Ford Madox Ford

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About the Book

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY ZOE HELLER

When John Dowell and his wife befriend Edward and Leonora Ashburnham they appear to be the perfect couple. He is a distinguished soldier and she is beautiful and intelligent. However, what lies beneath the surface of their marriage is far more sinister and their influence leads John into a tragic drama that threatens to destroy everything he cares about.

About the Author

Ford Madox Ford was born on 17 December 1873 in Merton, Devon. He began writing in the 1890s and both his fiction and his criticism are celebrated. His most famous works are *The Good Soldier* (1915) and *Parade's End* (1924–8). Ford's other major contribution to literature was the foundation of the *English Review* in which he published Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, H. G. Wells, Henry James and gave debuts to Wyndham Lewis and D.H. Lawrence. He also founded the *Transatlantic Review* in 1924. Ford changed his surname from Hueffer in 1919 after serving in the British army in France during the First World War. After 1927 Ford lived in the United States and France. He died in Deauville on 26 June 1939.

FORD MADDOX FORD

The Good Soldier

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Zoë Heller

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

INTRODUCTION

Ford Madox Ford sat down to write *The Good Soldier* in 1914 with the intention of producing a masterpiece. He was forty years old and had already written a good portion of the eighty some books that he would eventually publish in his lifetime, but he was not quite satisfied with what he had accomplished to date. As he later wrote in the dedicatory letter to Stella Bowen that accompanied the book's 1927 edition, 'I had never really tried to put into any novel of mine *all* that I knew about writing.' The new work – the culmination of his 'exhaustive studies into how words should be handled and novels constructed' – was to be his definitive claim on literary posterity.

Few critics today would dispute the greatness of Ford's achievement in *The Good Soldier*. The story of the English Ashburnhams and the American Dowells and the perfidies that roil beneath their 'four-square coterie' is an exquisitely intricate piece of modernist writing – a feat of literary construction that rewards multiple close readings, but there is nothing dry or scholastic about the human drama it depicts, or the troubled atmosphere that arises vaporously from its pages. Whatever painstaking technique went into its making, the fictional world of this novel has all the compelling strangeness and particularity of life itself.

For many of its first critics, *The Good Soldier* was a bewildering work. Some dismissed it out of hand as morally repugnant; others questioned its unorthodox style and structure. In a review of the novel that appeared in the *New Republic* magazine in 1915, the American novelist Theodore Dreiser faintly praised the novel's 'beautiful'

theme and ‘fine’ story while expressing regret that the potential of both had been foiled by the author’s inferior execution. Ford had not only wilfully ignored the chronological order of his plot, Dreiser noted, but he had failed to invest his protagonists with ‘unmistakable moods and characteristics’. Furthermore, he had tested the reader’s patience with ‘interlacings … re-re-references to all sorts of things which are subsequently told somewhere in full.’ Had Ford sought Dreiser’s opinion before setting out on this ill-considered project, he would have been advised to ‘begin at the beginning’ and allow the story to ‘go forward in a more or less direct line.’

There is no known record of Ford’s reaction to this imperious thumbs-down from one of the *éminence grises* of American realism, but one doubts that it caused him any lasting anguish. Dreiser’s remarks too clearly betray the irritation and anxiety of an old guard confronting the new. (His snooty reference to Ford’s ‘formal, British leanings’ is particularly telling in this regard.) Certainly, there is nothing in Dreiser’s list of ‘defects’ that Ford would not have proudly acknowledged as a calculated effect.

Judged by any conventional, nineteenth-century standard, *The Good Soldier* is indeed a disorganised book. Ford’s narrator, Dowell, digresses, dithers, backtracks and self-contradicts. His grasp of the most elementary ‘facts’, much like his sense of geography, is repeatedly shown to be partial and untrustworthy. (‘[T]he whole world for me is like spots of colour in an immense canvas,’ he tells us.) But one of the central ideas to have emerged from Ford’s investigations into ‘the way writing should be done’ was the conviction, as recorded in his 1924 memoir of Joseph Conrad, that, ‘Life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains. We in turn, if we wished to produce … an effect of life must not narrate but render … impressions.’ Dowell’s ‘incompetence’ as a narrator – his failure to impose continuity and order on his perceptions – is

precisely what allows him to convey the dense, chaotic stuff of his experience; what makes him, in effect, a most skilful ‘impressionist’.

