle, and then through a long instant he drove helplessly at the wall....

Hell perhaps is only one such incident, indefinitely prolonged....

Anything might have been there in front of him. And indeed now, out of the dreamland to which he could not escape something had come, something that screamed sharply....

"Good God!" he cried, "if I had hit a child! I might have hit a child!" The hypothesis flashed into being with the thought, tried to escape and was caught. It was characteristic of Mr. Britling's nocturnal imagination that he should individualise this child quite sharply as rather plain and slender, with reddish hair, staring eyes, and its ribs crushed in a vivid and dreadful manner, pinned against the wall, mixed up with some bricks, only to be extracted, oh! *horribly*.

But this was not fair! He had hurt no child! He had merely pitched out Mr. Direck and broken his arm....

It wasn't his merit that the child hadn't been there!

The child might have been there!

Mere luck.

He lay staring in despair—as an involuntary God might stare at many a thing in this amazing universe—staring at the little victim his imagination had called into being only to destroy....

§ 2

If he had not crushed a child other people had. Such things happened. Vicariously at any rate he had crushed many children....

Why are children ever crushed?

And suddenly all the pain and destruction and remorse of all the accidents in the world descended upon Mr. Britling.

No longer did he ask why am I such a fool, but why are we all such fools? He became Man on the automobile of civilisation, crushing his thousands daily in his headlong and yet aimless career....

That was a trick of Mr. Britling's mind. It had this tendency to spread outward from himself to generalised issues. Many minds are like that nowadays. He was not so completely individualised as people are supposed to be individualised—in our law, in our stories, in our moral judgments. He had a vicarious factor. He could slip from concentrated reproaches to the liveliest remorse for himself as The Automobilst in General, or for himself as England, or for himself as Man. From remorse for smashing his guest and his automobile he could pass by what was for him the most

imperceptible of transitions to remorse for every accident that has ever happened through the error of an automobilist since automobiles began. All that long succession of blunderers became Mr. Britling. Or rather Mr. Britling became all that vast succession of blunderers.

These fluctuating lapses from individuation made Mr. Britling a perplexity to many who judged only by the old personal standards. At times he seemed a monster of cantankerous self-righteousness, whom nobody could please or satisfy, but indeed when he was most pitiless about the faults of his race or nation he was really reproaching himself, and when he seemed more egotistical and introspective and self-centred he was really ransacking himself for a clue to that same confusion of purposes that waste the hope and strength of humanity. And now through the busy distresses of the night it would have perplexed a watching angel to have drawn the line and shown when Mr. Britling, was grieving for his own loss and humiliation and when he was grieving for these common human weaknesses of which he had so large a share.

And this double refraction of his mind by which a concentrated and individualised Britling did but present a larger impersonal Britling beneath, carried with it a duplication of his conscience and sense of responsibility. To his personal conscience he was answerable for his private honour and his debts and the Dower House he had made and so on, but to his impersonal conscience he was answerable for the whole world. The world from the latter point of view was his egg. He had a subconscious delusion that he had laid it. He had a subconscious suspicion that he had let it cool and that it was addled. He had an urgency to incubate it. The variety and interest of his talk was largely due to that persuasion, it was a perpetual attempt to spread his mental feathers over the task before him....

§ 3

After this much of explanation it is possible to go on to the task which originally brought Mr. Direck to Matching's Easy, the task that Massachusetts society had sent him upon, the task of organising the mental unveiling of Mr. Britling. Mr. Direck saw Mr. Britling only in the daylight, and with an increasing distraction of the attention towards Miss Cecily Corner. We may see him rather *more* clearly in the darkness, without any distraction except his own.

Now the smashing of Gladys was not only the source of a series of reproaches and remorse directly arising out of the smash; it had also a wide system of collateral consequences, which were also banging and blundering their way through the Britling mind. It was extraordinarily inconvenient in quite another direction that the automobile should be destroyed. It upset certain plans of Mr. Britling's in a direction growing right out from all the Dower House world in which Mr. Britling supposed him to be completely set and rooted. There were certain matters from which Mr. Britling had been averting his mind most strenuously throughout the week-end. Now, there was no averting his mind any more.

Mr. Britling was entangled in a love affair. It was, to be exact, and disregarding minor affinities, his eighth love affair. And the new automobile, so soon as he could drive it efficiently, was to have played quite a solvent and conclusive part in certain entangled complications of this relationship.

A man of lively imagination and quick impulses naturally has love affairs as he drives himself through life, just as he naturally has accidents if he drives an automobile.

And the peculiar relations that existed between Mr. Britling and Mrs. Britling tended inevitably to make these love affairs troublesome, undignified and futile. Especially when they were viewed from the point of view of insomnia.

Mr. Britling's first marriage had been a passionately happy one. His second was by comparison a marriage in neutral tint. There is much to be said for that extreme Catholic theory which would make marriage not merely lifelong but eternal. Certainly Mr. Britling would have been a finer if not a happier creature if his sentimental existence could have died with his first wife or continued only in his love for their son. He had married in the glow of youth, he had had two years of clean and simple loving, helping, quarrelling and the happy ending of quarrels. Something went out of him into all that, which could not be renewed again. In his first extremity of grief he knew that perfectly well—and then afterwards he forgot it. While there is life there is imagination, which makes and forgets and goes on.

He met Edith under circumstances that did not in any way recall his lost Mary. He met her, as people say, "socially"; Mary, on the other hand, had been a girl at Newnham while he was a fellow of Pembroke, and there had been something of accident and something of furtiveness in their lucky discovery of each other. There had been a flush in it; there was dash in it. But Edith he saw and chose and had to woo. There was no rushing together; there was solicitation and assent. Edith was a Bachelor of Science of London University and several things like that, and she looked upon the universe under her broad forehead and broad-waving brown hair with quiet watchful eyes that

had nothing whatever to hide, a thing so incredible to Mr. Britling that he had loved and married her very largely for the serenity of her mystery. And for a time after their marriage he sailed over those brown depths plumbing furiously.

Of course he did not make his former passion for Mary at all clear to her. Indeed, while he was winning Edith it was by no means clear to himself. He was making a new emotional drama, and consciously and subconsciously he dismissed a hundred reminiscences that sought to invade the new experience, and which would have been out of key with it. And without any deliberate intention to that effect he created an atmosphere between himself and Edith in which any discussion of Mary was reduced to a minimum, and in which Hugh was accepted rather than explained. He contrived to believe that she understood all sorts of unsayable things; he invented miracles of quite uncongenial mute mutuality....

It was over the chess-board that they first began to discover their extensive difficulties of sympathy. Mr. Britling's play was characterised by a superficial brilliance, much generosity and extreme unsoundness; he always moved directly his opponent had done so—and then reflected on the situation. His reflection was commonly much wiser than his moves. Mrs. Britling was, as it were, a natural antagonist to her husband; she was as calm as he was irritable. She was never in a hurry to move, and never disposed to make a concession. Quietly, steadfastly, by caution and deliberation, without splendour, without error, she had beaten him at chess until it led to such dreadful fits of anger that he had to renounce the game altogether. After every such occasion he would be at great pains to explain that he had merely been angry with himself. Nevertheless he felt, and would not let himself think (while she concluded from incidental heated phrases), that that was not the complete truth about the outbreak.

Slowly they got through the concealments of that specious explanation. Temperamentally they were incompatible.

They were profoundly incompatible. In all things she was defensive. She never came out; never once had she surprised him halfway upon the road to her. He had to go all the way to her and knock and ring, and then she answered faithfully. She never surprised him even by unkindness. If he had a cut finger she would bind it up very skilfully and healingly, but unless he told her she never discovered he had a cut finger. He was amazed she did not know of it before it happened. He piped and she did not dance. That became the formula of his grievance. For several unhappy years she thwarted him and disappointed him, while he filled her with dumb inexplicable distresses. He had been at first so gay an activity, and then he was shattered;

fragments of him were still as gay and attractive as ever, but between were outbreaks of anger, of hostility, of something very like malignity. Only very slowly did they realise the truth of their relationship and admit to themselves that the fine bud of love between them had failed to flower, and only after long years were they able to delimit boundaries where they had imagined union, and to become—allies. If it had been reasonably possible for them to part without mutual injury and recrimination they would have done so, but two children presently held them, and gradually they had to work out the broad mutual toleration of their later relations. If there was no love and delight between them there was a real habitual affection and much mutual help. She was proud of his steady progress to distinction, proud of each intimation of respect he won; she admired and respected his work; she recognised that he had some magic, of liveliness and unexpectedness that was precious and enviable. So far as she could help him she did. And even when he knew that there was nothing behind it, that it was indeed little more than an imaginative inertness, he could still admire and respect her steady dignity and her consistent honourableness. Her practical capacity was for him a matter for continual self-congratulation. He marked the bright order of her household, her flowering borders, the prosperous high-born roses of her garden with a wondering appreciation. He had never been able to keep anything in order. He relied more and more upon her. He showed his respect for her by a scrupulous attention to her dignity, and his confidence by a franker and franker emotional neglect. Because she expressed so little he succeeded in supposing she felt little, and since nothing had come out of the brown depths of her eyes he saw fit at last to suppose no plumb-line would ever find anything there. He pursued his interests; he reached out to this and that; he travelled; she made it a matter of conscience to let him go unhampered; she felt, she thought—unrecorded; he did, and he expressed and re-expressed and over-expressed, and started this and that with quick irrepressible activity, and so there had accumulated about them the various items of the life to whose more ostensible accidents Mr. Direck was now for an indefinite period joined.

It was in the nature of Mr. Britling to incur things; it was in the nature of Mrs. Britling to establish them. Mr. Britling had taken the Dower House on impulse, and she had made it a delightful home. He had discovered the disorderly delights of mixed Sunday hockey one weekend at Pontings that had promised to be dull, and she had made it an institution.... He had come to her with his orphan boy and a memory of a passionate first loss that sometimes, and more particularly at first, he seemed to have forgotten altogether, and at other times was only too evidently lamenting with every fibre of his being. She had taken the utmost care of the relics of her duskily pretty predecessor that she found in unexpected abundance in Mr. Britling's possession, and she had

done her duty by her sometimes rather incomprehensible stepson. She never allowed herself to examine the state of her heart towards this youngster; it is possible that she did not perceive the necessity for any such examination....

So she went through life, outwardly serene and dignified, one of a great company of rather fastidious, rather unenterprising women who have turned for their happiness to secondary things, to those fair inanimate things of household and garden which do not turn again and rend one, to aestheticisms and delicacies, to order and seemliness. Moreover she found great satisfaction in the health and welfare, the growth and animation of her own two little boys. And no one knew, and perhaps even she had contrived to forget, the phases of astonishment and disillusionment, of doubt and bitterness and secret tears, that spread out through the years in which she had slowly realised that this strange, fitful, animated man who had come to her, vowing himself hers, asking for her so urgently and persuasively, was ceasing, had ceased, to love her, that his heart had escaped her, that she had missed it; she never dreamt that she had hurt it, and that after its first urgent, tumultuous, incomprehensible search for her it had hidden itself bitterly away....

§ 4

The mysterious processes of nature that had produced Mr. Britling had implanted in him an obstinate persuasion that somewhere in the world, from some human being, it was still possible to find the utmost satisfaction for every need and craving. He could imagine as existing, as waiting for him, he knew not where, a completeness of understanding, a perfection of response, that would reach all the gamut of his feelings and sensations from the most poetical to the most entirely physical, a beauty of relationship so transfiguring that not only would she—it went without saying that this completion was a woman—be perfectly beautiful in its light but, what was manifestly more incredible, that he too would be perfectly beautiful and quite at his ease.... In her presence there could be no self-reproaches, no lapses, no limitations, nothing but happiness and the happiest activities.... To such a persuasion half the imaginative people in the world succumb as readily and naturally as ducklings take to water. They do not doubt its truth any more than a thirsty camel doubts that presently it will come to a spring.

