Mr. Britling Sees It Through

By

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BOOK I

MATCHING'S EASY AT EASE

CHAPTER THE FIRST

MR. DIRECK VISITS MR. BRITLING

Section 1

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

He had promised himself this visit for many years, but being of a sunny rather than energetic temperament--though he firmly believed himself to be a reservoir of clear-sighted American energy--he had allowed all sorts of things, and more particularly the uncertainties of Miss Mamie Nelson, to keep him back. But now there were no more uncertainties about

Miss Mamie Nelson, and Mr. Direck had come over to England just to convince himself and everybody else that there were other interests in life for him than Mamie....

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

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

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

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

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

Section 2

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

Washington Irving's England! Indeed it was. He couldn't sit still and just peep at it, he had to stand up in the little compartment and stick his large, firm-featured, kindly countenance out of the window as if he greeted it. The country under the June sunshine was neat and bright as an old-world garden, with little fields of corn surrounded by dog-rose hedges, and woods and small rushy pastures of an infinite tidiness. He had seen a real deer park, it had rather tumbledown iron gates between its shield-surmounted pillars, and in the distance, beyond all question, was Bracebridge Hall nestling among great trees. He had seen thatched and timbered cottages, and half-a-dozen inns with creaking signs. He had seen a fat vicar driving himself along a grassy lane in a governess cart drawn by a fat grey pony. It wasn't like any reality he had ever known. It was like travelling in literature.

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

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

"Aye-ya!"

"Fussin' about thea."

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

Mr. Direck had learnt at the main-line junction that he had to tell the guard to stop the train for Matching's Easy; it only stopped "by request"; the thing was getting better and better; and when Mr. Direck seized his grip and got out of the train there was just one little old Essex station-master and porter and signalman and everything, holding a red flag in his hand and talking to Mr. Britling about the cultivation of the sweet peas which glorified the station. And there was the Mr. Britling who was the only item of business and the greatest expectation in Mr. Direck's European journey, and he was quite unlike the portraits Mr. Direck had seen and quite unmistakably Mr. Britling all the same, since there was nobody else upon the platform, and he was advancing with a gesture of welcome.

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

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

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

Section 3

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

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

which the society honoured not only its guests but itself, that Mr. Direck had now come to Matching's Easy. He had already sent Mr. Britling a letter of introduction, not indeed intimating his precise purpose, but mentioning merely a desire to know him, and the letter had been so happily phrased and its writer had left such a memory of pleasant hospitality on Mr. Britling's mind during Mr. Britling's former visit to New York, that it had immediately produced for Mr. Direck an invitation not merely to come and see him but to come and stay over the week-end.

And here they were shaking hands.

Mr. Britling did not look at all as Mr. Direck had expected him to look. He had expected an Englishman in a country costume of golfing tweeds, like the Englishman in country costume one sees in American illustrated stories. Drooping out of the country costume of golfing tweeds he had expected to see the mildly unhappy face, pensive even to its drooping moustache, with which Mr. Britling's publisher had for some faulty and unfortunate reason familiarised the American public. Instead of this, Mr. Britling was in a miscellaneous costume, and mildness was the last quality one could attribute to him. His moustache, his hair, his eyebrows bristled; his flaming freckled face seemed about to bristle too. His little hazel eyes came out with a "ping" and looked at Mr. Direck. Mr. Britling was one of a large but still remarkable class of people who seem at the mere approach of photography to change their hair, their clothes, their moral natures. No photographer had ever caught a hint of his essential Britlingness and bristlingness. Only the

camera could ever induce Mr. Britling to brush his hair, and for the camera alone did he reserve that expression of submissive martyrdom Mr. Direck knew. And Mr. Direck was altogether unprepared for a certain casualness of costume that sometimes overtook Mr. Britling. He was wearing now a very old blue flannel blazer, no hat, and a pair of knickerbockers, not tweed breeches but tweed knickerbockers of a remarkable bagginess, and made of one of those virtuous socialistic homespun tweeds that drag out into woolly knots and strings wherever there is attrition. His stockings were worsted and wrinkled, and on his feet were those extraordinary slippers of bright-coloured bast-like interwoven material one buys in the north of France. These were purple with a touch of green. He had, in fact, thought of the necessity of meeting Mr. Direck at the station at the very last moment, and had come away from his study in the clothes that had happened to him when he got up. His face wore the amiable expression of a wire-haired terrier disposed to be friendly, and it struck Mr. Direck that for a man of his real intellectual distinction Mr. Britling was unusually short.