His first affront to any readerly expectation of authoritative guidance comes in the novel’s opening line. In keeping with Ford’s belief that a first sentence should contain ‘the note that suggests the whole book’, a snaky complexity lurks within this confident-sounding declaration. Within a page or so, it will become clear that Dowell has not merely ‘heard’ but lived and breathed this story; has been a central participant in its events. The reader is left to wonder: is his choice of verb an attempt to disown his own participation in the action, to affect a detachment he does not have? Or is it an unconscious slip – an unwitting expression of his felt passivity?

And what of the claim that this is ‘the saddest story’ – a phrase that Ford originally intended for the book’s title? Dreiser identified it as an unfortunate error of judgment on Ford’s part: ‘This is rather a large order when one thinks of all the sad stories that have been told of this mad old world.’ If we discount Dreiser’s magisterial literal-mindedness – his readiness to conflate the narrator’s intentions with those of the author – the suspicion that Dowell is overstating the sadness of his story is not irrelevant, I think, to the range of possible responses that Ford intended his first sentence to evoke. Is Dowell earnestly proposing that this is the saddest story? And if so, can we trust such a ‘large order’? We might choose to read his superlative, not as a solemn claim, but as a lazy, conversational exaggeration – the sort commonly deployed to denote something only quite, or moderately sad. In which case, his banal language is surely incommensurate with the actual horrors that are to follow. (A good deal of the pathos of this novel comes from the inadequacy of the characters’ chipper, proper expressions to express the intensity of their feeling: think of Ashburnham in an ‘agony

of fear, of longing, of heat, of fever' describing himself as 'pipped'.) The problem of how to categorise his story, in both literary and moral terms, is one to which Dowell will return throughout the novel. Is it tragic or merely sad? Does it have some larger, historical resonance, or is it a random, meaningless catastrophe? The fundamental ambiguity of his tone in this first sentence places the burden of these questions straight away on the reader.

Throughout the novel, Dowell will assure us not only of his ineptitude as a story-teller, but of his emotional cluelessness – his inability to weigh the import of this affair, or to judge the moral character of any of its players. And initially, at least, the reader is hard-pressed to dispute his characterisation of himself as a fatally short-sighted booby. Here is a man who has known the Ashburnhams 'intimately' for nine years and has managed to misread every crucial fact about the nature of their real relations with himself and each other. Here is a man who has believed himself to be dancing a delightful social minuet with 'good people', when all the while he has been a cuckold trapped in 'a prison of screaming hysterics'.

The limitations of Dowell's vision have much to do, it seems, with his misplaced faith in surface and form. He has spent his life believing that public behaviour is a reliable indicator of moral character. He has, himself, been very much the good soldier in diligently observing the *comme il faut* rituals of his leisured class.

> We took for granted that we all liked beef underdone but not too underdone; that both men preferred a good liqueur brandy after lunch … [I]t is really nauseating when you detest it to have to eat every day slices of thin, tepid, pink India rubber, and it is disagreeable to have to drink brandy when you would prefer to be cheered up by a warm sweet Kümmel … But these things have to be done.

Even now that he has been shown the maggoty rottenness at the centre of his ‘goodly apple’, he still clings to his faith in good form and in ‘first impressions’. He still relies on a system of assumptions about the ‘hot passions of Europeans’ and the ‘unscrupulousness’ of Continental Papists and the decency of ‘well-bred people’. For the reader, it is tempting to regard his equivocations about the moral character of the Ashburnhams as yet another symptom of his incorrigible naïveté. If he is too ‘close’ to these people to ‘think any of them wicked’, *we*, who are not so dazzled by proximity, may be forgiven for assuming that we have a firmer grip on the sordid truths of this case.

Yet, as we proceed further into the labyrinth of his narrative, as the impressions pile up and the angles of perspective multiply, our confidence in our own ability to attribute definitive moral characteristics to the characters rapidly diminishes. Is Edward a lying, cheating ‘libertine’ or a decent, slightly dim ‘sentimentalist’? Is Leonora a rigid, cold-hearted termagant or a confused woman struggling to reconcile human love with religious principle? Is Florence a malevolent ‘whore’, or a ‘frightened fool’? Dowell may claim to have been duped by ‘three hardened gamblers who were all in league to conceal their hands from me’ but no one in this affair has ever had perfect knowledge of anyone else’s hand. All of the players have been fumbling about in the darkness, trying in vain to intuit one another’s motives. Leonora, with her ‘lighthouse glance’, lives in a perpetual ‘fever of watchfulness’, but is always missing the crucial action, always failing to find the clue to the riddle of her husband. (A lighthouse only strafes the darkness at timed intervals.) And for all his confidence as a lady’s man, Edward is repeatedly out manoeuvred by wilier operators than himself: ‘He had not the least idea of what Leonora knew … it was a pretty enigmatic situation for him …’ Even Florence, the schemer with ‘the seeing eye’, is horribly deluded in her ambitions. One might go so

far as to argue that her worldly vision is the most superficial, the most impaired, of all. (What could be more naïve than her belief that she can seduce her way into the English landed gentry?)

