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Miscellany

A KENTISH PORTRAIT

ALFRED first came to us in the late summer of 1931. It was wet, rather humid weather generally, with occasional spells of high wind that blew fleets of the whitest clouds up from the coastal marshes and the sea. The earlier summer had been drier and hotter, and to this we attributed the astonishing colour of Alfred's face, which sailed into the garden every morning like the rising sun. But now I sometimes wonder if I ever saw a sun that rose as red and hot as Alfred's face. It was a little less brilliant than a polony sausage and a little more effulgent than a raspberry. It shone like the sausage and yet was as ripe as the fruit. It seemed to be on fire, and the mere sight of Alfred made us feel hot and clammy. It seemed also as if Alfred himself was on fire, since even before he took off his jacket every morning the sweat was standing in little clusters, like yellow berries, on his flaming face. His hair was very black, as though charred, and his eyes, brown and rather protruding, flickered and bubbled as though they were two chestnuts being roasted on the hob of his burning countenance.

Alfred had come to dig for us. What I have called the garden was then an acre of rank grassland on the edge of a disused farmyard. Docks had seeded there for a thousand years; the thistle-flowers prickled my face as I walked; the white camomile daisies made thick drifts of yellow and snow. But this was to be the garden. And Alfred had come to dig its foundations.

At first I had some difficulty in establishing communication with him. He was very shy and he spoke as though with a mouthful of plums and in a dialect that was not local. He was twenty-three, yet the tenor of his speech had about it the inarticulate deliberation of a man of ninety. It appeared soon that he was a Romney Marsh man. Later this seemed inevitable. He was so thick and strong and so dwarfish without being a dwarf that he must have been typical of the marshes. He had been built to withstand the cruelty of marsh winds, which in turn had stunted him as they stunted the marsh hawthorns. Here, too, was explained the mystery of his face; the marsh winds had burnt it with their freezing saltiness.

Finally Alfred understood what I wanted of him. He was to spade off the coarse turf in layers, double-trench the soil and bury the turf eighteen inches deep.

"About eighteen inches," I said. He shot one glance as though to say did I mean eighteen inches or didn't I mean eighteen inches? And out came his ruler.

"Eighteen inches." He measured it with his thumb nail. Thereafter there was a sort of gospel finality about that eighteen inches. Nothing could alter it.

So Alfred began to dig, and every morning, for weeks, he went on with this digging. He dug as I had never seen a man dig before. Up came the spade, breast-high, and then down, striking the earth as though it were some damnable pest, down too came Alfred's foot as though the spade in turn were a damnable pest, up came the freed soil, out shot the spade, and then a pause, and then up again came the spade in readiness for that downward blow. It was a ritual of strength.

It was beautiful. But with it went other rituals.

"Would you," said Alfred, "mind if I broke off at ten for a little refreshment?"

I did not mind, and punctually every morning at ten Alfred broke off. He was a teetotaler and drank hot cocoa from a vacuum flask, his face growing hotter and redder as he drank. Then, from many wrappings of newspaper, he would produce what seemed to me a sort of colossal white bomb, but which was in reality a jam turnover. He would munch at this solidly for twenty minutes, his eyes bobbing and his neck straining at the dry pastry. During this time he did not—and I suppose could not—speak.

For the same reason he did not dig. So that the cocoa and the bomb between them lost me twenty minutes each day or perhaps an hour and a half each week. This was nothing; but in spite of the ten o'clock pause there were still two drinks of cocoa left in the vacuum flask, so that at eleven o'clock and also at twelve Alfred would again make the excursion to the tool-shed. When he returned again in the afternoon he would seem to be more than ever on fire. "Lummy, if I don't like my dinner," he would say, and as if to cool himself down he would bring with him a quart bottle of lemonade to be drunk at two-thirty, three o'clock, three-thirty, four o'clock and four-thirty. At four-forty-five he would drain the bottle and begin to clean his tools for the day. All this meant excursions to the tool-shed. But Alfred's face was so soberly honest that I could say nothing.

But I began to notice that Alfred was never punctual. We compared watches and they synchronised. So I remonstrated with him, in a sort of off-hand, apologetic fashion, very gently.

"I bin delayed," he said.

Against the dignity, mystery and finality of that statement I could say nothing. It made me feel almost ashamed. And I let it pass. But Alfred was never early.