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

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

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

Mr. Direck had read a very great deal of all this expressed

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

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

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

'I've tried sile,' 'e says--"

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

"Absolutely," said Mr. Direck.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ready?" asked Mr. Britling.

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

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

Section 4

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

The thing became evident when he struggled to get into the high gear--an attempt that stopped the engine, and it was even more startlingly so

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 5

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

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

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

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

Mr. Direck descended, and there were considerable efforts.

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

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

Section 6

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

"My driving leaves something to be desired," said Mr. Britling with an air of frank impartiality. "But I have only just got this car for myself--after some years of hired cars--the sort of lazy arrangement where people supply car, driver, petrol, tyres, insurance and everything at so much a month. It bored me abominably. I can't imagine now how I stood it for so long. They sent me down a succession of compact, scornful boys who used to go fast when I wanted to go slow, and slow

when I wanted to go fast, and who used to take every corner on the wrong side at top speed, and charge dogs and hens for the sport of it, and all sorts of things like that. They would not even let me choose my roads. I should have got myself a car long ago, and driven it, if it wasn't for that infernal business with a handle one had to do when the engine stopped. But here, you see, is a reasonably cheap car with an electric starter--American, I need scarcely say. And here I am--going at my own pace."

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

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

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

That rapid attack while the transatlantic interlocutor is deploying is indeed a not infrequent defect of conversations between Englishmen and Americans. It is a source of many misunderstandings. The two conceptions of conversation differ fundamentally. The English are much less disposed

to listen than the American; they have not quite the same sense of conversational give and take, and at first they are apt to reduce their visitors to the rôle of auditors wondering when their turn will begin. Their turn never does begin. Mr. Direck sat deeply in his slanting seat with a half face to his celebrated host and said "Yep" and "Sure" and "That is so," in the dry grave tones that he believed an Englishman would naturally expect him to use, realising this only very gradually.

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

manufacturing. He believed this was largely due to the influence of Oxford and the Established Church....

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

"There's no end of such little incidents," said Mr. Britling, cutting in without apparent effort. "You see, we get it on both sides. Our manufacturer class was, of course, originally an insurgent class. It was a class of distended craftsmen. It had the craftsman's natural enterprise and natural radicalism. As soon as it prospered and sent its boys to Oxford it was lost. Our manufacturing class was assimilated in no time to the conservative classes, whose education has always had a mandarin quality--very, very little of it, and very cold and choice. In America you have so far had no real conservative class at all. Fortunate continent! You cast out your Tories, and you were left with nothing but Whigs and Radicals. But our peculiar bad luck has been to get a sort of revolutionary who is a Tory mandarin too. Ruskin and Morris, for example, were as reactionary and anti-scientific as the dukes and the bishops. Machine haters. Science haters. Rule of Thumbites to the bone. So are our current Socialists. They've filled this country with the idea that the ideal automobile ought to be made entirely by the hand labour

of traditional craftsmen, quite individually, out of beaten copper, wrought iron and seasoned oak. All this electric-starter business and this electric lighting outfit I have here, is perfectly hateful to the English mind.... It isn't that we are simply backward in these things, we are antagonistic. The British mind has never really tolerated electricity; at least, not that sort of electricity that runs through wires. Too slippery and glib for it. Associates it with Italians and fluency generally, with Volta, Galvani, Marconi and so on. The proper British electricity is that high-grade useless long-sparking stuff you get by turning round a glass machine; stuff we used to call frictional electricity. Keep it in Leyden jars.... At Claverings here they still refuse to have electric bells. There was a row when the Solomonsons, who were tenants here for a time, tried to put them in...."