Thus does our own 'first impression' of a simple story about the hypocrisy of *belle epoque* society dissolve into an infinitely more perplexing vision of vice and innocence inextricably intertwined. In his memoir of Conrad, Ford offered the following example of how our understanding of other people 'never goes straight forward':

> You meet an English gentleman at your golf club. He is beefy, full of health, the moral of the boy from an English Public School of the finest type. You discover, gradually, that he is hopelessly neurasthenic, dishonest in matters of small change, but unexpectedly self-sacrificing, a dreadful liar but a most painfully careful student of lepidoptera and, finally, from the public prints, a bigamist who was once, under another name, hammered on the Stock Exchange …

Of all the protagonists in *The Good Soldier*, it is arguably Dowell himself who best exemplifies this slippery multitudinousness of human character. He offers himself to us as 'a trained poodle', a man exempt from the destructive passions that plague his companions. Yet, throughout the text, we receive unsettling glimpses of quite another Dowell – a man subject to 'frenzies' of impatience, and capable of 'the maddest kind of rage', whose fussy attentions to his supposedly invalid wife carry with them a distinct whiff of sadism. ('I would not', he remarks with bitter irony, 'have let her pass the steamer gangway to save her life.') In recounting his physical attack on Florence's servant at the start of his honeymoon, Dowell mentions that he 'saw red … saw purple' – the same colours of sex and

anger that will later be seen lurking within the pleasant, green countryside on the quartet's fateful trip to Nauheim. It is this crazed physical outburst, he notes, that first led his wife to fear him. 'She was afraid that I would murder her.'

If the quietness of Dowell's disposition is dubious, so too is his avowed 'cleanness' of mind. He is, he tells us, 'a sort of convent' and his refusal to recognise how the 'sex-instinct' drives the behaviour of his companions – to understand what Florence 'saw' in her loutish lover, Jimmy, or what various women 'saw' in Ashburnham – is one of the grimly comic motifs of the novel. Yet, the reader who too readily accepts Dowell's claims to eunuch-like innocence will be startled when, towards the end of the novel, he abruptly confesses his own polygamous desires. 'If I had had the courage, the virility and possibly also the physique of Edward Ashburnham,' he writes, 'I should, I fancy, have done much what he did.'

It is impossible to know for sure whether Dowell has been deliberately concealing his own stallion-like tendencies from us (much as he concealed his more innocuous appetite for 'good cooking' from his wife) or whether he is only now becoming aware of his long-repressed 'sex-instinct'. But in identifying himself as a 'fainter' version of Ashburnham – 'I love him because he was just myself' – Dowell is not merely acknowledging his buried carnal ambitions; he is allying himself with Ashburnham's sentimental ethos.

'Sentimentality' is a key term, like 'knowing' and 'goodness', whose meaning is fretted over and revised throughout the novel. In Dowell's first account of Ashburnham's 'sentimental view of the cosmos' he derides his friend's 'gurgling' platitudes and relates them to a weakness for silly, romantic novels – 'novels in which typewriter girls married Marquises and governesses Earls'. He is obliged to note, however, that in their one truly

intimate conversation together, Ashburnham 'talked like quite a good book – a book not in the least cheaply sentimental.' (A later comment about the same conversation, will convey a similar ambivalence. 'But the fellow talked like a cheap novelist. Or like a very good novelist, for the matter of that, if it's the business of a novelist to make you see things clearly.') By the end of the novel, Dowell's understanding of sentimentality and of its literary associations has radically altered. It no longer connotes the soppy stuff of 'indifferent' or 'cheap' literature, it seems, but of Swinburne and Froissart and Walter Scott. It has become a codeword for the idealism of the 'passionate, the headstrong, the too-truthful', an idealism that is destined to be destroyed by those like Leonora, who do not read novels and therefore don't believe in 'pure and constant love'.