This persuasion is as foolish as though a camel hoped that some day it would drink from such a spring that it would never thirst again. For the most part Mr. Britling

ignored its presence in his mind, and resisted the impulses it started. But at odd times, and more particularly in the afternoon and while travelling and in between books, Mr. Britling so far succumbed to this strange expectation of a wonder round the corner that he slipped the anchors of his humour and self-contempt and joined the great cruising brotherhood of the Pilgrims of Love....

In fact—though he himself had never made a reckoning of it—he had been upon eight separate cruises. He was now upon the eighth....

Between these various excursions—they took him round and about the world, so to speak, they cast him away on tropical beaches, they left him dismayed on desolate seas, they involved the most startling interventions and the most inconvenient consequences—there were interludes of penetrating philosophy. For some years the suspicion had been growing up in Mr. Britling's mind that in planting this persuasion in his being, the mysterious processes of Nature had been, perhaps for some purely biological purpose, pulling, as people say, his leg, that there were not these perfect responses, that loving a woman is a thing one does thoroughly once for all—or so—and afterwards recalls regrettably in a series of vain repetitions, and that the career of the Pilgrim of Love, so soon as you strip off its credulous glamour, is either the most pitiful or the most vulgar and vile of perversions from the proper conduct of life. But this suspicion had not as yet grown to prohibitive dimensions with him, it was not sufficient to resist the seasons of high tide, the sudden promise of the salt-edged breeze, the invitation of the hovering sea-bird; and he was now concealing beneath the lively surface of activities with which Mr. Direck was now familiar, a very extensive system of distresses arising out of the latest, the eighth of these digressional adventures....

Mr. Britling had got into it very much as he had got into the ditch on the morning before his smash. He hadn't thought the affair out and he hadn't looked carefully enough. And it kept on developing in just the ways he would rather that it didn't.

The seventh affair had been very disconcerting. He had made a fool of himself with quite a young girl; he blushed to think how young; it hadn't gone very far, but it had made his nocturnal reflections so disagreeable that he had—by no means for the first time—definitely and forever given up these foolish dreams of love. And when Mrs. Harrowdean swam into his circle, she seemed just exactly what was wanted to keep his imagination out of mischief. She came bearing flattery to the pitch of adoration. She was the brightest and cleverest of young widows. She wrote quite admirably criticism in the *Scrutator* and the *Sectarian*, and occasionally poetry in the *Right Review*—when she felt disposed to do so. She had an intermittent vein of high spirits

that was almost better than humour and made her quickly popular with most of the people she met, and she was only twenty miles away in her pretty house and her absurd little jolly park.

There was something, she said, in his thought and work that was like walking in mountains. She came to him because she wanted to clamber about the peaks and glens of his mind.

It was natural to reply that he wasn't by any means the serene mountain elevation she thought him, except perhaps for a kind of loneliness....

She was a great reader of eighteenth century memoirs, and some she conveyed to him. Her mental quality was all in the vein of the friendships of Rousseau and Voltaire, and pleasantly and trippingly she led him along the primrose path of an intellectual liaison. She came first to Matching's Easy, where she was sweet and bright and vividly interested and a great contrast to Mrs. Britling, and then he and she met in London, and went off together with a fine sense of adventure for a day at Richmond, and then he took some work with him to her house and stayed there....

Then she went away into Scotland for a time and he wanted her again tremendously and clamoured for her eloquently, and then it was apparent and admitted between them that they were admirably in love, oh! immensely in love.

The transitions from emotional mountaineering to ardent intimacies were so rapid and impulsive that each phase obliterated its predecessor, and it was only with a vague perplexity that Mr. Britling found himself transferred from the rôle of a mountainous objective for pretty little pilgrims to that of a sedulous lover in pursuit of the happiness of one of the most uncertain, intricate, and entrancing of feminine personalities. This was not at all his idea of the proper relations between men and women, but Mrs. Harrowdean had a way of challenging his gallantry. She made him run about for her; she did not demand but she commanded presents and treats and surprises; she even developed a certain jealousy in him. His work began to suffer from interruptions. Yet they had glowing and entertaining moments together that could temper his rebellious thoughts with the threat of irreparable loss. "One must love, and all things in life are imperfect," was how Mr. Britling expressed his reasons for submission. And she had a hold upon him too in a certain facile pitifulness. She was little; she could be stung sometimes by the slightest touch and then her blue eyes would be bright with tears.

Those possible tears could weigh at times even more than those possible lost embraces.

And there was Oliver.

Oliver was a person Mr. Britling had never seen. He grew into the scheme of things by insensible gradations. He was a government official in London; he was, she said, extraordinarily dull, he was lacking altogether in Mr. Britling's charm and interest, but he was faithful and tender and true. And considerably younger than Mr. Britling. He asked nothing but to love. He offered honourable marriage. And when one's heart was swelling unendurably one could weep in safety on his patient shoulder. This patient shoulder of Oliver's ultimately became Mr. Britling's most exasperating rival.

She liked to vex him with Oliver. She liked to vex him generally. Indeed in this by no means abnormal love affair, there was a very strong antagonism. She seemed to resent the attraction Mr. Britling had for her and the emotions and pleasure she had with him. She seemed under the sway of an instinctive desire to make him play heavily for her, in time, in emotion, in self-respect. It was intolerable to her that he could take her easily and happily. That would be taking her cheaply. She valued his gifts by the bother they cost him, and was determined that the path of true love should not, if she could help it, run smooth. Mr. Britling on the other hand was of the school of polite and happy lovers. He thought it outrageous to dispute and contradict, and he thought that making love was a cheerful, comfortable thing to be done in a state of high good humour and intense mutual appreciation. This levity offended the lady's pride. She drew unfavourable contrasts with Oliver. If Oliver lacked charm he certainly did not lack emotion. He desired sacrifice, it seemed, almost more than satisfactions. Oliver was a person of the most exemplary miserableness; he would weep copiously and frequently. She could always make him weep when she wanted to do so. By holding out hopes and then dashing them if by no other expedient. Why did Mr. Britling never weep? She wept.

Some base streak of competitiveness in Mr. Britling's nature made it seem impossible that he should relinquish the lady to Oliver. Besides, then, what would he do with his dull days, his afternoons, his need for a properly demonstrated affection?

So Mr. Britling trod the path of his eighth digression, rather overworked in the matter of flowers and the selection of small jewellery, stalked by the invisible and indefatigable Oliver, haunted into an unwilling industry of attentions—attentions on the model of the professional lover of the French novels—by the memory and expectation of tearful scenes. "Then you don't love me! And it's all spoilt. I've risked talk and my reputation.... I was a fool ever to dream of making love beautifully..."

Exactly like running your car into a soft wet ditch when you cannot get out and you cannot get on. And your work and your interests waiting and waiting for you!...

The car itself was an outcome of the affair. It was Mrs. Harrowdean's idea, she thought chiefly of pleasant expeditions to friendly inns in remote parts of the country, inns with a flavour of tacit complicity, but it fell in very pleasantly with Mr. Britling's private resentment at the extraordinary inconvenience of the railway communications between Matching's Easy and her station at Pyecrafts, which involved a journey to Liverpool Street and a long wait at a junction. And now the car was smashed up—just when he had acquired skill enough to take it over to Pyecrafts without shame, and on Tuesday or Wednesday at latest he would have to depart in the old way by the London train....

Only the most superficial mind would assert nowadays that man is a reasonable creature. Man is an unreasonable creature, and it was entirely unreasonable and human for Mr. Britling during his nocturnal self-reproaches to mix up his secret resentment at his infatuation for Mrs. Harrowdean with his ill-advised attack upon the wall of Brandismead Park. He ought never to have bought that car; he ought never to have been so ready to meet Mrs. Harrowdean more than half-way.

What exacerbated his feeling about Mrs. Harrowdean was a new line she had recently taken with regard to Mrs. Britling. From her first rash assumption that Mr. Britling was indifferent to his wife, she had come to realise that on the contrary he was in some ways extremely tender about his wife. This struck her as an outrageous disloyalty. Instead of appreciating a paradox she resented an infidelity. She smouldered with perplexed resentment for some days, and then astonished her lover by a series of dissertations of a hostile and devastating nature upon the lady of the Dower House.

He tried to imagine he hadn't heard all that he had heard, but Mrs. Harrowdean had a nimble pen and nimbler afterthoughts, and once her mind had got to work upon the topic she developed her offensive in half-a-dozen brilliant letters.... On the other hand she professed a steadily increasing passion for Mr. Britling. And to profess passion for Mr. Britling was to put him under a sense of profound obligation—because indeed he was a modest man. He found himself in an emotional quandary.

You see, if Mrs. Harrowdean had left Mrs. Britling alone everything would have been quite tolerable. He considered Mrs. Harrowdean a charming human being, and altogether better than he deserved. Ever so much better. She was all initiative and response and that sort of thing. And she was so discreet. She had her own reputation to think about, and one or two of her predecessors—God rest the ashes of those fires!—had not been so discreet. Yet one could not have this sort of thing going on behind Edith's back. All sorts of things one might have going on behind Edith's back,

but not this writing and saying of perfectly beastly things about Edith. Nothing could alter the fact that Edith was his honour....

§ 5

Throughout the week-end Mr. Britling had kept this trouble well battened down. He had written to Mrs. Harrowdean a brief ambiguous note saying, "I am thinking over all that you have said," and after that he had scarcely thought about her at all. Or at least he had always contrived to be much more vividly thinking about something else. But now in these night silences the suppressed trouble burst hatches and rose about him.

What a mess he had made of the whole scheme of his emotional life! There had been a time when he had started out as gaily with his passions and his honour as he had started out with Gladys to go to Market Saffron. He had as little taste for complications as he had for ditches. And now his passions and his honour were in a worse case even than poor muddy smashed up Gladys as the cart-horses towed her off, for she at any rate might be repaired. But he—he was a terribly patched fabric of explanations now. Not indeed that he had ever stooped to explanations. But there he was! Far away, like a star seen down the length of a tunnel, was that first sad story of a love as clean as starlight. It had been all over by eight-and-twenty and he could find it in his heart to grieve that he had ever given a thought to love again. He should have lived a decent widower.... Then Edith had come into his life, Edith that honest and unconscious defaulter. And there again he should have stuck to his disappointment. He had stuck to it—nine days out of every ten. It's the tenth day, it's the odd seductive moment, it's the instant of confident pride—and there is your sanguine temperament in the ditch.

He began to recapitulate items in the catalogue of his escapades, and the details of his automobile misadventures mixed themselves up with the story of his heart steering. For example there was that tremendous Siddons affair. He had been taking the corner of a girlish friendship and he had taken it altogether too far. What a frightful mess that had been! When once one is off the road anything may happen, from a crumpled mud-guard to the car on the top of you. And there was his forty miles an hour spurt with the great and gifted Delphine Marquise—for whom he was to have written a play and been a perfect Annunzio. Until Willersley appeared—very like the motor-cyclist—buzzing in the opposite direction. And then had ensued angers, humiliations....

Had every man this sort of crowded catalogue? Was every forty-five-year-old memory a dark tunnel receding from the star of youth? It is surely a pity that life cannot end at thirty. It comes to one clean and in perfect order....

Is experience worth having?

