

## HUMOR



Edith Wharton

(1862-1937)

### EDITH WHARTON DESCRIBES

#### HENRY JAMES ASKING DIRECTIONS

...James and I chanced to arrive at Windsor long after dark. We must have been driven by a strange chauffeur--perhaps Cook was on holiday; at any rate, having fallen into the lazy habit of trusting him to know the way, I found myself at a loss to direct his substitute to the King's Road. While I was hesitating and peering out into the darkness James spied an ancient doddering man who had stopped in the rain to gaze at us. "Wait a moment, my dear—I'll ask him where we are"; and leaning out he signaled to the spectator.

"My good man, if you'll be good enough to come here, please; a little nearer--so," and as the old man came up: "My friend, to put it to you in two words, this lady and I have just arrived here from Slough; that is to say, to be more strictly accurate, we have recently passed through Slough on our way here, having actually motored to Windsor from Rye, which was our point of departure; and the darkness having overtaken us, we should be much obliged if you would tell us where we are now in relation, say, to the High Street, which, as you of course know, leads to the Castle, after leaving on the left hand the turn down to the railway station."

I was not surprised to have this extraordinary appeal met by silence, and a dazed expression on the old wrinkled face at the window; nor to have James go on: "In short" (his invariable prelude to a fresh series of explanatory ramifications), "in short, my good man, what I want to put to you in a word is this: supposing we have already (as I have reason to think we have) driven past the turn down to the railway station (which in that case, by the way, would probably not have been on our left hand, but on our right) where are we now in relation to--"

"--Oh, please," I interrupted, feeling myself utterly unable to sit through another parenthesis, "do ask him where the King's Road is."

"Ah--? The King's Road? Just so! Quite right! Can you, as a matter of fact, my good man, tell us where, in relation to our present position, the King's Road exactly is?"

"Ye're in it," said the aged face at the window.

*The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes*  
(Oxford 1975; Pocket Book 1976) 363-64

ed. James Sutherland