Whether it makes sense for Dowell to speak of Leonora as more 'deceitful' than her adulterous husband, or whether his avowed sentimentality is itself a sort of decadence, remains for the reader to decide. The conclusion of Dowell's narrative offers not a resolution, so much as a plangent confirmation of complexities. While Ford would certainly have agreed with Dowell that it is a novelist's business to make a reader 'see things clearly', his interest in clarity had little to do with simplicity. There is no 'getting to the bottom of things', no triumphant answers to the epistemological muddle offered in this beautiful, bleak story – only a finer appreciation of the confusion. We may remove the scales from our eyes, Ford suggests, but only the better to appreciate the glass through which we see darkly.

Zoë Heller, 2010

DEDICATORY LETTER TO STELLA FORD

MY DEAR STELLA

I have always regarded this as my best book – at any rate as the best book of mine of a pre-war period; and between its writing and the appearance of my next novel nearly ten years must have elapsed, so that whatever I may have since written may be regarded as the work of a different man – as the work of *your* man. For it is certain that without the incentive to live that you offered me I should scarcely have survived the war-period and it is more certain still that without your spurring me again to write I should never have written again. And it happens that, by a queer chance, *The Good Soldier* is almost alone amongst my books in being dedicated to no one: Fate must have elected to let it wait the ten years that it waited – for this dedication.

What I am now I owe to you: what I was when I wrote *The Good Soldier* I owed to the concatenation of circumstances of a rather purposeless and wayward life. Until I sat down to write this book – on the 17th December, 1913 – I had never attempted to extend myself, to use a phrase of race-horse training. Partly because I had always entertained very fixedly the idea that – whatever may be the case with other writers – I at least should not be able to write a novel by which I should care to stand before reaching the age of forty; partly because I very definitely did not want to come into competition with other writers whose claim or whose need for recognition and what recognitions bring were greater than my own. I had never really tried to put into any novel of mine *all* that I knew about writing. I had written rather desultorily a number of books – a great number – but they had all been in the

nature of *pastiches*, of pieces of rather precious writing, or of *tours de force*. But I have always been mad about writing – about the way writing should be done and partly alone, partly with the companionship of Conrad, I had even at that date made exhaustive studies into how words should be handled and novels constructed.

So, on the day I was forty I sat down to show what I could do – and *The Good Soldier* resulted. I fully intended it to be my last book. I used to think – and I do not know that I do not think the same now – that one book was enough for any man to write, and, at the date when *The Good Soldier* was finished, London at least and possibly the world appeared to be passing under the dominion of writers newer and much more vivid. Those were the passionate days of the literary Cubists, Vorticists, Imagistes and the rest of the tapageur and riotous Jeunes of that young decade. So I regarded myself as the Eel which, having reached the deep sea, brings forth its young and dies – or as the Great Auk I considered that, having reached my allotted, I had laid my one egg and might as well die. So I took a formal farewell of Literature in the columns of a magazine called the *Thrush* – which also, poor little auk that it was, died of the effort. Then I prepared to stand aside in favour of our good friends – yours and mine – Ezra, Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, H. D., and the rest of the clamorous young writers who were then knocking at the door.

But greater clamours beset London and the world which till then had seemed to lie at the proud feet of those conquerors; Cubism, Vorticism, Imagism and the rest never had their fair chance amid the voices of the cannon, and so I have come out of my hole again and beside your strong, delicate and beautiful works have taken heart to lay some work of my own.

The Good Soldier, however, remains my great auk's egg for me as being something of a race that will have no successors and as it was written so long ago I may not

seem over-vain if I consider it for a moment or two. No author, I think, is deserving of much censure for vanity if, taking down one of his ten-year-old books, he exclaims: ‘Great Heavens, did I write as well as that then?’ for the implication always is that one does not any longer write so well and few are so envious as to censure the complacencies of an extinct volcano.

Be that as it may, I was lately forced into the rather close examination of this book, for I had to translate it into French, that forcing me to give it much closer attention than would be the case in any reading however minute. And I will permit myself to say that I was astounded at the work I must have put into the construction of the book, at the intricate tangle of references and cross-references. Nor is that to be wondered at for, though I wrote it with comparative rapidity, I had it hatching within myself for fully another decade. That was because the story is a true story and because I had it from Edward Ashburnham himself and I could not write it till all the others were dead. So I carried it about with me all those years, thinking about it from time to time.