What a clean, straight thing the spirit of youth is. It is like a bright new spear. It is like a finely tempered sword. The figure of his boy took possession of his mind, his boy who looked out on the world with his mother's dark eyes, the slender son of that whole-hearted first love. He was a being at once fine and simple, an intimate mystery. Must he in his turn get dented and wrinkled and tarnished?

The boy was in trouble. What was the trouble?

Was it some form of the same trouble that had so tangled and tainted and scarred the private pride of his father? And how was it possible for Mr. Britling, disfigured by heedless misadventures, embarrassed by complications and concealments, to help this honest youngster out of his perplexities? He imagined possible forms of these perplexities. Graceless forms. Ugly forms. Such forms as only the nocturnal imagination would have dared present....

Oh, why had he been such a Britling? Why was he still such a Britling?

Mr. Britling sat up in his bed and beat at the bedclothes with his fists. He uttered uncompleted vows, "From this hour forth ... from this hour forth...."

He must do something, he felt. At any rate he had his experiences. He could warn. He could explain away. Perhaps he might help to extricate, if things had got to that pitch.

Should he write to his son? For a time he revolved a long, tactful letter in his mind. But that was impossible. Suppose the trouble was something quite different? It would have to be a letter in the most general terms....

§ 6

It was in the doubly refracting nature of Mr. Britling's mind that while he was deploring his inefficiency in regard to his son, he was also deploring the ineffectiveness of all his generation of parents. Quite insensibly his mind passed over to the generalised point of view.

In his talks with Mr. Direck, Mr. Britling could present England as a great and amiable spectacle of carelessness and relaxation, but was it indeed an amiable spectacle? The point that Mr. Direck had made about the barn rankled in his thoughts. His barn was a barn no longer, his farmyard held no cattle; he was just living laxly in the buildings that ancient needs had made, he was living on the accumulated prosperity of former times, the spendthrift heir of toiling generations. Not only was he a pampered, undisciplined sort of human being; he was living in a pampered, undisciplined sort of community. The two things went together.... This confounded Irish business, one could laugh at it in the daylight, but was it indeed a thing to laugh at? We were drifting lazily towards a real disaster. We had a government that seemed guided by the principles of Mr. Micawber, and adopted for its watchword "Wait and see." For months now this trouble had grown more threatening. Suppose presently that civil war broke out in Ireland! Suppose presently that these irritated, mishandled suffragettes did some desperate irreconcilable thing, assassinated for example! The bomb in Westminster Abbey the other day might have killed a dozen people.... Suppose the smouldering criticism of British rule in India and Egypt were fanned by administrative indiscretions into a flame....

And then suppose Germany had made trouble....

Usually Mr. Britling kept his mind off Germany. In the daytime he pretended Germany meant nothing to England. He hated alarmists. He hated disagreeable possibilities. He declared the idea of a whole vast nation waiting to strike at us incredible. Why should they? You cannot have seventy million lunatics.... But in the darkness of the night one cannot dismiss things in this way. Suppose, after all, their army was more than a parade, their navy more than a protest?

We might be caught—it was only in the vast melancholia of such occasions that Mr. Britling would admit such possibilities, but we might be caught by some sudden declaration of war.... And how should we face it?

He recalled the afternoon's talk at Claverings and such samples of our governmental machinery as he chanced to number among his personal acquaintance. Suppose suddenly the enemy struck! With Raeburn and his friends to defend us! Or if the shock tumbled them out of power, then with these vituperative Tories, these spiteful advocates of weak tyrannies and privileged pretences in the place of them. There was no leadership in England. In the lucid darkness he knew that with a terrible certitude. He had a horrible vision of things disastrously muffled; of Lady Frensham and her *Morning Post* friends first garrulously and maliciously "patriotic," screaming her way with incalculable mischiefs through the storm, and finally discovering that the

Germans were the real aristocrats and organising our national capitulation on that understanding. He knew from talk he had heard that the navy was weak in mines and torpedoes, unprovided with the great monitors needed for a war with Germany; torn by doctrinaire feuds; nevertheless the sea power was our only defence. In the whole country we might muster a military miscellany of perhaps three hundred thousand men. And he had no faith in their equipment, in their direction. General French, the one man who had his entire confidence, had been forced to resign through some lawyer's misunderstanding about the Irish difficulty. He did not believe any plans existed for such a war as Germany might force upon us, any calculation, any foresight of the thing at all.

Why had we no foresight? Why had we this wilful blindness to disagreeable possibilities? Why did we lie so open to the unexpected crisis? Just what he said of himself he said also of his country. It was curious to remember that. To realise how closely Dower House could play the microcosm to the whole Empire....

It became relevant to the trend of his thoughts that his son had through his mother a strong strain of the dark Irish in his composition.

How we had wasted Ireland! The rich values that lay in Ireland, the gallantry and gifts, the possible friendliness, all these things were being left to the Ulster politicians and the Tory women to poison and spoil, just as we left India to the traditions of the chattering army women and the repressive instincts of our mandarins. We were too lazy, we were too negligent. We passed our indolent days leaving everything to somebody else. Was this the incurable British, just as it was the incurable Britling, quality?

Was the whole prosperity of the British, the far-flung empire, the securities, the busy order, just their good luck? It was a question he had asked a hundred times of his national as of his personal self. No doubt luck had favoured him. He was prosperous, and he was still only at the livelier end of middle age. But was there not also a personal factor, a meritorious factor? Luck had favoured the British with a well-placed island, a hardening climate, accessible minerals, but then too was there not also a national virtue? Once he had believed in that, in a certain gallantry, a noble levity, an underlying sound sense. The last ten years of politics had made him doubt that profoundly. He clung to it still, but without confidence. In the night that dear persuasion left him altogether.... As for himself he had a certain brightness and liveliness of mind, but the year of his fellowship had been a soft year, he had got on to *The Times* through something very like a misapprehension, and it was the chances of a dinner and a duchess that had given him the opportunity of the Kahn show. He'd

dropped into good things that suited him. That at any rate was the essence of it. And these lucky chances had been no incentive to further effort. Because things had gone easily and rapidly with him he had developed indolence into a philosophy. Here he was just over forty, and explaining to the world, explaining all through the week-end to this American—until even God could endure it no longer and the smash stopped him—how excellent was the backwardness of Essex and English go-as-you-please, and how through good temper it made in some mysterious way for all that was desirable. A fat English doctrine. *Punch* has preached it for forty years.

But this wasn't what he had always been. He thought of the strenuous intentions of his youth, before he had got into this turmoil of amorous experiences, while he was still out there with the clean star of youth. As Hugh was....

In those days he had had no amiable doctrine of compromise. He had truckled to no "domesticated God," but talked of the "pitiless truth"; he had tolerated no easygoing pseudo-aristocratic social system, but dreamt of such a democracy "mewing its mighty youth" as the world had never seen. He had thought that his brains were to do their share in building up this great national *imago*, winged, divine, out of the clumsy, crawling, snobbish, comfort-loving caterpillar of Victorian England. With such dreams his life had started, and the light of them, perhaps, had helped him to his rapid success. And then his wife had died, and he had married again and become somehow more interested in his income, and then the rather expensive first of the eight experiences had drained off so much of his imaginative energy, and the second had drained off so much, and there had been quarrels and feuds, and the way had been lost, and the days had passed. He hadn't failed. Indeed he counted as a success among his generation. He alone, in the night watches, could gauge the quality of that success. He was widely known, reputedly known; he prospered. Much had come, oh! by a mysterious luck, but everything was doomed by his invincible defects. Beneath that hollow, enviable show there ached waste. Waste, waste, waste—his heart, his imagination, his wife, his son, his country—his automobile....

Then there flashed into his mind a last straw of disagreeable realisation.

He hadn't as yet insured his automobile! He had meant to do so. The papers were on his writing-desk.

On these black nights, when the personal Mr. Britling would lie awake thinking how unsatisfactorily Mr. Britling was going on, and when the impersonal Mr. Britling would be thinking how unsatisfactorily his universe was going on, the whole mental process had a likeness to some complex piece of orchestral music wherein the organ deplored the melancholy destinies of the race while the piccolo lamented the secret trouble of Mrs. Harrowdean; the big drum thundered at the Irish politicians, and all the violins bewailed the intellectual laxity of the university system. Meanwhile the trumpets prophesied wars and disasters, the cymbals ever and again inserted a clashing jar about the fatal delay in the automobile insurance, while the triangle broke into a plangent solo on the topic of a certain rotten gate-post he always forgot in the daytime, and how in consequence the cows from the glebe farm got into the garden and ate Mrs. Britling's carnations.

Time after time he had promised to see to that gatepost....

The organ *motif* battled its way to complete predominance. The lesser themes were drowned or absorbed. Mr. Britling returned from the rôle of an incompetent automobilist to the rôle of a soul naked in space and time wrestling with giant questions. These cosmic solitudes, it may be, are the last penalty of irreligion. Was Huxley right, and was all humanity, even as Mr. Britling, a careless, fitful thing, playing a tragically hopeless game, thinking too slightly, moving too quickly, against a relentless antagonist?

Or is the whole thing just witless, accidentally cruel perhaps, but not malignant? Or is it wise, and merely refusing to pamper us? Is there somewhere in the immensities some responsive kindness, some faint hope of toleration and assistance, something sensibly on our side against death and mechanical cruelty? If so, it certainly refuses to pamper us.... But if the whole thing is cruel, perhaps also it is witless and will-less? One cannot imagine the ruler of everything a devil—that would be silly. So if at the worst it is inanimate then anyhow we have our poor wills and our poor wits to pit against it. And manifestly then, the good of life, the significance of any life that is not mere receptivity, lies in the disciplined and clarified will and the sharpened and tempered mind. And what for the last twenty years—for all his lectures and writings—had he been doing to marshal the will and harden the mind which were his weapons against the Dark? He was ready enough to blame others—dons, politicians, public apathy, but what was he himself doing?

What was he doing now?

Lying in bed!

His son was drifting to ruin, his country was going to the devil, the house was a hospital of people wounded by his carelessness, the country roads choked with his smashed (and uninsured) automobiles, the cows were probably lined up along the borders and munching Edith's carnations at this very moment, his pocketbook and bureau were stuffed with venomous insults about her—and he was just lying in bed!

Suddenly Mr. Britling threw back his bedclothes and felt for the matches on his bedside table.

Indeed this was by no means the first time that his brain had become a whirring torment in his skull. Previous experiences had led to the most careful provision for exactly such states. Over the end of the bed hung a light, warm pyjama suit of llama-wool, and at the feet of it were two tall boots of the same material that buckled to the middle of his calf. So protected, Mr. Britling proceeded to make himself tea. A Primus stove stood ready inside the fender of his fireplace, and on it was a brightly polished brass kettle filled with water; a little table carried a tea-caddy, a tea-pot, a lemon and a glass. Mr. Britling lit the stove and then strolled to his desk. He was going to write certain "Plain Words about Ireland." He lit his study lamp and meditated beside it until a sound of water boiling called him to his tea-making.

He returned to his desk stirring the lemon in his glass of tea. He would write the plain common sense of this Irish situation. He would put things so plainly that this squabbling folly would *have* to cease. It should be done austere, with a sort of ironical directness. There should be no abuse, no bitterness, only a deep passion of sanity.

What is the good of grieving over a smashed automobile?

He sipped his tea and made a few notes on his writing pad. His face in the light of his shaded reading lamp had lost its distraught expression, his hand fingered his familiar fountain pen....

§ 8

The next morning Mr. Britling came into Mr. Direck's room. He was pink from his morning bath, he was wearing a cheerful green-and-blue silk dressing gown, he had shaved already, he showed no trace of his nocturnal vigil. In the bathroom he had whistled like a bird. "Had a good night?" he said. "That's famous. So did I. And the wrist and arm didn't even ache enough to keep you awake?"

