

KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,

1902-6

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WHEN I came up, the man I heard most talked about was one whom I never saw—Henry Sidgwick. By 1906 I would have said that he was a moral philosopher (I greatly enjoyed his *Ethics*) of compelling charm—you should have seen Dr. Neville Keyne's face light up when he spoke of him—who wrote dull books on Politics, Political Economy and European Politics, through which I had been advised to wade. O. B. (Oscar Browning) was as devoted to his memory, as to that of George Eliot. Among living persons O. B. was devoted also to Wedd, Dickinson, George Curzon—he was Viceroy then—Jack Sheppard and my humble self—although, as he said one day to me in Italy, to which he took me as a freshman, 'You ain't as clever as Jack, you know: and neither of you can compare with George.' It is my belief that the morning tea buns had disagreed with him that day, as happened also with the midnight hock and oysters, on which, according to Wedd, O. B. for a time dieted himself, in order to cure the insomnia of multiple authorship.

In the crucial 3rd year my tutor was Lowes Dickinson. I have never known a man whom I was more unlike, nor a man whom I would have liked to be like. None of his values were my values: I had all the crudeness of energetic youth; I had rarely read any of the literature that interested him. At 5 p.m. each week or fortnight, I read an essay to him with something of fear and trembling. He was some times in riding breeches; and instead of the comfortable way of O. B., who slept with a red handkerchief on his face and woke with praise at the end, he looked over the essay, pencil in hand, with which he made small marginal squiggles. "It hasn't come yet, I'm afraid," the "it" being a style. But I got level with him once with a pretty quotation in inverted commas. "Yes, that's the point—I like it. Who's it from?" And then, as I looked up at him without opening my mouth, he went on "Did I say it myself?" Others too will remember his shoulder shake, as he rubbed his hand on his trowse leg. "Good God, I never thought anyone read it now"—to wit the *Development of Parliament in the 19th Century*. Nor do I think historians would miss it. But I know

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by heart whole chunks of the *Letters of John Chinaman*—a rose in a moon-lit garden, the shadow of trees upon the turf, almond bloom, scent of pine, the wine-cup and the guitar, etc., etc.

As a scholar I was in College all four years. Going round to see people (dons included) at 11 p. m. or even later was what we most enjoyed; and I vividly remember around 1 a.m. of a certain moonlight night crossing the sacred grass of the front court and looking up at the fleecy clouds, as they raced over the pinnacles of the chapel, and thinking, "That's mine. I'm part of it, four centuries and a half of it. I wish I was a great historian, then I would write about it." But a more non-mediaeval soul than myself I never met; and though O.B. tricked me into a minor history of the College, I feel towards it as Dickinson felt to his *Development of Parliament in the 19th Century*.

These were the good lecturers in the History Tripos of my day: Corbett (Constitutional History)—no doubt Lapsley at Trinity was as good—Dickinson (Political Theory), and Acton's successor Bury. Bury was the man I liked most of all. There was real meat. It was his first year as Regius, and I must have got down nearly every word on those Barbarian Invasions. George Green was scissors and paste; Gwatkin, a farceur. Thorneley doddered. After a taste of Marshall I had no use for Lawrence or Archdeacon Bill. With Tanner one could spend a pleasant hour. Reddaway was my good friend. O. B. let me off his, halfway through his first term, in return for attending his Dante tea readings on Sunday afternoons.

They were great days for me. I was a historian and most fortunately never consorted with historians. There was Furness in Classics, Keynes in Mathematics—Furness talking Rabelais, and Keynes, McTaggart—and finally Esme Cecil Wingfield-Stratford, who rose at 12, talked Herbert Spencer at you, as long as you would listen to him, in the merciful days before he became a poet and Fellow of King's College, Cambridge.

II

There was only one issue of superlative interest in my undergraduate days—the Mission of Alister Grant. I knew him as a freshman on the football field and at Fenner's. In 1903 he took religion. I was on the paper for the debate in hall—a College Mission with or without Religion—Grant leading for the "withs". I was 'anti' on the agenda paper, but they never got down to me. Meredith and Keynes were hot for free thought.