At last, in spite of the fact that the tools were never right and that Alfred had sprained his back, the borders were finished, and in spite of cocoa and bomb and lemonade and the morning lateness it was beautiful work, the soil laying as straight as though spirit-levelled, the colour of dark brown sugar in the late sunlight.

Then came the rock-garden, and we went to look at the site for it one September morning.

"Ah, lummy if I know," said Alfred. "By Jingoos if I know."

"You don't think it can be done?" I said.

"Ah, it can be done," said Alfred. "But lummy if I know."

He stood in dubious contemplation.

"O' course," he said at last. "It'll take time."

"Yes, I know that. But how long?"

"Ah, by Jingoos if I know. That's hard to say, that is. A fine old many hours."

All this was characteristic of Alfred. He regarded every fresh problem with suspicious doubt and great pessimism. He manufactured colossal difficulties and for some days he spoke of the rock-garden as though I were asking him to take over the care of an ailing and illegitimate child.

"Ah, I don't know. It's a funny job. Lummy if I know."

This was very curious, for the making of the rock-garden was in fact to be exactly the same as the making of the borders had been, except that the turf was to be buried deeper and the soil thrown up higher in readiness for the boulders.

And finally Alfred must have seen this, for he began to work on it in his calm, solid powerful fashion, fortified as before by bomb and cocoa and lemonade.

I would go out to talk with him and help on fine afternoons; and once when I spoke of London, he confessed that he had never been there.

"But," he said, "I bin to Maidstone. So I got a good idea o' what it's like."

The high winds continued, I remember, as we finished the rock-garden, and finally Alfred called my attention to them.

"I don't know if you've noticed," he said, "these winds?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, lummy if I know, but I fancy they're caused by aeroplanes. It stands to sense that with all these aeroplanes flying over the top o' the world you're going to get a tidy old wind. That's my idea."

And he remains unshakeable in that solemn conviction, though the marsh winds must have buffeted and whipped him since the time when aeroplanes were rarer than eagles.

The garden is finished. The flowers have risen in glory from Alfred's foundations. When I look out of my window I see the late sunlight shining on Michaelmas daisies taller than Alfred will ever be and the dazzling blue trumpets of late gentians blowing away among the great rocks that Alfred quarried and picked up and set in their places like children. He comes

and stands sometimes in awe of the rocks and the flowers. "By Jingoos, nobody would never believe it," he says, never, I suppose, dreaming it is his own handiwork.

Looking at Alfred, indeed, nobody would ever believe it. His face grows redder and shyer and more stupid; his eyes bobble and he continues to speak as though with perpetual plums in his mouth; he holds to his theories about the winds and the Metropolis; he still consumes his colossal morning bomb, his cocoa and his lemonade; he seems to be more than ever wilfully stubborn against new ideas, filled by them with solid doubt and pessimism; he is never early, he grouches, things are not right; his back aches, he has sprained his foot, or his spade is blunt; his redness and his bewildered speech and his eternal habit of cocking up his head as though looking for the wind or for the aeroplanes that cause it make him the laughing-stock of his fellow-men.

He is in short very typical of his race and his kind. Indeed, he might be a caricature. But he exists in reality, and I should not be surprised if his kind existed as long as there are winds that blow up from the coastal marshes and the sea and across Kentish woods and fields.

H. E. BATES

JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES

BEFORE 1919 Keynes was a don and a Treasury official; with the publication of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* he became a best-seller and one of the most highly paid journalists in the world. Trained as a mathematician and philosopher, he discovered, as he has himself said, that in that field he could never be in the first rank: in economics the least explored and most abstract territory found him completely at home. And unlike most economists he combined analytical ability with a superb gift of lucid exposition, a capacity for brilliant characterisation and a passion for applying intelligence to human affairs. He could not help becoming a prophet and pamphleteer as well as an economist. It is bold to offer oneself as Chief Economic Advisor to the world and not all his prophecies have been so precisely correct as those in the *Economic Consequences*. But the charges of caprice and inconsistency so often levelled against him really signify very little except that his mind deals swiftly and somewhat cavalierly with practical difficulties, offering one possible solution after another in a way that is terrifying and bewildering to the cautious and the solidly rooted. Thus in the crisis of 1931 it was said that wherever "five economists were gathered together there were six opinions, two of them Keynes's." Why not? Either of the alternative policies he offered to meet the urgent facts would have saved the Government from the catastrophe that awaits those who are incapable of making up their minds.