"I thought I heard you talking and walking about," said Mr. Direck.

"I got up for a little bit and worked. I often do that. I hope I didn't disturb you. Just for an hour or so. It's so delightfully quiet in the night...."

He went to the window and blinked at the garden outside. His two younger sons appeared on their bicycles returning from some early expedition. He waved a hand of greeting. It was one of those summer mornings when attenuated mist seems to fill the very air with sunshine dust.

"This is the sunniest morning bedroom in the house," he said. "It's south-east."

The sunlight slashed into the masses of the blue cedar outside with a score of golden spears.

"The Dayspring from on High," he said.... "I thought of rather a useful pamphlet in the night.

"I've been thinking about your luggage at that hotel," he went on, turning to his guest again. "You'll have to write and get it packed up and sent down here—

"No," he said, "we won't let you go until you can hit out with that arm and fell a man. Listen!"

Mr. Direck could not distinguish any definite sound.

"The smell of frying rashers, I mean," said Mr. Britling. "It's the clarion of the morn in every proper English home...."

"You'd like a rasher, coffee?"

"It's good to work in the night, and it's good to wake in the morning," said Mr. Britling, rubbing his hands together. "I suppose I wrote nearly two thousand words. So quiet one is, so concentrated. And as soon as I have had my breakfast I shall go on with it again."

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

THE COMING OF THE DAY

It was quite characteristic of the state of mind of England in the summer of 1914 that Mr. Britling should be mightily concerned about the conflict in Ireland, and almost deliberately negligent of the possibility of a war with Germany.

The armament of Germany, the hostility of Germany, the consistent assertion of Germany, the world-wide clash of British and German interests, had been facts in the consciousness of Englishmen for more than a quarter of a century. A whole generation had been born and brought up in the threat of this German war. A threat that goes on for too long ceases to have the effect of a threat, and this overhanging possibility had become a fixed and scarcely disturbing feature of the British situation. It kept the navy sedulous and Colonel Rendevous uneasy; it stimulated a small and not very influential section of the press to a series of reminders that bored Mr. Britling acutely, it was the excuse for an agitation that made national service ridiculous, and quite subconsciously it affected his attitude to a hundred things. For example, it was a factor in his very keen indignation at the Tory levity in Ireland, in his disgust with many things that irritated or estranged Indian feeling. It bored him; there it was, a danger, and there was no denying it, and yet he believed firmly that it was a mine that would never be fired, an avalanche that would never fall. It was a nuisance, a stupidity, that kept Europe drilling and wasted enormous sums on unavoidable preparations; it hung up everything like a noisy argument in a drawing-room, but that human weakness and folly would ever let the mine actually explode he did not believe. He had been in France in 1911, he had seen how close things had come then to a conflict, and the fact that they had not come to a conflict had enormously strengthened his natural disposition to believe that at bottom Germany was sane and her militarism a bluff.

But the Irish difficulty was a different thing. There, he felt, was need for the liveliest exertions. A few obstinate people in influential positions were manifestly pushing things to an outrageous point....

He wrote through the morning—and as the morning progressed the judicial calm of his opening intentions warmed to a certain regrettable vigour of phrasing about our politicians, about our political ladies, and our hand-to-mouth press....

He came down to lunch in a frayed, exhausted condition, and was much afflicted by a series of questions from Herr Heinrich. For it was an incurable characteristic of Herr Heinrich that he asked questions; the greater part of his conversation took the form of question and answer, and his thirst for information was as marked as his belief that German should not simply be spoken but spoken "out loud." He invariably prefaced his inquiries with the word "Please," and he insisted upon ascribing an omniscience to his employer that it was extremely irksome to justify after a strenuous morning of

enthusiastic literary effort. He now took the opportunity of a lull in the solitudes and congratulations that had followed Mr. Direck's appearance—and Mr. Direck was so little shattered by his misadventure that with the assistance of the kindly Teddy he had got up and dressed and come down to lunch—to put the matter that had been occupying his mind all the morning, even to the detriment of the lessons of the Masters Britling.

"Please!" he said, going a deeper shade of pink and partly turning to Mr. Britling.

A look of resignation came into Mr. Britling's eyes. "Yes?" he said.

"I do not think it will be wise to take my ticket for the Esperanto Conference at Boulogne. Because I think it is probable to be war between Austria and Servia, and that Russia may make war on Austria."

"That may happen. But I think it improbable."

"If Russia makes war on Austria, Germany will make war on Russia, will she not?"

"Not if she is wise," said Mr. Britling, "because that would bring in France."

"That is why I ask. If Germany goes to war with France I should have to go to Germany to do my service. It will be a great inconvenience to me."

"I don't imagine Germany will do anything so frantic as to attack Russia. That would not only bring in France but ourselves."

"England?"

"Of course. We can't afford to see France go under. The thing is as plain as daylight. So plain that it cannot possibly happen.... Cannot.... Unless Germany wants a universal war."

"Thank you," said Herr Heinrich, looking obedient rather than reassured.

"I suppose now," said Mr. Direck after a pause, "that there isn't any strong party in Germany that wants a war. That young Crown Prince, for example."

"They keep him in order," said Mr. Britling a little irritably. "They keep him in order...."

"I used to be an alarmist about Germany," said Mr. Britling, "but I have come to feel more and more confidence in the sound common sense of the mass of the German population, and in the Emperor too if it comes to that. He is—if Herr Heinrich will permit me to agree with his own German comic papers—sometimes a little theatrical,

sometimes a little egotistical, but in his operatic, boldly coloured way he means peace. I am convinced he means peace...."

§ 2

After lunch Mr. Britling had a brilliant idea for the ease and comfort of Mr. Direck.

It seemed as though Mr. Direck would be unable to write any letters until his wrist had mended. Teddy tried him with a typewriter, but Mr. Direck was very awkward with his left hand, and then Mr. Britling suddenly remembered a little peculiarity he had which it was possible that Mr. Direck might share unconsciously, and that was his gift of looking-glass writing with his left hand. Mr. Britling had found out quite by chance in his schoolboy days that while his right hand had been laboriously learning to write, his left hand, all unsuspected, had been picking up the same lesson, and that by taking a pencil in his left hand and writing from right to left, without watching what he was writing, and then examining the scrawl in a mirror, he could reproduce his own handwriting in exact reverse. About three people out of five have this often quite unsuspected ability. He demonstrated his gift, and then Miss Cecily Corner, who had dropped in in a casual sort of way to ask about Mr. Direck, tried it, and then Mr. Direck tried it. And they could all do it. And then Teddy brought a sheet of copying carbon, and so Mr. Direck, by using the carbon reversed under his paper, was restored to the world of correspondence again.

They sat round a little table under the cedar trees amusing themselves with these experiments, and after that Cecily and Mr. Britling and the two small boys entertained themselves by drawing pigs with their eyes shut, and then Mr. Britling and Teddy played hard at Badminton until it was time for tea. And Cecily sat by Mr. Direck and took an interest in his accident, and he told her about summer holidays in the Adirondacks and how he loved to travel. She said she would love to travel. He said that so soon as he was better he would go on to Paris and then into Germany. He was extraordinarily curious about this Germany and its tremendous militarism. He'd far rather see it than Italy, which was, he thought, just all art and ancient history. His turn was for modern problems. Though of course he didn't intend to leave out Italy while he was at it. And then their talk was scattered, and there was great excitement because Herr Heinrich had lost his squirrel.

He appeared coming out of the house into the sunshine, and so distraught that he had forgotten the protection of his hat. He was very pink and deeply moved.

"But what shall I do without him?" he cried. "He has gone!"

The squirrel, Mr. Direck gathered, had been bought by Mrs. Britling for the boys some month or so ago; it had been christened "Bill" and adored and then neglected, until Herr Heinrich took it over. It had filled a place in his ample heart that the none too demonstrative affection of the Britling household had left empty. He abandoned his pursuit of philology almost entirely for the cherishing and adoration of this busy, nimble little creature. He carried it off to his own room, where it ran loose and took the greatest liberties with him and his apartment. It was an extraordinarily bold and savage little beast even for a squirrel, but Herr Heinrich had set his heart and his very large and patient will upon the establishment of sentimental relations. He believed that ultimately Bill would let himself be stroked, that he would make Bill love him and understand him, and that his would be the only hand that Bill would ever suffer to touch him. In the meanwhile even the untamed Bill was wonderful to watch. One could watch him forever. His front paws were like hands, like a musician's hands, very long and narrow. "He would be a musician if he could only make his fingers go apart, because when I play my violin he listens. He is attentive."

The entire household became interested in Herr Heinrich's attacks upon Bill's affection. They watched his fingers with particular interest because it was upon those that Bill vented his failures to respond to the stroking advances.

"To-day I have stroked him once and he has bitten me three times," Herr Heinrich reported. "Soon I will stroke him three times and he shall not bite me at all.... Also yesterday he climbed up me and sat on my shoulder, and suddenly bit my ear. It was not hard he bit, but sudden.

"He does not mean to bite," said Herr Heinrich. "Because when he has bit me he is sorry. He is ashamed.

"You can see he is ashamed."

Assisted by the two small boys, Herr Heinrich presently got a huge bough of oak and brought it into his room, converting the entire apartment into the likeness of an aviary. "For this," said Herr Heinrich, looking grave and diplomatic through his glasses, "Billy will be very grateful. And it will give him confidence with me. It will make him feel we are in the forest together."

Mrs. Britling came to console her husband in the matter.

"It is not right that the bedroom should be filled with trees. All sorts of dust and litter came in with it."

"If it amuses him," said Mr. Britling.

"But it makes work for the servants."

"Do they complain?"

"No."

"Things will adjust themselves. And it is amusing that he should do such a thing...."

And now Billy had disappeared, and Herr Heinrich was on the verge of tears. It was so ungrateful of Billy. Without a word.

"They leave my window open," he complained to Mr. Direck. "Often I have askit them not to. And of course he did not understand. He has out climbit by the ivy. Anything may have happened to him. Anything. He is not used to going out alone. He is too young.

"Perhaps if I call—"

And suddenly he had gone off round the house crying: "Beelee! Beelee! Here is an almond for you! An almond, Beelee!"

"Makes me want to get up and help," said Mr. Direck. "It's a tragedy."

Everybody else was helping. Even the gardener and his boy knocked off work and explored the upper recesses of various possible trees.

"He is too young," said Herr Heinrich, drifting back.... And then presently: "If he heard my voice I am sure he would show himself. But he does not show himself."

It was clear he feared the worst....

At supper Billy was the sole topic of conversation, and condolence was in the air. The impression that on the whole he had displayed rather a brutal character was combated by Herr Heinrich, who held that a certain brusqueness was Billy's only fault, and told anecdotes, almost sacred anecdotes, of the little creature's tenderer, nobler side. "When I feed him always he says, 'Thank you,'" said Herr Heinrich. "He never fails." He betrayed darker thoughts. "When I went round by the barn there was a cat that sat and looked at me out of a laurel bush," he said. "I do not like cats."

Mr. Lawrence Carmine, who had dropped in, was suddenly reminded of that lugubrious old ballad, "The Mistletoe Bough," and recited large worn fragments of it impressively. It tells of how a beautiful girl hid away in a chest during a Christmas game of hide-and-seek, and how she was found, a dried vestige, years afterwards. It

took a very powerful hold upon Herr Heinrich's imagination. "Let us now," he said, "make an examination of every box and cupboard and drawer. Marking each as we go...."

When Mr. Britling went to bed that night, after a long gossip with Carmine about the Bramo Samaj and modern developments of Indian thought generally, the squirrel was still undiscovered.

