

I

IN WATLING STREET

Upon an evening in early autumn, I, who had never owned an orchard before, stood in my orchard; behind me were a phalanx of some sixty trees bearing (miraculously, to my simplicity) a fine crop of apples and plums—my apples and plums, and a mead of some two acres, my mead, upon which I discerned possibilities of football and cricket; behind these was a double greenhouse containing three hundred pendent bunches of grapes of the dark and aristocratic variety which I thought I had seen in Piccadilly ticketed at four shillings a pound—my grapes; still further behind uprose the chimneys of a country-house, uncompromisingly plain and to some eyes perhaps ugly, but my country-house, the lease of which, stamped, was in my pocket. Immediately in front of me was a luxuriant hedge which, long unclipped, had attained a height of at least fifteen feet. Beyond the hedge the ground fell away sharply into a draining ditch, and on the other side of the ditch, through the interstices of the hedge, I perceived glimpses of a very straight and very white highway.

This highway was Watling Street, built of the Romans, and even now surviving as the most fa-