Provost Leigh presided with exquisite fairness. I sat close by Dickinson, and I'm told that my memory is at fault when I say he took part. But he did. I remember his lips, as he spoke shortly—it was hardly more than a question—in favor of no complusion. I remember too the rain on the Hall windows that night. I remember finally, saying to myself as I left, "At any rate that's one in the eye for Gaselee and Bill Spens." But that was only the beginning. I was with "Wingers" in a front seat for the two famous Lectures in the little room of the Guildhall, in which Alister expounded his revelation. He was a medical student, and the essence of his revelation was that you might see the Light approximately eight months before you were born. This was the conclusion up to which he worked, and when he got there, the Roman Catholic clergy present stalked heavily out of the room.

He had one convert, then, a small boy, Robert, who worked the screen at his second and concluding lecture. The screen, when elevated, revealed a chart exhibiting the progress of religion throughout the ages. It rose to a first peak with Elijah, and after a second upturn for the minor prophets ran along a trough till it rose sharply at the Christian era: then again a long slow descent, with a moderate upswing at the Reformation, after which it sank relentlessly till 1902—3, when it shot up out of the screen at the top right hand corner. Wingers clapped and I clapped, till we could clap no more.

I was in hall, too, on the famous night when the prophet, now whiskered and wearing a black gown, strode up to the High Table and began "Mr. Vice-provost and Gentlemen. It is my painful duty to denounce you as a set of godless atheists"—at which point Macaulay rose tutorially and taking him by the elbow, amid the dead silence of the waiters, coaxed him out of the hall. Wingers and I were now his enthusiastic followers, but Wingers had a setback; Alister called on him for a subscription to his Community, which Wingers said he gave; but before leaving, Alister asked, "Do you think I am inspired?" Winger replied "Er-un-well-er-um-I mean, Shakespeare was inspired too." Upon which Alister registered his disappointment and said, "Do you mind if I curse you before I go?"—which Wingers, always a thrifty soul, thought rather mean.

But he got his own back a little later. The Prophet was had up for brawling in the local Congregational Church, and when defending himself said, "In the Name of . . ." "Come, come," said the beak, "you mustn't use that sort of language

in a British Court of Justice." Well, Wingers got his own back by visiting Alister in jail, and lending him (so I understood) a copy of Oscar's Wilde's *De Profundis*.

The finale was noteworthy. Alister was sent down to Cornwall to recuperate in a parsonage. One night he seemed excited and asked for salad oil. Next morning when the family were at prayers, he appeared anointed in nothing but salad oil. Hastily dismissing the ladies, the clergyman closed with Alister, but he, being slippery as an eel, eluded escape till manouevred into the bow window. After which, according to Temps, he was removed to Bedlam, where he spoke with tongues.

Of course I know that mental sickness is a sad thing, but can you blame the undergraduate mind for seeing the humorous side of it? Grant was at heart a jolly soul. We had played games together. And even when he was a prophet, we never passed each other in the street without a friendly nod.

III

Since I never called him Maynard¹ till long after the War of 1914-1918 and find it strange to refer to him now in my lectures as Lord Keynes, I will call him what we called him then—Keynes. A troublesome name, to be sure, for if I have interrupted Canadian and American friends once for pronouncing it Keens, I have done it twenty times ('Kaynes: and not Professor, just Mister').

When I arrived in the Lane for Little-go on 1 October 1902, there was only one other person on the staircase; and as I descended from my about-to-be furnished rooms, he asked me to come in and have some tea. 'My name's Keynes. What's yours?' He had a moustache and fancy waistcoat, a beautifully carved desk and a wicker basket, with a pair of gloves in it. He asked me if I liked the place, and I said 'Rather' and to keep the ball rolling I lugged in O. B., whereupon he said, 'I was at Eton, too.'