The worthy modern thinker undressed slowly, blew out his candle and got into bed. Still meditating deeply upon the God of the Tagores, he thrust his right hand under his pillow according to his usual practice, and encountered something soft and warm and active. He shot out of bed convulsively, lit his candle, and lifted his pillow discreetly.

He discovered the missing Billy looking crumpled and annoyed.

For some moments there was a lively struggle before Billy was gripped. He chattered furiously and bit Mr. Britling twice. Then Mr. Britling was out in the passage with the wriggling lump of warm fur in his hand, and paddling along in the darkness to the door of Herr Heinrich. He opened it softly.

A startled white figure sat up in bed sharply.

"Billy," said Mr. Britling by way of explanation, dropped his capture on the carpet, and shut the door on the touching reunion.

§ 3

A day was to come when Mr. Britling was to go over the history of that sunny July with incredulous minuteness, trying to trace the real succession of events that led from the startling crime at Sarajevo to Europe's last swift rush into war. In a sense it was untraceable; in a sense it was so obvious that he was amazed the whole world had not watched the coming of disaster. The plain fact of the case was that there was no direct connection; the Sarajevo murders were dropped for two whole weeks out of the general consciousness, they went out of the papers, they ceased to be discussed; then they were picked up again and used as an excuse for war. Germany, armed so as to be a threat to all the world, weary at last of her mighty vigil, watching the course of events, decided that her moment had come, and snatched the dead archduke out of his grave again to serve her tremendous ambition.

It may well have seemed to the belligerent German patriot that all her possible foes were confused, divided within themselves, at an extremity of distraction and impotence. The British Isles seemed slipping steadily into civil war. Threat was met by counter-threat, violent fool competed with violent fool for the admiration of the world, the National Volunteers armed against the Ulster men; everything moved on with a kind of mechanical precision from parade and meeting towards the fatal gun-running of Howth and the first bloodshed in Dublin streets. That wretched affray, far more than any other single thing, must have stiffened Germany in the course she had chosen. There can be no doubt of it; the mischief makers of Ireland set the final confirmation upon the European war. In England itself there was a summer fever of strikes; Liverpool was choked by a dockers' strike, the East Anglian agricultural labourers were in revolt, and the building trade throughout the country was on the verge of a lockout. Russia seemed to be in the crisis of a social revolution. From Baku to St. Petersburg there were insurrectionary movements in the towns, and on the 23rd—the very day of the Austrian ultimatum—Cossacks were storming barbed wire entanglements in the streets of the capital. The London Stock Exchange was in a state of panic disorganisation because of a vast mysterious selling of securities from abroad. And France, France it seemed was lost to all other consideration in the enthralling confrontations and denunciations of the Caillaux murder trial, the trial of the wife of her ex-prime Minister for the murder of a blackmailing journalist. It was a case full of the vulgarest sexual violence. Before so piquant a spectacle France it seemed could have no time nor attention for the revelation of M. Humbert, the Reporter of the Army Committee, proclaiming that the artillery was short of ammunition, that her infantry had boots "thirty years old" and not enough of those....

Such were the appearances of things. Can it be wondered if it seemed to the German mind that the moment for the triumphant assertion of the German predominance in the world had come? A day or so before the Dublin shooting, the murder of Sarajevo had been dragged again into the foreground of the world's affairs by an ultimatum from Austria to Serbia of the extremest violence. From the hour when the ultimatum was discharged the way to Armageddon lay wide and unavoidable before the feet of Europe. After the Dublin conflict there was no turning back. For a week Europe was occupied by proceedings that were little more than the recital of a formula. Austria could not withdraw her unqualified threats without admitting error and defeat, Russia could not desert Serbia without disgrace, Germany stood behind Austria, France was bound to Russia by a long confederacy of mutual support, and it was impossible for England to witness the destruction of France or the further strengthening of a loud and threatening rival. It may be that Germany counted on Russia giving way to her, it may

be she counted on the indecisions and feeble perplexities of England, both these possibilities were in the reckoning, but chiefly she counted on war. She counted on war, and since no nation in all the world had ever been so fully prepared in every way for war as she was, she also counted on victory.

One writes "Germany." That is how one writes of nations, as though they had single brains and single purposes. But indeed while Mr. Britling lay awake and thought of his son and Lady Frensham and his smashed automobile and Mrs. Harrowdean's trick of abusive letter-writing and of God and evil and a thousand perplexities, a multitude of other brains must also have been busy, lying also in beds or sitting in studies or watching in guard-rooms or chatting belatedly in cafés or smoking-rooms or pacing the bridges of battleships or walking along in city or country, upon this huge possibility the crime of Sarajevo had just opened, and of the state of the world in relation to such possibilities. Few women, one guesses, heeded what was happening, and of the men, the men whose decision to launch that implacable threat turned the destinies of the world to war, there is no reason to believe that a single one of them had anything approaching the imaginative power needed to understand fully what it was they were doing. We have looked for an hour or so into the seething pot of Mr. Britling's brain and marked its multiple strands, its inconsistencies, its irrational transitions. It was but a specimen. Nearly every brain of the select few that counted in this cardinal determination of the world's destinies, had its streak of personal motive, its absurd and petty impulses and deflections. One man decided to say *this* because if he said *that* he would contradict something he had said and printed four or five days ago; another took a certain line because so he saw his best opportunity of putting a rival into a perplexity. It would be strange if one could reach out now and recover the states of mind of two such beings as the German Kaiser and his eldest son as Europe stumbled towards her fate through the long days and warm, close nights of that July. Here was the occasion for which so much of their lives had been but the large pretentious preparation, coming right into their hands to use or forgo, here was the opportunity that would put them into the very forefront of history forever; this journalist emperor with the paralysed arm, this common-fibred, sly, lascivious son. It is impossible that they did not dream of glory over all the world, of triumphant processions, of a world-throne that would outshine Caesar's, of a godlike elevation, of acting Divus Caesar while yet alive. And being what they were they must have imagined spectators, and the young man, who was after all a young man of particularly poor quality, imagined no doubt certain women onlookers, certain humiliated and astonished friends, and thought of the clothes he would wear and the gestures he would make. The nickname his English cousins had given this heir to all

the glories was the "White Rabbit." He was the backbone of the war party at court. And presently he stole bric-à-brac. That will help posterity to the proper values of things in 1914. And the Teutonic generals and admirals and strategists with their patient and perfect plans, who were so confident of victory, each within a busy skull must have enacted anticipatory dreams of his personal success and marshalled his willing and unwilling admirers. Readers of histories and memoirs as most of this class of men are, they must have composed little eulogistic descriptions of the part themselves were to play in the opening drama, imagined pleasing vindications and interesting documents. Some of them perhaps saw difficulties, but few foresaw failure. For all this set of brains the thing came as a choice to take or reject; they could make war or prevent it. And they chose war.

It is doubtful if any one outside the directing intelligence of Germany and Austria saw anything so plain. The initiative was with Germany. The Russian brains and the French brains and the British brains, the few that were really coming round to look at this problem squarely, had a far less simple set of problems and profounder uncertainties. To Mr. Britling's mind the Round Table Conference at Buckingham Palace was typical of the disunion and indecision that lasted up to the very outbreak of hostilities. The solemn violence of Sir Edward Carson was intensely antipathetic to Mr. Britling, and in his retrospective inquiries he pictured to himself that dark figure with its dropping under-lip, seated, heavy and obstinate, at that discussion, still implacable though the King had but just departed after a little speech that was packed with veiled intimations of imminent danger...

Mr. Britling had no mercy in his mind for the treason of obstinate egotism and for persistence in a mistaken course. His own temperamental weaknesses lay in such different directions. He was always ready to leave one trail for another; he was always open to conviction, trusting to the essentials of his character for an ultimate consistency. He hated Carson in those days as a Scotch terrier might hate a bloodhound, as something at once more effective and impressive, and exasperatingly, infinitely less intelligent.

§ 4

Thus—a vivid fact as yet only in a few hundred skulls or so—the vast catastrophe of the Great War gathered behind the idle, dispersed and confused spectacle of an indifferent world, very much as the storms and rains of late September gathered

behind the glow and lassitudes of August, and with scarcely more of set human intention. For the greater part of mankind the European international situation was at most something in the papers, no more important than the political disturbances in South Africa, where the Herzogites were curiously uneasy, or the possible trouble between Turkey and Greece. The things that really interested people in England during the last months of peace were boxing and the summer sales. A brilliant young Frenchman, Carpentier, who had knocked out Bombardier Wells, came over again to defeat Gunboat Smith, and did so to the infinite delight of France and the whole Latin world, amidst the generous applause of Anglo-Saxondom. And there was also a British triumph over the Americans at polo, and a lively and cultured newspaper discussion about a proper motto for the arms of the London County Council. The trial of Madame Caillaux filled the papers with animated reports and vivid pictures; Gregori Rasputin was stabbed and became the subject of much lively gossip about the Russian Court; and Ulivi, the Italian impostor who claimed he could explode mines by means of an "ultra-red" ray, was exposed and fled with a lady, very amusingly. For a few days all the work at Woolwich Arsenal was held up because a certain Mr. Entwistle, having refused to erect a machine on a concrete bed laid down by non-unionists, was rather uncivilly dismissed, and the Irish trouble pounded along its tiresome mischievous way. People gave a divided attention to these various topics, and went about their individual businesses.

And at Dower House they went about their businesses. Mr. Direck's arm healed rapidly; Cecily Corner and he talked of their objects in life and Utopias and the books of Mr. Britling, and he got down from a London bookseller Baedeker's guides for Holland and Belgium, South Germany and Italy; Herr Heinrich after some doubt sent in his application form and his preliminary deposit for the Esperanto Conference at Boulogne, and Billy consented to be stroked three times but continued to bite with great vigour and promptitude. And the trouble about Hugh, Mr. Britling's eldest son, resolved itself into nothing of any vital importance, and settled itself very easily.

§ 5

After Hugh had cleared things up and gone back to London Mr. Britling was inclined to think that such a thing as apprehension was a sin against the general fairness and integrity of life.

Of all things in the world Hugh was the one that could most easily rouse Mr. Britling's unhappy aptitude for distressing imaginations. Hugh was nearer by far to his heart and nerves than any other creature. In the last few years Mr. Britling, by the light of a variety of emotional excursions in other directions, had been discovering this. Whatever Mr. Britling discovered he talked about; he had evolved from his realisation of this tenderness, which was without an effort so much tenderer than all the subtle and tremendous feelings he had attempted in his—excursions, the theory that he had expounded to Mr. Direck that it is only through our children that we are able to achieve disinterested love, real love. But that left unexplained that far more intimate emotional hold of Hugh than of his very jolly little step-brothers. That was a fact into which Mr. Britling rather sedulously wouldn't look....

Mr. Britling was probably much franker and more open-eyed with himself and the universe than a great number of intelligent people, and yet there were quite a number of aspects of his relations with his wife, with people about him, with his country and God and the nature of things, upon which he turned his back with an attentive persistence. But a back too resolutely turned may be as indicative as a pointing finger, and in this retrogressive way, and tacitly even so far as his formal thoughts, his unspoken comments, went, Mr. Britling knew that he loved his son because he had lavished the most hope and the most imagination upon him, because he was the one living continuation of that dear life with Mary, so lovingly stormy at the time, so fine now in memory, that had really possessed the whole heart of Mr. Britling. The boy had been the joy and marvel of the young parents; it was incredible to them that there had ever been a creature so delicate and sweet, and they brought considerable imagination and humour to the detailed study of his minute personality and to the forecasting of his future. Mr. Britling's mind blossomed with wonderful schemes for his education. All that mental growth no doubt contributed greatly to Mr. Britling's peculiar affection, and with it there interwove still tenderer and subtler elements, for the boy had a score of Mary's traits. But there were other things still more conspicuously ignored. One silent factor in the slow widening of the breach between Edith and Mr. Britling was her cool estimate of her stepson. She was steadfastly kind to this shock-headed, untidy little dreamer, he was extremely well cared for in her hands, she liked him and she was amused by him—it is difficult to imagine what more Mr. Britling could have expected—but it was as plain as daylight that she felt that this was not the child she would have cared to have borne. It was quite preposterous and perfectly natural that this should seem to Mr. Britling to be unfair to Hugh.