I had in those days an ambition: that was to do for the English novel what in *Fort Comme la Mort*, Maupassant had done for the French. One day I had my reward, for I happened to be in a company where a fervent young admirer exclaimed: ‘By Jove, *The Good Soldier* is the finest novel in the English language!’ whereupon my friend Mr John Rodker who has always had a properly tempered admiration for my work remarked in his clear, slow drawl: ‘Ah yes. It is, but you have left out a word. It is the finest French novel in the English language!’

With that – which is my tribute to my masters and betters of France – I will leave the book to the reader. But I should like to say a word about the title. This book was originally called by me *The Saddest Story*, but since it did not appear till the darkest days of the war were upon us,

Mr Lane importuned me with letters and telegrams – I was by that time engaged in other pursuits! – to change the title which he said would at that date render the book unsaleable. One day, when I was on parade, I received a final wire of appeal from Mr Lane, and the telegraph being reply-paid I seized the reply-form and wrote in hasty irony: 'Dear Lane, Why not *The Good Soldier*?' … To my horror six months later the book appeared under that title.

I have never ceased to regret it but, since the War, I have received so much evidence that the book has been read under that name that I hesitate to make a change for fear of causing confusion. Had the chance occurred during the War I should not have hesitated to make the change, for I had only two evidences that anyone had ever heard of it. On one occasion I met the adjutant of my regiment just come off leave and looking extremely sick. I said: 'Great Heavens, man, what is the matter with you?' He replied: 'Well, the day before yesterday I got engaged to be married and to-day I have been reading *The Good Soldier*.'

On the other occasion I was on parade again, being examined in drill, on the Guards' Square at Chelsea. And, since I was petrified with nervousness, having to do it before a half-dozen elderly gentlemen with red hatbands, I got my men about as hopelessly boxed as it is possible to do with the gentlemen privates of H. M. Coldstream Guards. Whilst I stood stiffly at attention one of the elderly red hatbands walked close behind my back and said distinctly in my ear, 'Did you say *The* Good *Soldier*?' So no doubt Mr Lane was avenged. At any rate I have learned that irony may be a two-edged sword.

You, my dear Stella, will have heard me tell these stories a great many times. But the seas now divide us and I put them in this, your letter, which you will read before you see me in the hope that they may give you some pleasure with the illusion that you are hearing familiar – and very devoted – tones. And so I subscribe myself in all truth and in the

hope that you will accept at once the particular dedication of this book and the general dedication of the edition.

Your

F. M. F

NEW YORK, *January* 9, 1927.

THE GOOD SOLDIER

A TALE OF PASSION

‘Beati Immaculati’

PART ONE

I

THIS IS THE saddest story I have ever heard. We had known the Ashburnhams for nine seasons of the town of Nauheim with an extreme intimacy – or, rather with an acquaintanceship as loose and easy and yet as close as a good glove’s with your hand. My wife and I knew Captain and Mrs Ashburnham as well as it was possible to know anybody, and yet, in another sense, we knew nothing at all about them. This is, I believe, a state of things only possible with English people of whom, till to-day, when I sit down to puzzle out what I know of this sad affair, I knew nothing whatever. Six months ago I had never been to England, and, certainly, I had never sounded the depths of an English heart. I had known the shallows.

I don’t mean to say that we were not acquainted with many English people. Living, as we perforce lived, in Europe, and being, as we perforce were, leisured Americans, which is as much as to say that we were un-American, we were thrown very much into the society of the nicer English. Paris, you see, was our home. Somewhere between Nice and Bordighera provided yearly winter quarters for us, and Nauheim always received us from July to September. You will gather from this statement that one of us had, as the saying is, a ‘heart,’ and, from the statement that my wife is dead, that she was the sufferer.

Captain Ashburnham also had a heart. But, whereas a yearly month or so at Nauheim tuned him up to exactly the right pitch for the rest of the twelvemonth, the two months or so were only just enough to keep poor Florence alive from year to year. The reason for his heart was, approximately, polo, or too much hard sportsmanship in his youth. The reason for poor Florence’s broken years was a storm at sea upon our first crossing to Europe, and the

immediate reasons for our imprisonment in that continent were doctors' orders. They said that even the short Channel crossing might well kill the poor thing.

When we all first met, Captain Ashburnham, home on sick leave from an India to which he was never to return, was thirty-three; Mrs Ashburnham – Leonora – was thirty-one. I was thirty-six and poor Florence thirty. Thus to-day Florence would have been thirty-nine and Captain Ashburnham forty-two; whereas I am forty-five and Leonora forty. You will perceive, therefore, that our friendship has been a young-middle-aged affair, since we were all of us of quite quiet dispositions, the Ashburnhams being more particularly what in England it is the custom to call 'quite good people.'

