6 “I’m Not Such a Fool as I Seem”

In the earliest years of the new century, Galsworthy’s clan, especially members of the younger generation, regarded him as increasingly different. Having abruptly stopped shooting, he shaved off the full, although never waxed, moustache that he had worn most of the time during the 1890s. Dorothy Ivens recalls her first memories of him, in 1901 or 1902, when he came for dinner and watched her and her sisters perform a playlet she had written: “Uncle Jack roared, he really laughed, throwing his head back and forth, so unlike the other relatives. And he gave each of us girls a gold half-sovereign.”¹ She recognized other ways in which he was different: “he encouraged my first efforts although the family code was dead against expression”.² When she learned, a short time later, that her cousin was trying to become a writer, she became his “defender” in the midst of a family that combined affection for him with disapproval. She quotes her grandmother Randall as reflecting the general opinion within the extended family: “Poor, dear Jack. He’s so handsome and charming, but he will waste his time scribbling when he could have pleased his father so much and been such a success at the bar. The writing’s even more pointless than the way he spent his time at Oxford.”³ At a later date, in 1910, when Dorothy had begun to write herself, Galsworthy sent two of her short literary sketches to the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, which accepted them. When she, with silent pride, left a copy of the periodical containing her first published work on a table, her grandmother saw it and “seized its greenish papers with the tongs, rammed it onto the coal scuttle and wrathfully commanded me: ‘Go to your room, Miss, and if I ever find that filthy Radical rag lying about . . .’”.⁴ At about that time, Dorothy, going to tea at the Galsworthys, met Ralph Mottram and hesistantly began a conversation with him about poetry and music because both

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¹ J. Gindin, *John Galsworthy’s Life and Art*, © James Gindin 1987
Ada and Jack were late in returning. The young people began to correspond:

Granny Randall wondered at the strange writing on the letters coming to the house. She insisted that I write Uncle Jack for more details, that I “make inquiries.” Uncle Jack replied: “Your correspondent is quite grown up, nearly thirty. He has no prospects and is of good character. Some of his poems you’ve read – he is a bank clerk at Norwich – and his soul is not simple.”

The political and social attitudes that Galsworthy developed, in contrast with what might have been expected, given his origins and education, were clearly visible from the beginning of the century. Both of Hubert’s children, for example, Muriel and Hubert John, have used their more “conventional” father as a contrast to his older and, in terms of the clan, more deviant brother. Muriel thought the difference explicable in their commitments to different political parties, John Galsworthy a Liberal, Hubert a Conservative so staunch that his children were not allowed to go to the village tailor or bootmaker because these tradesmen supported the Liberals. Even much later, during the Second World War, Muriel recalled, Winston Churchill’s heroism and long Tory service were not enough for the older Hubert to excuse earlier Liberal heresies. And, in addition, Churchill “was less a gentleman” than Chamberlain. Hubert John, although substantially agreeing with his sister, was more inclined to distinguish the two on the basis of other attitudes, toward money or toward anything mechanical:

They were mentally poles apart, although genuinely fond of each other. It wasn’t just politics. Conservative and Liberal. They just approached everything in an entirely different way. My father rushed to join a League for Air Defence that started in ’20 or ’21 when Uncle Jack wanted to obliterate flying altogether. And I remember once, with my father, taking Uncle Jack on a boat trip up the Dart river to Totnes. My father tried to show him how to handle the boat and pointed out the scenery on the way. But Uncle Jack didn’t care much for the scenery, still less for the boat. He only wanted to see