Edith's home was more prosperous than Mary's; she brought her own money to it; the bringing up of her children was a far more efficient business than Mary's instinctive

proceedings. Hugh had very nearly died in his first year of life; some summer infection had snatched at him; that had tied him to his father's heart by a knot of fear; but no infection had ever come near Edith's own nursery. And it was Hugh that Mr. Britling had seen, small and green-faced and pitiful under an anaesthetic for some necessary small operation to his adenoids. His younger children had never stabbed to Mr. Britling's heart with any such pitifulness; they were not so thin-skinned as their elder brother, not so assailable by the little animosities of dust and germ. And out of such things as this evolved a shapeless cloud of championship for Hugh. Jealousies and suspicions are latent in every human relationship. We go about the affairs of life pretending magnificently that they are not so, pretending to the generousities we desire. And in all step-relationships jealousy and suspicion are not merely latent, they stir.

It was Mr. Britling's case for Hugh that he was something exceptional, something exceptionally good, and that the peculiar need there was to take care of him was due to a delicacy of nerve and fibre that was ultimately a virtue. The boy was quick, quick to hear, quick to move, very accurate in his swift way, he talked unusually soon, he began to sketch at an early age with an incurable roughness and a remarkable expressiveness. That he was sometimes ungainly, often untidy, that he would become so mentally preoccupied as to be uncivil to people about him, that he caught any malaise that was going, was all a part of that. The sense of Mrs. Britling's unexpressed criticisms, the implied contrasts with the very jolly, very uninspired younger family, kept up a nervous desire in Mr. Britling for evidences and manifestations of Hugh's quality. Not always with happy results; it caused much mutual irritation, but not enough to prevent the growth of a real response on Hugh's part to his father's solicitude. The youngster knew and felt that his father was his father just as certainly as he felt that Mrs. Britling was not his mother. To his father he brought his successes and to his father he appealed.

But he brought his successes more readily than he brought his troubles. So far as he himself was concerned he was disposed to take a humorous view of the things that went wrong and didn't come off with him, but as a "Tremendous Set-Down for the Proud Parent" they resisted humorous treatment....

Now the trouble that he had been hesitating to bring before his father was concerned with that very grave interest of the young, his Object in Life. It had nothing to do with those erotic disturbances that had distressed his father's imagination. Whatever was going on below the surface of Hugh's smiling or thoughtful presence in that respect had still to come to the surface and find expression. But he was bothered very much by divergent strands in his own intellectual composition. Two sets of interests pulled

at him, one—it will seem a dry interest to many readers, but for Hugh it glittered and fascinated—was crystallography and molecular physics; the other was caricature. Both aptitudes sprang no doubt from the same exceptional sensitiveness to form. As a schoolboy he exercised both very happily, but now he was getting to the age of specialisation, and he was fluctuating very much between science and art. After a spell of scientific study he would come upon a fatigue period and find nothing in life but absurdities and a lark that one could represent very amusingly; after a bout of funny drawings his mind went back to his light and crystals and films like a Magdalen repenting in a church. After his public school he had refused Cambridge and gone to University College, London, to work under the great and inspiring Professor Cardinal; simultaneously Cardinal had been arranging to go to Cambridge, and Hugh had scarcely embarked upon his London work when Cardinal was succeeded by the dull, conscientious and depressing Pelkingham, at whose touch crystals became as puddings, bubble films like cotton sheets, transparency vanished from the world, and X rays dwarfed and died. And Hugh degenerated immediately into a scoffing trifler who wished to give up science for art.

He gave up science for art after grave consultation with his father, and the real trouble that had been fretting him, it seemed, was that now he repented and wanted to follow Cardinal to Cambridge, and—a year lost—go on with science again. He felt it was a discreditable fluctuation; he knew it would be a considerable expense; and so he took two weeks before he could screw himself up to broaching the matter.

"So *that* is all," said Mr. Britling, immensely relieved.

"My dear Parent, you didn't think I had backed a bill or forged a cheque?"

"I thought you might have married a chorus girl or something of that sort," said Mr. Britling.

"Or bought a large cream-coloured motor-car for her on the instalment system, which she'd smashed up. No, that sort of thing comes later.... I'll just put myself down on the waiting list of one of those bits of delight in the Cambridge tobacco shops—and go on with my studies for a year or two...."

§ 6

Though Mr. Britling's anxiety about his son was dispelled, his mind remained curiously apprehensive throughout July. He had a feeling that things were not going well with the

world, a feeling he tried in vain to dispel by various distractions. Perhaps some subtler subconscious analysis of the situation was working out probabilities that his conscious self would not face. And when presently he bicycled off to Mrs. Harrowdean for flattery, amusement, and comfort generally, he found her by no means the exalting confirmation of everything he wished to believe about himself and the universe, that had been her delightful rôle in the early stages of their romantic friendship. She maintained her hostility to Edith; she seemed bent on making things impossible. And yet there were one or two phases of the old sustaining intimacies.

They walked across her absurd little park to the summer-house with the view on the afternoon of his arrival, and they discussed the Irish pamphlet which was now nearly finished.

"Of course," she said, "it will be a wonderful pamphlet."

There was a reservation in her voice that made him wait.

"But I suppose all sorts of people could write an Irish pamphlet. Nobody but you could write 'The Silent Places.' Oh, *why* don't you finish that great beautiful thing, and leave all this world of reality and newspapers, all these Crude, Vulgar, Quarrelsome, Jarring things to other people? You have the magic gift, you might be a poet, you can take us out of all these horrid things that are, away to Beautyland, and you are just content to be a critic and a disputer. It's your surroundings. It's your sordid realities. It's that Practicality at your elbow. You ought never to see a newspaper. You ought never to have an American come within ten miles of you. You ought to live on bowls of milk drunk in valleys of asphodel."

Mr. Britling, who liked this sort of thing in a way, and yet at the same time felt ridiculously distended and altogether preposterous while it was going on, answered feebly and self-consciously.

"There was your letter in the *Nation* the other day," she said. "Why *do* you get drawn into arguments? I wanted to rush into the *Nation* and pick you up and wipe the anger off you, and carry you out of it all—into some quiet beautiful place."

"But one *has* to answer these people," said Mr. Britling, rolling along by the side of her like a full moon beside Venus, and quite artlessly falling in with the tone of her.

She repeated lines from "The Silent Places" from memory. She threw quite wonderful emotion into her voice. She made the words glow. And he had only shown her the thing once....

Was he indeed burying a marvellous gift under the dust of current affairs? When at last in the warm evening light they strolled back from the summer-house to dinner he had definitely promised her that he would take up and finish "The Silent Places"... And think over the Irish pamphlet again before he published it....

Pyecrafts was like a crystal casket of finer soil withdrawn from the tarred highways of the earth....

And yet the very next day this angel enemy of controversies broke out in the most abominable way about Edith, and he had to tell her more plainly than he had done hitherto, that he could not tolerate that sort of thing. He wouldn't have Edith guyed. He wouldn't have Edith made to seem base. And at that there was much trouble between them, and tears and talk of Oliver....

Mr. Britling found himself unable to get on either with "The Silent Places" or the pamphlet, and he was very unhappy....

Afterwards she repented very touchingly, and said that if only he would love her she would swallow a thousand Ediths. He waived a certain disrespect in the idea of her swallowing Edith, and they had a beautiful reconciliation and talked of exalted things, and in the evening he worked quite well upon "The Silent Places" and thought of half-a-dozen quite wonderful lines, and in the course of the next day he returned to Dower House and Mr. Direck and considerable piles of correspondence and the completion of the Irish pamphlet.

But he was restless. He was more restless in his house than he had ever been. He could not understand it. Everything about him was just as it had always been, and yet it was unsatisfactory, and it seemed more unstable than anything had ever seemed before. He was bored by the solemn development of the Irish dispute; he was irritated by the smouldering threat of the Balkans; he was irritated by the suffragettes and by a string of irrational little strikes; by the general absence of any main plot as it were to hold all these wranglings and trivialities together.... At the Dower House the most unpleasant thoughts would come to him. He even had doubts whether in "The Silent Places," he had been plagiarising, more or less unconsciously, from Henry James's "Great Good Place!"...

On the twenty-first of July Gladys came back repaired and looking none the worse for her misadventure. Next day he drove her very carefully over to Pyecrafts, hoping to drug his uneasiness with the pretence of a grand passion and the praises of "The Silent Places," that beautiful work of art that was so free from any taint of application, and alas! he found Mrs. Harrowdean in an evil mood. He had been away from her for

ten days—ten whole days. No doubt Edith had manoeuvred to keep him. She hadn't! *Hadn't* she? How was he, poor simple soul! to tell that she hadn't? That was the prelude to a stormy afternoon.

The burthen of Mrs. Harrowdean was that she was wasting her life, that she was wasting the poor, good, patient Oliver's life, that for the sake of friendship she was braving the worst imputations and that he treated her cavalierly, came when he wished to do so, stayed away heartlessly, never thought she needed *little* treats, *little* attentions, *little* presents. Did he think she could settle down to her poor work, such as it was, in neglect and loneliness? He forgot women were dear little tender things, and had to be made happy and *kept* happy. Oliver might not be clever and attractive but he did at least in his clumsy way understand and try and do his duty....

Towards the end of the second hour of such complaints the spirit of Mr. Britling rose in revolt. He lifted up his voice against her, he charged his voice with indignant sorrow and declared that he had come over to Pyecrafts with no thought in his mind but sweet and loving thoughts, that he had but waited for Gladys to be ready before he came, that he had brought over the manuscript of "The Silent Places" with him to polish and finish up, that "for days and days" he had been longing to do this in the atmosphere of the dear old summer-house with its distant view of the dear old sea, and that now all that was impossible, that Mrs. Harrowdean had made it impossible and that indeed she was rapidly making everything impossible....

And having delivered himself of this judgment Mr. Britling, a little surprised at the rapid vigour of his anger, once he had let it loose, came suddenly to an end of his words, made a renunciatory gesture with his arms, and as if struck with the idea, rushed out of her room and out of the house to where Gladys stood waiting. He got into her and started her up, and after some trouble with the gear due to the violence of his emotion, he turned her round and departed with her—crushing the corner of a small bed of snapdragon as he turned—and dove her with a sulky sedulousness back to the Dower House and newspapers and correspondence and irritations, and that gnawing and irrational sense of a hollow and aimless quality in the world that he had hoped Mrs. Harrowdean would assuage. And the further he went from Mrs. Harrowdean the harsher and unjust it seemed to him that he had been to her.

But he went on because he did not see how he could very well go back.

Mr. Direck's broken wrist healed sooner than he desired. From the first he had protested that it was the sort of thing that one can carry about in a sling, that he was quite capable of travelling about and taking care of himself in hotels, that he was only staying on at Matching's Easy because he just loved to stay on and wallow in Mrs. Britling's kindness and Mr. Britling's company. While as a matter of fact he wallowed as much as he could in the freshness and friendliness of Miss Cecily Corner, and for more than a third of this period Mr. Britling was away from home altogether.