The man with a good digestion accepts everything which is put in front of him and develops an omnivorous love of reality. Keynes has too good a digestion for most of us. It functions too well and he takes too much pleasure in it. He can digest any facts and the process delights him. He belongs neither to political, University nor business life, but to all three, and looks after ballets and picture shows and has time to love pictures and books in his spare time. He does not feel that the day has been well spent unless he has filled three large waste-paper baskets and left his writing table bare for the morrow. If he is cut off from business papers, a garden overgrown with weeds provides him with a substitute. By luncheon you will find him out of breath, pleased with himself, a cleared patch without a single weed or root of a weed in it and three or four wheel-barrow loads of refuse.

In conversation he is rapid; if you make him say "I must have time to think about that," you have distinctly scored. Sometimes his mind seems rather to possess the qualities of a liquid than a solid, and to run round and over an obstacle rather than to dispose of it. Like a stream he often appears travelling in opposite directions. A friend once said that there was no reason to say anything if you were talking to

Keynes, because he always thought of a better remark than yours before you had had time to think of it. That is exactly how you feel if you are in agreement with him. If you want to persuade him to a different point of view, avoid challenging his reasoning—never dispute the accuracy of a slide rule. If the result is obviously wrong, suspect at once that you may yourself have provided him with a faulty premise. Since he is troubled with sympathies and prejudices rather than with principles, the best policy is to find him a new premise; in a few minutes he may be successfully discovering for you all the arguments in support of your own conclusion.

Keynes is so affectionate, loyal and warm blooded that until one meets him in opposition one may not understand where he gets his reputation for arrogance. He has an unavoidable consciousness that he is intellectually superior to the great ruck of mortals. He does not suffer fools. He minds about culture and personal freedom, but not at all about equality; he hates waste more than he hates suffering, and he is quite capable of being ruthless when he wants his own way. He is the most benevolent, impish, dangerous and persuasive promoter of ideas, and his eyes, arresting, commanding and challenging at times, are at others as soft and lively as bees' bottoms in blue flowers. It is the less poetical side that Low reveals.

THE SYMPHONY CONCERTS

ALL the big orchestral societies have now started on their autumn season. The London Symphony Orchestra, the London Philharmonic, the B.B.C. and the Courtauld-Sargent Club have all given one or more concerts, and as the season goes on we shall be able to make comparative judgments with more confidence. So far the most impressive concert in my opinion was the first of the Courtauld-Sargent series which was conducted by Robert Heger in place of Otto Klemperer, who has gone to America to fulfil an engagement. Klemperer is one of the musicians to have suffered through the advent of the Nazis into power in Germany, being a victim of the anti-Jewish campaign, in spite of the fact that like Mendelssohn he was a Christianised Jew and, I understand, a sincere Roman Catholic. He had been for some time one of the principal conductors of the Berlin State Opera, but he has lost his job, and, so far as I know, has received no compensation, although his contract had another four years to run. It is incidents such as these which have no doubt influenced such musicians as Huberman, Casals, Adolf Busch and others in their decision not to play in Germany at the present time, and it is rather naive—to say the least—of Furtwängler to be surprised at their attitude. Furtwängler himself is now Nazi-Generalissimo of Music in Germany, and it is a position which no doubt satisfies his autocratic nature, although it is difficult to see how he reconciles it with his artistic principles.

No doubt German non-Jewish musicians must carry on as best they can their musical activities in Germany, however much the best of them may deplore racial and religious discrimination against their fellow artists and colleagues. The worst of them, of course, are only too happy to have jumped into jobs which they would never have obtained on their musical merits, but this narrow partisan spirit will not last for ever, and the best policy for everybody at present is not to make too much fuss about the wrongs and sufferings of Jews or the intolerance of Nazis. All men, whatever their pretended race or religion or ideology, are liable to spasms of prejudice and intolerance, and these outbreaks always have a cause and are not mere idle outbreaks of ill-will.

The appearance of Robert Heger in Klemperer's place introduced to us a conductor who has been well known for some years at Covent Garden, where he has often conducted one or more cycles of the *Ring* with a singular modesty and competence. This was his first appearance in a London concert hall as an orchestral conductor, and the programme was one that served thoroughly to test his powers. A Branden-