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

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

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

Section 7

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

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

After shouting again, several times, it became manifest that he had attracted the attention of two willing but deliberate labouring men. They emerged slowly, first as attentive heads, from the landscape. With their assistance the car was restored to the road again. Mr. Direck assisted manfully, and noted the respect that was given to Mr. Britling and the shillings that fell to the men, with an intelligent detachment. They touched their hats, they called Mr. Britling "Sir." They examined the car distantly but kindly. "Ain't 'urt 'e, not a bit 'e ain't, not really," said one encouragingly. And indeed except for a slight crumpling of the mud-guard and the detachment of the wire of one of the headlights the automobile was uninjured. Mr. Britling resumed his seat;

Mr. Direck gravely and in silence got up beside him. They started with the usual convulsion, as though something had pricked the vehicle unexpectedly and shamefully behind. And from this point Mr. Britling, driving with meticulous care, got home without further mishap, excepting only that he scraped off some of the metal edge of his footboard against the gate-post of his very agreeable garden.

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

Section 8

Mr. Direck, though he was a little incommoded by the suppression of his story about Robinson--for when he had begun a thing he liked to finish it--found Mr. Britling's household at once thoroughly British, quite un-American and a little difficult to follow. It had a quality that at first he could not define at all. Compared with anything he had ever seen in his life before it struck him as being--he found the word at last--sketchy. For instance, he was introduced to nobody except his hostess, and she was indicated to him by a mere wave of Mr. Britling's hand. "That's Edith," he said, and returned at once to his car to put it away. Mrs. Britling was a tall, freckled woman with pretty bright brown hair and preoccupied brown eyes. She welcomed him with a handshake, and

then a wonderful English parlourmaid--she at least was according to expectations--took his grip-sack and guided him to his room. "Lunch, sir," she said, "is outside," and closed the door and left him to that and a towel-covered can of hot water.

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

"Why surely," said Mr. Direck.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Britling child hated Buster Brown. He regarded Buster Brown as a totally unnecessary infant. He detested the way he wore his hair and the peculiar cut of his knickerbockers and--him. He thought Buster Brown the one drop of paraffin in the otherwise delicious feast of the Sunday Supplement. But he was a diplomatic child.

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

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

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

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

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

Section 9

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

The composition of the company was a matter for some perplexity to Mr. Direck. Mr. and Mrs. Britling were at either end of the table, that was plain enough. It was also fairly plain that the two barefooted boys were little Britlings. But beyond this was a cloud of uncertainty. There was a youth of perhaps seventeen, much darker than Britling but with nose and freckles rather like his, who might be an early son or a stepson; he was shock-headed and with that look about his arms and legs that suggests overnight growth; and there was an unmistakable young German, very pink, with close-cropped fair hair, glasses and a panama hat, who was probably the tutor of the younger boys. (Mr. Direck also was wearing his hat, his mind had been filled with an exaggerated idea of the treacheries of the English climate before he left New York. Every one else was hatless.) Finally, before one reached the limits of the explicable there was a pleasant young man with a lot of dark hair and very fine dark blue eyes, whom everybody called "Teddy." For him, Mr. Direck hazarded "secretary."