Mr. Direck, it should be clear by this time, was a man of more than European simplicity and directness, and his intentions towards the young lady were as simple and direct and altogether honest as such intentions can be. It is the American conception of gallantry more than any other people's, to let the lady call the tune in these affairs; the man's place is to be protective, propitiatory, accommodating and clever, and the lady's to be difficult but delightful until he catches her and houses her splendidly and gives her a surprising lot of pocket-money, and goes about his business; and upon these assumptions Mr. Direck went to work. But quite early it was manifest to him that Cecily did not recognise his assumptions. She was embarrassed when he got down one or two little presents of chocolates and flowers for her from London—the Britling boys were much more appreciative—she wouldn't let him contrive costly little expeditions for her, and she protested against compliments and declared she would stay away when he paid them. And she was not contented by his general sentiments about life, but asked the most direct questions about his occupation and his activities. His chief occupation was being the well provided heir of a capable lawyer, and his activities in the light of her inquiries struck him as being light and a trifle amateurish, qualities he had never felt as any drawback about them before. So that he had to rely rather upon aspirations and the possibility, under proper inspiration, of a more actively serviceable life in future.

"There's a feeling in the States," he said, "that we've had rather a tendency to overdo work, and that there is scope for a leisure class to develop the refinement and the wider meanings of life."

"But a leisure class doesn't mean a class that does nothing," said Cecily. "It only means a class that isn't busy in business."

"You're too hard on me," said Mr. Direck with that quiet smile of his.

And then by way of putting her on the defensive he asked her what she thought a man in his position ought to do.

"*Something*," she said, and in the expansion of this vague demand they touched on a number of things. She said that she was a Socialist, and there was still in Mr. Direck's composition a streak of the old-fashioned American prejudice against the word. He associated Socialists with Anarchists and deported aliens. It was manifest too that she was deeply read in the essays and dissertations of Mr. Britling. She thought everybody, man or woman, ought to be chiefly engaged in doing something definite for the world at large. ("There's my secretaryship of the Massachusetts Modern Thought Society, anyhow," said Mr. Direck.) And she herself wanted to be doing something—it was just because she did not know what it was she ought to be doing that she was reading so extensively and voraciously. She wanted to lose herself in something. Deep in the being of Mr. Direck was the conviction that what she ought to be doing was making love in a rapturously egotistical manner, and enjoying every scrap of her own delightful self and her own delightful vitality—while she had it, but for the purposes of their conversation he did not care to put it any more definitely than to say that he thought we owed it to ourselves to develop our personalities. Upon which she joined issue with great vigour.

"That is just what Mr. Britling says about you in his 'American Impressions,'" she said. "He says that America overdoes the development of personalities altogether, that whatever else is wrong about America that is where America is most clearly wrong. I read that this morning, and directly I read it I thought, 'Yes, that's exactly it! Mr. Direck is overdoing the development of personalities.'"

"Me!"

"Yes. I like talking to you and I don't like talking to you. And I see now it is because you keep on talking of my Personality and your Personality. That makes me uncomfortable. It's like having some one following me about with a limelight. And in a sort of way I do like it. I like it and I'm flattered by it, and then I go off and dislike it, dislike the effect of it. I find myself trying to be what you have told me I am—sort of acting myself. I want to glance at looking-glasses to see if I am keeping it up. It's just exactly what Mr. Britling says in his book about American women. They act themselves, he says; they get a kind of story and explanation about themselves and they are always trying to make it perfectly plain and clear to every one. Well, when you do that you can't think nicely of other things."

"We like a clear light on people," said Mr. Direck.

"We don't. I suppose we're shadier," said Cecily.

"You're certainly much more in half-tones," said Mr. Direck. "And I confess it's the half-tones get hold of me. But still you haven't told me, Miss Cissie, what you think I ought to do with myself. Here I am, you see, very much at your disposal. What sort of business do you think it's my duty to go in for?"

"That's for some one with more experience than I have, to tell you. You should ask Mr. Britling."

"I'd rather have it from you."

"I don't even know for myself," she said.

"So why shouldn't we start to find out together?" he asked.

It was her tantalising habit to ignore all such tentatives.

"One can't help the feeling that one is in the world for something more than oneself," she said....

§ 8

Soon Mr. Direck could measure the time that was left to him at the Dower House no longer by days but by hours. His luggage was mostly packed, his tickets to Rotterdam, Cologne, Munich, Dresden, Vienna, were all in order. And things were still very indefinite between him and Cecily. But God has not made Americans clean-shaven and firm-featured for nothing, and he determined that matters must be brought to some sort of definition before he embarked upon travels that were rapidly losing their attractiveness in this concentration of his attention....

A considerable nervousness betrayed itself in his voice and manner when at last he carried out his determination.

"There's just a lil' thing," he said to her, taking advantage of a moment when they were together after lunch, "that I'd value now more than anything else in the world."

She answered by a lifted eyebrow and a glance that had not so much inquiry in it as she intended.

"If we could just take a lil' walk together for a bit. Round by Claverings Park and all that. See the deer again and the old trees. Sort of scenery I'd like to remember when I'm away from it."

He was a little short of breath, and there was a quite disproportionate gravity about her moment for consideration.

"Yes," she said with a cheerful acquiescence that came a couple of bars too late. "Let's. It will be jolly."

"These fine English afternoons are wonderful afternoons," he remarked after a moment or so of silence. "Not quite the splendid blaze we get in our summer, but—sort of glowing."

"It's been very fine all the time you've been here," she said....

After which exchanges they went along the lane, into the road by the park fencing, and so to the little gate that lets one into the park, without another word.

The idea took hold of Mr. Direck's mind that until they got through the park gate it would be quite out of order to say anything. The lane and the road and the stile and the gate were all so much preliminary stuff to be got through before one could get to business. But after the little white gate the way was clear, the park opened out and one could get ahead without bothering about the steering. And Mr. Direck had, he felt, been diplomatically involved in lanes and by-ways long enough.

"Well," he said as he rejoined her after very carefully closing the gate. "What I really wanted was an opportunity of just mentioning something that happens to be of interest to you—if it does happen to interest you.... I suppose I'd better put the thing as simply as possible.... Practically.... I'm just right over the head and all in love with you.... I thought I'd like to tell you...."

Immense silences.

"Of course I won't pretend there haven't been others," Mr. Direck suddenly resumed. "There have. One particularly. But I can assure you I've never felt the depth and height or anything like the sort of Quiet Clear Conviction.... And now I'm just telling you these things, Miss Corner, I don't know whether it will interest you if I tell you that you're really and truly the very first love I ever had as well as my last. I've had sent over—I got it only yesterday—this lil' photograph of a miniature portrait of one of my ancestor's relations—a Corner just as you are. It's here...."

He had considerable difficulties with his pockets and papers. Cecily, mute and flushed and inconvenienced by a preposterous and unaccountable impulse to weep, took the picture he handed her.

"When I was a lil' fellow of fifteen," said Mr. Direck in the tone of one producing a melancholy but conclusive piece of evidence, "I *worshipped* that miniature. It seemed to me—the loveliest person.... And—it's just you...."

He too was preposterously moved.

It seemed a long time before Cecily had anything to say, and then what she had to say she said in a softened, indistinct voice. "You're very kind," she said, and kept hold of the little photograph.

They had halted for the photograph. Now they walked on again.

"I thought I'd like to tell you," said Mr. Direck and became tremendously silent.

Cecily found him incredibly difficult to answer. She tried to make herself light and offhand, and to be very frank with him.

"Of course," she said, "I knew—I felt somehow—you meant to say something of this sort to me—when you asked me to come with you——"

"Well?" he said.

"And I've been trying to make my poor brain think of something to say to you."

She paused and contemplated her difficulties....

"Couldn't you perhaps say something of the same kind—such as I've been trying to say?" said Mr. Direck presently, with a note of earnest helpfulness. "I'd be very glad if you could."

"Not exactly," said Cecily, more careful than ever.

"Meaning?"

"I think you know that you are the best of friends. I think you are, oh—a Perfect Dear."

"Well—that's all right—so far."

"That *is* as far."

"You don't know whether you love me? That's what you mean to say."

"No.... I feel somehow it isn't that.... Yet...."

"There's nobody else by any chance?"

"No." Cecily weighed things. "You needn't trouble about that."

"Only ... only you don't know."

Cecily made a movement of assent.

"It's no good pretending I haven't thought about you," she said.

"Well, anyhow I've done my best to give you the idea," said Mr. Direck. "I seem now to have been doing that pretty nearly all the time."

"Only what should we do?"

Mr. Direck felt this question was singularly artless. "Why!—we'd marry," he said. "And all that sort of thing."

"Letty has married—and all that sort of thing," said Cecily, fixing her eye on him very firmly because she was colouring brightly. "And it doesn't leave Letty very much—fornader."

"Well now, they have a good time, don't they? I'd have thought they have a lovely time!"

"They've had a lovely time. And Teddy is the dearest husband. And they have a sweet little house and a most amusing baby. And they play hockey every Sunday. And Teddy does his work. And every week is like every other week. It is just heavenly. Just always the same heavenly. Every Sunday there is a fresh week of heavenly beginning. And this, you see, isn't heaven; it is earth. And they don't know it but they are getting bored. I have been watching them, and they are getting dreadfully bored. It's heart-breaking to watch, because they are almost my dearest people. Teddy used to be making perpetual jokes about the house and the baby and his work and Letty, and now—he's made all the possible jokes. It's only now and then he gets a fresh one. It's like spring flowers and then—summer. And Letty sits about and doesn't sing. They want something new to happen.... And there's Mr. and Mrs. Britling. They love each other. Much more than Mrs. Britling dreams, or Mr. Britling for the matter of that. Once upon a time things were heavenly for them too, I suppose. Until suddenly it began to happen to them that nothing new ever happened...."

"Well," said Mr. Direck, "people can travel."

"But that isn't *real* happening," said Cecily.

"It keeps one interested."

"But real happening is doing something."

"You come back to that," said Mr. Direck. "I never met any one before who'd quite got that spirit as you have it. I wouldn't alter it. It's part of you. It's part of this place. It's

what Mr. Britling always seems to be saying and never quite knowing he's said it. It's just as though all the things that are going on weren't the things that ought to be going on—but something else quite different. Somehow one falls into it. It's as if your daily life didn't matter, as if politics didn't matter, as if the King and the social round and business and all those things weren't anything really, and as though you felt there was something else—out of sight—round the corner—that you ought to be getting at. Well, I admit, that's got hold of me too. And it's all mixed up with my idea of you. I don't see that there's really a contradiction in it at all. I'm in love with you, all my heart's in love with you, what's the good of being shy about it? I'd just die for your littlest wish right here now, it's just as though I'd got love in my veins instead of blood, but that's not taking me away from that other thing. It's bringing me round to that other thing. I feel as if without you I wasn't up to anything at all, but *with* you—We'd not go settling down in a cottage or just touring about with a Baedeker Guide or anything of that kind. Not for long anyhow. We'd naturally settle down side by side and *do* ..."

"But what should we do?" asked Cecily.

There came a hiatus in their talk.

Mr. Direck took a deep breath.

"You see that old felled tree there. I was sitting on it the day before yesterday and thinking of you. Will you come there and sit with me on it? When you sit on it you get a view, oh! a perfectly lovely English view, just a bit of the house and those clumps of trees and the valley away there with the lily pond. I'd love to have you in my memory of it...."