It was surely strange that the first person I met at King's was the most brilliant man I have ever met or can hope to meet. I make for him the claim that he was greater than Alfred Marshall and the equal of Adam Smith, and had what Smith also had, an uncanny power of 'going along with' you or it. He suffered fools and foolish thoughts, not gladly but patiently

1. This closing section of the reminiscences appeared originally in *John Maynard Keynes, 1883-1946: A Memoir Prepared by Direction of the Council of King's Council, Cambridge, 1949*

and kindly. A Puritan in soul and bodily habit, he yet was fond of scrumptious things, of old books, social breakfasts, *de luxe* travel and *petits cheveux* (when we were at Biarritz in 1907 he lost his spare cash on a system, so that for the last three days we were confined to piquet, his hotel coupons against my French francs,— and fond above all of being in the swim. Not for years (not indeed till his tremendous article of September 1914 in the *Economic Journal*, when he exposed the poltooney of the bankers) did I recognize his stature.

As an undergraduate he did many things and once out of bed worked really hard, trying to keep up with Page in Mathematics, and always finding time for his other interests, literary, social and political. Through his father and Sidgwick (a boyhood friend who told him Limericks on the Royston links) he imbibed the atmosphere of the Moral Science, which then was a nursery of economists; and from the time I knew him he took an interest in the Stock Exchange, which is but an exercise in Probability. Neither Page nor I was his bosom friend. This was our Classic, R. A. Furness, whose familiarity with Rabelais and Sterne *et hoc genus omne* caused Page to blush, me to feel an inferiority complex, and Keynes to be enviously competitive. As I was, in my first year, something of a Rigger celebrity, he often talked games with me, and especially of his wall-scraping role in the Eton Wall Game. Later we used to play golf at Royston, at which he was the worst player I have known with the exception of Wedd, whose method was first to miss the ball, then to talk to it, then to refill his pipe, and finally to wave through the pair behind.

All through his undergraduate days Keynes was as happy as the rest of us, for how can I express the freedom we enjoyed at King's: no gate fines, no pestering from that damnable thing now called supervision (I exclude the coaching, which sometimes he cut, and my weekly essay, through which the O. B. slept), attending what lectures we pleased, such as McTaggart's at Trinity, into which Keynes roped me, and paying for none. But I thought it a bit offensive when in his second year, having bought a standard edition of Burke, he proceeded to win the Members' Prize for English Essay on the Political Philosophy of Burke (1904). By this time, however, he was a Union light and seemed to know most people at Trinity; and if I had been asked what his best speech was, I would have recalled his debut in the College Hall at King's in his first year, when he followed Meredith and others in helping to down the College Mission

with religious tests in London: of which I and others reaped the harvest by obeying the invitation of Reddaway to play, instead, undenominational cricket with the College tenants.

It rankled with Keynes that the Dean would not allow him to read the lessons in Chapel unless he promised regular attendance on Sunday mornings, which he would not. For he loved to read aloud, and I remember well how, when he stayed with us at Liverpool (in those days I was slated for the Church), he explained on the way to church that Huxley had exploded Christianity and in the afternoon, while I smoked, he read to me *Will o' The Mill*.

When he came back to Cambridge in 1909 he was just the same, only more so. (I believe that at that moment he would have gone to Trinity, though nowhere else, if they had been shrewd enough to invite him). Quite obviously he would in a few years be running the College; and if the Economics Tripos did not offer a fair field to money, then the Economics Tripos must be, and duly was, reformed. Yet none of us foresaw (how could we?) that, before he was finished, he would be running the world. Often enough I disagreed with him and his bright ideas, but you couldn't quarrel with him, because he wouldn't quarrel with you.

I am not an economist, only a 'near-economist' as the saying is. Perhaps that is why of all the conversation I had with him a bare ten per cent was concerned with economics. I attended his lectures on money and wrote papers for him, which he said were off the point. But what I remember now are the pronouncements of his Freshman year, such as (and this is literally true) 'I've had a good look round the place and come to the conclusion that it's pretty inefficient.'