But in addition to these normal and understandable presences, there was an entirely mysterious pretty young woman in blue linen who sat and smiled next to Mr. Britling, and there was a rather kindred-looking girl with darker hair on the right of Mr. Direck who impressed him at the very outset as being still prettier, and--he didn't quite place her at first--somehow familiar to him; there was a large irrelevant middle-aged lady in black with a gold chain and a large nose, between Teddy and the tutor; there was a tall middle-aged man with an intelligent face, who

might be a casual guest; there was an Indian young gentleman faultlessly dressed up to his brown soft linen collar and cuffs, and thereafter an uncontrolled outbreak of fine bronze modelling and abundant fuzzy hair; and there was a very erect and attentive baby of a year or less, sitting up in a perambulator and gesticulating cheerfully to everybody. This baby it was that most troubled the orderly mind of Mr. Direck. The research for its paternity made his conversation with Mrs. Britling almost as disconnected and absent-minded as her conversation with him. It almost certainly wasn't Mrs. Britling's. The girl next to him or the girl next to Mr. Britling or the lady in black might any of them be married, but if so where was the spouse? It seemed improbable that they would wheel out a foundling to lunch....

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

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

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

The girl really had an extraordinarily pretty smile, and there was

something in her soft bright brown eye--like the movement of some quick little bird. And--she was like somebody he knew! Indeed she was. She was quite ready to be spoken to.

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

"You've not met him before?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

across America."

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

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

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

"And Mr. Lawrence Carmine?" he pursued.

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

Mr. Direck prepared to be even more sotto-voce and to plumb a much

profounder mystery. His eye rested on the perambulator; he leant a little nearer to the ear.... But the strawberries interrupted him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But about those Essex relatives of yours?"

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

He looked from one face to another.

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

"Well," said Mr. Direck, and hesitated for a moment. It was so delightful that one couldn't go on being just discreet. The atmosphere was free and friendly. His intonation disarmed offence. And he gave the

young lady the full benefit of a quite expressive eye. "I'm very pleased to meet you, Cousin Corner. How are the old folks at home?"

Section 10

The bright interest of this consulship helped Mr. Direck more than anything to get the better of his Robinson-anecdote crave, and when presently he found his dialogue with Mr. Britling resumed, he turned at once to this remarkable discovery of his long lost and indeed hitherto unsuspected relative. "It's an American sort of thing to do, I suppose," he said apologetically, "but I almost thought of going on, on Monday, to Market Saffron, which was the locality of the Hinkinsons, and just looking about at the tombstones in the churchyard for a day or so."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It must be very interesting," he said, "to come over here and pick up these American families of yours on the monuments and tombstones. You

know, of course, that district south of Evesham where every other church monument bears the stars and stripes, the arms of departed Washingtons. I doubt though if you'll still find the name about there. Nor will you find many Hinkinsons in Market Saffron. But lots of this country here has five or six hundred-year-old families still flourishing. That's why Essex is so much more genuinely Old England than Surrey, say, or Kent. Round here you'll find Corners and Fairlies, and then you get Capels, and then away down towards Dunmow and Braintree Maynards and Byngs. And there are oaks and hornbeams in the park about Claverings that have echoed to the howling of wolves and the clank of men in armour. All the old farms here are moated--because of the wolves. Claverings itself is Tudor, and rather fine too. And the cottages still wear thatch...."

He reflected. "Now if you went south of London instead of northward it's all different. You're in a different period, a different society. You're in London suburbs right down to the sea. You'll find no genuine estates left, not of our deep-rooted familiar sort. You'll find millionaires and that sort of people, sitting in the old places. Surrey is full of rich stockbrokers, company-promoters, bookies, judges, newspaper proprietors. Sort of people who fence the paths across their parks. They do something to the old places--I don't know what they do--but instantly the countryside becomes a villadom. And little sub-estates and red-brick villas and art cottages spring up. And a kind of new, hard neatness. And pneumatic tyre and automobile spirit advertisements, great glaring boards by the roadside. And all the poor people are inspected and rushed about until they forget who their grandfathers were. They become villa