They sat down, and Mr. Direck opened his case. He was shy and clumsy about opening it, because he had been thinking dreadfully hard about it, and he hated to seem heavy or profound or anything but artless and spontaneous to Cecily. And he felt even when he did open his case that the effect of it was platitudinous and disappointing. Yet when he had thought it out it had seemed very profound and altogether living.

"You see one doesn't want to use terms that have been used in a thousand different senses in any way that isn't a perfectly unambiguous sense, and at the same time one doesn't want to seem to be canting about things or pitching anything a note or two higher than it ought legitimately to go, but it seems to me that this sort of something that Mr. Britling is always asking for in his essays and writings and things, and what you are looking for just as much and which seems so important to you that even love itself is a secondary kind of thing until you can square the two together, is nothing more nor

less than Religion—I don't mean this Religion or that Religion but just Religion itself, a Big, Solemn, Comprehensive Idea that holds you and me and all the world together in one great, grand universal scheme. And though it isn't quite the sort of idea of love-making that's been popular—well, in places like Carrierville—for some time, it's the right idea; it's got to be followed out if we don't want love-making to be a sort of idle, troublesome game of treats and flatteries that is sure as anything to lead right away to disappointments and foolishness and unfaithfulness and—just Hell. What you are driving at, according to my interpretation, is that marriage has got to be a religious marriage or else you are splitting up life, that religion and love are most of life and all the power there is in it, and that they can't afford to be harnessed in two different directions.... I never had these ideas until I came here and met you, but they come up now in my mind as though they had always been there.... And that's why you don't want to marry in a hurry. And that's why I'm glad almost that you don't want to marry in a hurry."

He considered. "That's why I'll have to go on to Germany and just let both of us turn things over in our minds."

"Yes," said Cecily, weighing his speech. "I think that is it. I think that I do want a religious marriage, and that what is wrong with Teddy and Letty is that they aren't religious. They pretend they are religious somewhere out of sight and round the corner.... Only—"

He considered her gravely.

"What *is* Religion?" she asked.

Here again there was a considerable pause.

"Very nearly two-thirds of the papers read before our Massachusetts society since my connection with it, have dealt with that very question," Mr. Direck began. "And one of our most influential members was able to secure the services of a very able and highly trained young woman from Michigan University, to make a digest of all these representative utterances. We are having it printed in a thoroughly artistic manner, as the club book for our autumn season. The drift of her results is that religion isn't the same thing as religions. That most religions are old and that religion is always new.... Well, putting it simply, religion is the perpetual rediscovery of that Great Thing Out There.... What the Great Thing is goes by all sorts of names, but if you know it's there and if you remember it's there, you've got religion.... That's about how she figured it out.... I shall send you the book as soon as a copy comes over to me.... I can't profess

to put it as clearly as she puts it. She's got a real analytical mind. But it's one of the most suggestive lil' books I've ever seen. It just takes hold of you and *makes* you think."

He paused and regarded the ground before him—thoughtfully.

"Life," said Cecily, "has either got to be religious or else it goes to pieces.... Perhaps anyhow it goes to pieces...."

Mr. Direck endorsed these observations by a slow nodding of the head.

He allowed a certain interval to elapse. Then a vaguely apprehended purpose that had been for a time forgotten in these higher interests came back to him. He took it up with a breathless sense of temerity.

"Well," he said, "then you don't hate me?"

She smiled.

"You don't dislike me or despise me?"

She was still reassuring.

"You don't think I'm just a slow American sort of portent?"

"No."

"You think, on the whole, I might even—someday——?"

She tried to meet his eyes with a pleasant frankness, and perhaps she was franker than she meant to be.

"Look here," said Mr. Direck, with a little quiver of emotion softening his mouth. "I'll ask you something. We've got to wait. Until you feel clearer. Still.... Could you bring yourself——? If just once—I could kiss you...."

"I'm going away to Germany," he went on to her silence. "But I shan't be giving so much attention to Germany as I supposed I should when I planned it out. But somehow—if I felt—that I'd kissed you...."

With a delusive effect of calmness the young lady looked first over her left shoulder and then over her right and surveyed the park about them. Then she stood up. "We can go that way home," she said with a movement of her head, "through the little covert."

Mr. Direck stood up too.

"If I was a poet or a bird," said Mr. Direck, "I should sing. But being just a plain American citizen all I can do is just to talk about all I'd do if I wasn't...."

And when they had reached the little covert, with its pathway of soft moss and its sheltering screen of interlacing branches, he broke the silence by saying, "Well, what's wrong with right here and now?" and Cecily stood up to him as straight as a spear, with gifts in her clear eyes. He took her soft cool face between his trembling hands, and kissed her sweet half-parted lips. When he kissed her she shivered, and he held her tighter and would have kissed her again. But she broke away from him, and he did not press her. And muter than ever, pondering deeply, and secretly trembling in the queerest way, these two outwardly sedate young people returned to the Dower House....

And after tea the taxicab from the junction came for him and he vanished, and was last seen as a waving hat receding along the top of the dog-rose hedge that ran beyond the hockey field towards the village.

"He will see Germany long before I shall," said Herr Heinrich with a gust of nostalgia. "I wish almost I had not agreed to go to Boulogne."

And for some days Miss Cecily Corner was a very grave and dignified young woman indeed. Pondering....

§ 9

After the departure of Mr. Direck things international began to move forward with great rapidity. It was exactly as if his American deliberation had hitherto kept things waiting. Before his postcard from Rotterdam reached the Dower House Austria had sent an ultimatum to Serbia, and before Cecily had got the letter he wrote her from Cologne, a letter in that curiously unformed handwriting the stenographer and the typewriter are making an American characteristic, Russia was mobilising, and the vast prospect of a European war had opened like the rolling up of a curtain on which the interests of the former week had been but a trivial embroidery. So insistent was this reality that revealed itself that even the shooting of the Dublin people after the gun-running of Howth was dwarfed to unimportance. The mind of Mr. Britling came round from its restless wanderings to a more and more intent contemplation of the hurrying storm-clouds that swept out of nothingness to blacken all his sky. He watched it, he watched amazed and incredulous, he watched this contradiction of all his reiterated

confessions of faith in German sanity and pacifism, he watched it with all that was impersonal in his being, and meanwhile his personal life ran in a continually deeper and narrower channel as his intelligence was withdrawn from it.

Never had the double refraction of his mind been more clearly defined. On the one hand the Britling of the disinterested intelligence saw the habitual peace of the world vanish as the daylight vanishes when a shutter falls over the window of a cell; and on the other the Britling of the private life saw all the pleasant comfort of his relations with Mrs. Harrowdean disappearing in a perplexing irrational quarrel. He did not want to lose Mrs. Harrowdean; he contemplated their breach with a profound and profoundly selfish dismay. It seemed the wanton termination of an arrangement of which he was only beginning to perceive the extreme and irreplaceable satisfactoriness.

It wasn't that he was in love with her. He knew almost as clearly as though he had told himself as much that he was not. But then, on the other hand, it was equally manifest in its subdued and ignored way that as a matter of fact she was hardly more in love with him. What constituted the satisfactoriness of the whole affair was its essential unlovingness and friendly want of emotion. It left their minds free to play with all the terms and methods of love without distress. She could summon tears and delights as one summons servants, and he could act his part as lover with no sense of lost control. They supplied in each other's lives a long-felt want—if only, that is, she could control her curious aptitude for jealousy and the sexual impulse to vex. There, he felt, she broke the convention of their relations and brought in serious realities, and this little rift it was that had widened to a now considerable breach. He knew that in every sane moment she dreaded and wished to heal that breach as much as he did. But the deep simplicities of the instincts they had tacitly agreed to bridge over washed the piers of their reconciliation away.

And unless they could restore the bridge things would end, and Mr. Britling felt that the ending of things would involve for him the most extraordinary exasperation. She would go to Oliver for comfort; she would marry Oliver; and he knew her well enough to be sure that she would thrust her matrimonial happiness with Oliver unsparingly upon his attention; while he, on the other hand, being provided with no corresponding Olivette, would be left, a sort of emotional celibate, with his slack times and his afternoons and his general need for flattery and amusement dreadfully upon his own hands. He would be tormented by jealousy. In which case—and here he came to verities—his work would suffer. It wouldn't grip him while all these vague demands she satisfied fermented unassuaged.

And, after the fashion of our still too adolescent world, Mr. Britling and Mrs. Harrowdean proceeded to negotiate these extremely unromantic matters in the phrases of that simple, honest and youthful passionateness which is still the only language available, and at times Mr. Britling came very near persuading himself that he had something of the passionate love for her that he had once had for his Mary, and that the possible loss of her had nothing to do with the convenience of Pyecrafts or any discretion in the world. Though indeed the only thing in the whole plexus of emotional possibility that still kept anything of its youthful freshness in his mind was the very strong objection indeed he felt to handing her over to anybody else in the world. And in addition he had just a touch of fatherly feeling that a younger man would not have had, and it made him feel very anxious to prevent her making a fool of herself by marrying a man out of spite. He felt that since an obstinate lover is apt to be an exacting husband, in the end the heavy predominance of Oliver might wring much sincerer tears from her than she had ever shed for himself. But that generosity was but the bright edge to a mainly possessive jealousy.

It was Mr. Britling who reopened the correspondence by writing a little apology for the corner of the small snapdragon bed, and this evoked an admirably touching reply. He replied quite naturally with assurances and declarations. But before she got his second letter her mood had changed. She decided that if he had really and truly been lovingly sorry, instead of just writing a note to her he would have rushed over to her in a wild, dramatic state of mind, and begged forgiveness on his knees. She wrote therefore a second letter to this effect, crossing his second one, and, her literary gift getting the better of her, she expanded her thesis into a general denunciation of his habitual off-handedness with her, to an abandonment of all hope of ever being happy with him, to a decision to end the matter once for all, and after a decent interval of dignified regrets to summon Oliver to the reward of his patience and goodness. The European situation was now at a pitch to get upon Mr. Britling's nerves, and he replied with a letter intended to be conciliatory, but which degenerated into earnest reproaches for her "unreasonableness." Meanwhile she had received his second and tenderly eloquent letter; it moved her deeply, and having now cleared her mind of much that had kept it simmering uncomfortably, she replied with a sweetly loving epistle. From this point their correspondence had a kind of double quality, being intermittently angry and loving; her third letter was tender, and it was tenderly answered in his fourth; but in the interim she had received his third and answered it with considerable acerbity, to which his fifth was a retort, just missing her generous and conclusive fifth. She replied to his fifth on a Saturday evening—it was that eventful Saturday, Saturday the First of August, 1914—by a telegram. Oliver was

abroad in Holland, engaged in a much-needed emotional rest, and she wired to Mr. Britling: "Have wired for Oliver, he will come to me, do not trouble to answer this."

She was astonished to get no reply for two days. She got no reply for two days because remarkable things were happening to the telegraph wires of England just then, and her message, in the hands of a boy scout on a bicycle, reached Mr. Britling's house only on Monday afternoon. He was then at Claverings discussing the invasion of Belgium that made Britain's participation in the war inevitable, and he did not open the little red-brown envelope until about half-past six. He failed to mark the date and hours upon it, but he perceived that it was essentially a challenge. He was expected, he saw, to go over at once with his renovated Gladys and end this unfortunate clash forever in one striking and passionate scene. His mind was now so full of the war that he found this the most colourless and unattractive of obligations. But he felt bound by the mysterious code of honour of the illicit love affair to play his part. He postponed his departure until after supper—there was no reason why he should be afraid of motoring by moonlight if he went carefully—because Hugh came in with Cissie demanding a game of hockey. Hockey offered a nervous refreshment, a scampering forgetfulness of the tremendous disaster of this war he had always believed impossible, that nothing else could do, and he was very glad indeed of the irruption....