CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE ENTERTAINMENT OF MR. DIRECK REACHES A CLIMAX

Section 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes. Manning is a London journalist. He has a little cottage about a mile over there"--Mr. Britling pointed vaguely--"and he comes down for

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

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

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

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

"He's gone," cried Britling.

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

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

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

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

The conversation thus opened by Manning centred for a time upon Colonel Rendezvous. He was presented as a monster of energy and self-discipline;

as the determined foe of every form of looseness, slackness, and easy-goingness.

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

"It's Kitchenerism," said Britling.

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

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

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

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

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

"There is something tragical in all this--what shall I call it?--Kitchenerism," Mr. Britling reflected "Here you have it rushing about and keeping itself--screwed up, and trying desperately to keep the country screwed up. And all because there may be a war some day somehow

with Germany. Provided Germany is insane. It's that war, like some sort of bee in Rendezvous' brains, that is driving him along the road now to Market Saffron--he always keeps to the roads because they are severer--through all the dust and sunshine. When he might be here gossiping....

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 2

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

But neither Mr. Britling nor Mr. Manning nor Mr. Direck was interrupted or incommoded in the slightest degree by that report. Because it was too far off over the curve of this round world to be either heard or seen at

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

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

Section 3

Lunch was an open-air feast again. Three visitors had dropped in; they had motored down from London piled up on a motor-cycle and a side-car; a brother and two sisters they seemed to be, and they had apparently reduced hilariousness to a principle. The rumours of coming hockey that

had been floating on the outskirts of Mr. Direck's consciousness ever since his arrival, thickened and multiplied.... It crept into his mind that he was expected to play....

He decided he would not play. He took various people into his confidence. He told Mr. Britling, and Mr. Britling said, "We'll make you full back, where you'll get a hit now and then and not have very much to do. All you have to remember is to hit with the flat side of your stick and not raise it above your shoulders." He told Teddy, and Teddy said, "I strongly advise you to dress as thinly as you can consistently with decency, and put your collar and tie in your pocket before the game begins. Hockey is properly a winter game." He told the maiden aunt-like lady with the prominent nose, and she said almost enviously, "Every one here is asked to play except me. I assuage the perambulator. I suppose one mustn't be envious. I don't see why I shouldn't play. I'm not so old as all that." He told Hugh, and Hugh warned him to be careful not to get hold of one of the sprung sticks. He considered whether it wouldn't be wiser to go to his own room and lock himself in, or stroll off for a walk through Claverings Park. But then he would miss Miss Corner, who was certain, it seemed, to come up for hockey. On the other hand, if he did not miss her he might make himself ridiculous in her eyes, and efface the effect of the green silk stuff with the golden pheasants.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So Miss Corner went off to get two sticks and a ball and came back to instruct Mr. Direck. She said he had a good eye. The two small boys scenting play in the air got sticks and joined them. The overnight visitor's wife appeared from the house in abbreviated skirts, and

wearing formidable shin-guards. With her abundant fair hair, which was already breaking loose, so to speak, to join the fray, she looked like a short stout dismounted Valkyr. Her gaze was clear and firm.

Section 4

Hockey as it was played at the Dower House at Matching's Easy before the war, was a game combining danger, physical exercise and kindliness 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.

Section 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...."

Section 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, pertinaceous 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."

Section 7

"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...."

Section 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.