They were descended, as you will probably expect, from the Ashburnham who accompanied Charles I to the scaffold, and, as you must also expect with this class of English people, you would never have noticed it. Mrs Ashburnham was a Powys; Florence was a Hurlbird of Stamford, Connecticut, where, as you know, they are more old-fashioned than even the inhabitants of Cranford, England, could have been. I myself am a Dowell of Philadelphia, Pa., where, it is historically true, there are more old English families than you would find in any six English counties taken together. I carry about with me, indeed – as if it were the only thing that invisibly anchored me to any spot upon the globe – the title deeds of my farm, which once covered several blocks between Chestnut and Walnut Streets. These title deeds are of wampum, the grant of an Indian chief to the first Dowell, who left Farnham in Surrey in company with William Penn. Florence's people, as is so often the case with the inhabitants of Connecticut, came from the neighbourhood of Fordingbridge, where the Ashburnhams' place is. From there, at this moment, I am actually writing.

You may well ask why I write. And yet my reasons are quite many. For it is not unusual in human beings who have witnessed the sack of a city or the falling to pieces of a people to desire to set down what they have witnessed for the benefit of unknown heirs or of generations infinitely remote; or, if you please, just to get the sight out of their heads.

Some one has said that the death of a mouse from cancer is the whole sack of Rome by the Goths, and I swear to you that the breaking up of our little four-square coterie was such another unthinkable event. Supposing that you should come upon us sitting together at one of the little tables in front of the club house, let us say, at Homburg, taking tea of an afternoon and watching the miniature golf, you would have said that, as human affairs go, we were an extraordinarily safe castle. We were, if you will, one of those tall ships with the white sails upon a blue sea, one of those things that seem the proudest and the safest of all the beautiful and safe things that God has permitted the mind of men to frame. Where better could one take refuge? Where better?

Permanence? Stability? I can’t believe it’s gone. I can’t believe that that long, tranquil life, which was just stepping a minuet, vanished in four crashing days at the end of nine years and six weeks. Upon my word, yes, our intimacy was like a minuet, simply because on every possible occasion and in every possible circumstance we knew where to go, where to sit, which table we unanimously should choose; and we could rise and go, all four together, without a signal from any one of us, always to the music of the Kur orchestra, always in the temperate sunshine, or, if it rained, in discreet shelter. No, indeed, it can’t be gone. You can’t kill a minuet de la cour. You may shut up the music-book, close the harpsichord; in the cupboard and presses the rats may destroy the white satin favours. The mob may sack Versailles; the Trianon may fall, but surely the minuet – the

minuet itself is dancing itself away into the furthest stars, even as our minuet of the Hessian bathing places must be stepping itself still. Isn't there any heaven where old beautiful dances, old beautiful intimacies prolong themselves? Isn't there any Nirvana pervaded by the faint thrilling of instruments that have fallen into the dust of wormwood but that yet had frail, tremulous, and everlasting souls?

No, by God, it is false! It wasn't a minuet that we stepped; it was a prison – a prison full of screaming hysterics, tied down so that they might not outsound the rolling of our carriage wheels as we went along the shaded avenues of the Taunus Wald.

And yet I swear by the sacred name of my creator that it was true. It was true sunshine; the true music; the true splash of the fountains from the mouth of stone dolphins. For, if for me we were four people with the same tastes, with the same desires, acting – or, no, not acting – sitting here and there unanimously, isn't that the truth? If for nine years I have possessed a goodly apple that is rotten at the core and discover its rottenness only in nine years and six months less four days, isn't it true to say that for nine years I possessed a goodly apple? So it may well be with Edward Ashburnham, with Leonora his wife and with poor dear Florence. And, if you come to think of it, isn't it a little odd that the physical rottenness of at least two pillars of our four-square house never presented itself to my mind as a menace to its security? It doesn't so present itself now though the two of them are actually dead. I don't know …

I know nothing – nothing in the world – of the hearts of men. I only know that I am alone – horribly alone. No hearthstone will ever again witness, for me, friendly intercourse. No smoking-room will ever be other than peopled with incalculable simulacra amidst smoke wreaths. Yet, in the name of God, what should I know if I don't know the life of the hearth and of the smoking-room, since my