parasites and odd-job men, and grow basely rich and buy gramophones. This Essex and yonder Surrey are as different as Russia and Germany. But for one American who comes to look at Essex, twenty go to Godalming and Guildford and Dorking and Lewes and Canterbury. Those Surrey people are not properly English at all. They are strenuous. You have to get on or get out. They drill their gardeners, lecture very fast on agricultural efficiency, and have miniature rifle ranges in every village. It's a county of new notice-boards and barbed-wire fences; there's always a policeman round the corner. They dress for dinner. They dress for everything. If a man gets up in the night to look for a burglar he puts on the correct costume--or doesn't go. They've got a special scientific system for urging on their tramps. And they lock up their churches on a week-day. Half their soil is hard chalk or a rationalistic sand, only suitable for bunkers and villa foundations. And they play golf in a large, expensive, thorough way because it's the thing to do.... Now here in Essex we're as lax as the eighteenth century. We hunt in any old clothes. Our soil is a rich succulent clay; it becomes semi-fluid in winter--when we go about in waders shooting duck. All our fingerposts have been twisted round by facetious men years ago. And we pool our breeds of hens and pigs. Our roses and oaks are wonderful; that alone shows that this is the real England. If I wanted to play golf--which I don't, being a decent Essex man--I should have to motor ten miles into Hertfordshire. And for rheumatics and longevity Surrey can't touch us. I want you to be clear on these points, because they really will affect your impressions of this place.... This country is a part of the real England--England outside London and outside manufactures. It's one with

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

Section 11

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

There was quite a lot of rose garden, it made the air delicious, and it was full of great tumbling bushes of roses and of neglected standards, and it had a long pergola of creepers and trailers and a great arbour, and underneath over the beds everywhere, contrary to all the rules, the blossom of a multitude of pansies and stock and little trailing plants swarmed and crowded and scrimmaged and drilled and fought great massed attacks. And then Mr. Britling talked their way round a red-walled vegetable garden with an abundance of fruit trees, and through a door into a terraced square that had once been a farmyard, outside the converted barn. The barn doors had been replaced by a door-pierced

window of glass, and in the middle of the square space a deep tank had been made, full of rainwater, in which Mr. Britling remarked casually that "everybody" bathed when the weather was hot. Thyme and rosemary and suchlike sweet-scented things grew on the terrace about the tank, and ten trimmed little trees of Arbor vitae stood sentinel. Mr. Direck was tantalisingly aware that beyond some lilac bushes were his new-found cousin and the kindred young woman in blue playing tennis with the Indian and another young man, while whenever it was necessary the large-nosed lady crossed the stage and brooded soothingly over the perambulator. And Mr. Britling, choosing a seat from which Mr. Direck just couldn't look comfortably through the green branches at the flying glimpses of pink and blue and white and brown, continued to talk about England and America in relation to each other and everything else under the sun.

Presently through a distant gate the two small boys were momentarily visible wheeling small but serviceable bicycles, followed after a little interval by the German tutor. Then an enormous grey cat came slowly across the garden court, and sat down to listen respectfully to Mr. Britling. The afternoon sky was an intense blue, with little puff-balls of cloud lined out across it.

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

spirted and played ideas and reflections like a happy fountain in the sunshine.

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

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

"Nobody planned the British estate system, nobody planned the British aristocratic system, nobody planned the confounded constitution, it came about, it was like layer after layer wrapping round an agate, but you

see it came about so happily in a way, it so suited the climate and the temperament of our people and our island, it was on the whole so cosy, that our people settled down into it, you can't help settling down into it, they had already settled down by the days of Queen Anne, and Heaven knows if we shall ever really get away again. We're like that little shell the Lingula, that is found in the oldest rocks and lives to-day: it fitted its easy conditions, and it has never modified since. Why should it? It excretes all its disturbing forces. Our younger sons go away and found colonial empires. Our surplus cottage children emigrate to Australia and Canada or migrate into the towns. It doesn't alter this...."

Section 12

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

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

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

Georgian."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You were so good as to ask me, Mr. Britling, a little while ago, what my first impression of England was. Well, Mr. Britling, my first impression of England that seems to me to matter in the least is this:

that it looks and feels more like the traditional Old England than any one could possibly have believed, and that in reality it is less like the traditional Old England than any one would ever possibly have imagined."

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