

## VI. ON THE ROAD TO RIPLEY

In the fulness of time, Mr. Hoopdriver drew near the Marquis of Granby at Esher, and as he came under the railway arch and saw the inn in front of him, he mounted his machine again and rode bravely up to the doorway. Burton and biscuit and cheese he had, which, indeed, is Burton in its proper company; and as he was eating there came a middleaged man in a drab cycling suit, very red and moist and angry in the face, and asked bitterly for a lemon squash. And he sat down upon the seat in the bar and mopped his face. But scarcely had he sat down before he got up again and stared out of the doorway.

"Damn!" said he. Then, "Damned Fool!"

"Eigh?" said Mr. Hoopdriver, looking round suddenly with a piece of cheese in his cheek.

The man in drab faced him. "I called myself a Damned Fool, sir. Have you any objections?"

"Oh!--None. None," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "I thought you spoke to me. I didn't hear what you said."

"To have a contemplative disposition and an energetic temperament, sir, is hell. Hell, I tell you. A contemplative disposition and a phlegmatic temperament, all very well. But energy and philosophy--!"

Mr. Hoopdriver looked as intelligent as he could, but said nothing.

"There's no hurry, sir, none whatever. I came out for exercise, gentle exercise, and to notice the scenery and to botanise. And no sooner do I get on the accursed machine, than off I go hammer and tongs; I never look to right or left, never notice a flower, never see a view, get hot, juicy, red,--like a grilled chop. Here I am, sir. Come from Guildford in something under the hour. WHY, sir?"

Mr. Hoopdriver shook his head.

"Because I'm a damned fool, sir. Because I've reservoirs and reservoirs of muscular energy, and one or other of them is always leaking. It's a most interesting road, birds and trees, I've no doubt, and wayside flowers, and there's nothing I should enjoy more than watching them. But I can't. Get me on that machine, and I have to go. Get me on anything, and I have to go. And I don't want to go a bit. WHY should a man rush about like a rocket, all pace and fizzle? Why? It makes me furious. I can assure you, sir, I go scorching along the road, and cursing aloud at myself for doing it. A quiet, dignified, philosophical man, that's what I am--at bottom; and here I am dancing with rage and swearing like a drunken tinker at a perfect stranger--

"But my day's wasted. I've lost all that country road, and now I'm on the fringe of London. And I might have loitered all the morning! Ugh!

Thank Heaven, sir, you have not the irritable temperament, that you are not goaded to madness by your endogenous sneers, by the eternal wrangling of an uncomfortable soul and body. I tell you, I lead a cat and dog life--But what IS the use of talking?--It's all of a piece!"

He tossed his head with unspeakable self-disgust, pitched the lemon squash into his mouth, paid for it, and without any further remark strode to the door. Mr. Hoopdriver was still wondering what to say when his interlocutor vanished. There was a noise of a foot spurning the gravel, and when Mr. Hoopdriver reached the doorway, the man in drab was a score of yards Londonward. He had already gathered pace. He pedalled with ill-suppressed anger, and his head was going down. In another moment he flew swiftly out of sight under the railway arch, and Mr. Hoopdriver saw him no more.