



GOING TO OXFORD

The Education of a Cornishman

A CORNISHMAN AT OXFORD

A. L. ROWSE

Fellow of All Souls College

Oxford

x



JONATHAN CAPE

THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE LONDON

incompetence in people.) In the middle of this bout, I returned to Oxford for the Trinity term.

Sunday, 6 May: I have been in Oxford over a week now, and the indigestion has gone steadily worse. For three days I have not been able to keep my meals down; I am not comfortable after dinner until I have vomited. Today and last night the pain in my stomach has been excruciating: I have hardly known what to do with myself, or what position to put myself in a place of ease.

I feared another attack of appendicitis, as the summer before, hi fact, it looks as if the ulcer, leaving its scar, had healed up for the time, leaving me free to enjoy myself for the term.

Enjoy myself I certainly did, the moment I was free of pain. Oxford in bowery May, apple-blossom, pear-blossom and all the white blossoms of Spring out in the gardens; blue of aubretia under grey walls, the coloured tulips standing all grow; wind-flowers white and blue along the paths, the scent of balsam-poplar blown across the pastures as one walked; and shortly the chestnuts beginning, best of all the red-candled ones hi Merton Field and Magdalen Walks. May-day with the bells pealing from Magdalen tower and over meadows and waters, the punts crowded under the bridge, ready to set off up-river to breakfast at Godstow. To be nineteen, and pick up with kind friends again, in the morning of the world! In the Meadows I ran into Rawlinson, with whom I circled the Meadow again: he was going to St Ives for the long vacation, to write a book he had in mind. (Not so good as Nippie's on Original Shi!) Jimmy Crowther and Ralph Fox came to see me, and I went to tea with Ralph. At the American Club I heard Birkenhead speak:

'a most brilliant speech, exact, polished and perfect. Never a false step or unsatisfying note.' I remember still the grace of that faultless elocution, the well-turned phrases: he was Lord High Steward of the university, 'an office as to the duties of which I am uncertain'. I walked with David Low over Shotover to Wheatley, tea in an upper room of the *Merry Bells*, where the only books were a couple of the Methodist novels of my countryman, Joseph Hocking.

Immediately I found the phrase I had remembered from one of

them since my boyhood: the R.C. priest entering the church with a boy carrying before him 'all the insignia of his office'. O *sancta simplicitas!* I went with Low to sec *Patience*, most of which I remembered from the score that hung about the piano at school, and from which Bacon and I used to sing bits, myself accompanying. 'I have just written and sent £2 to mother. I have £20

from my County Scholarship to come: I can't think why there has been such a delay.' I went to see Sybil Thorndike in the *Medea*, I stumbled out dazed in the afternoon light after it. I should have wept unrestrainedly if the young man who had taken me hadn't spent the whole afternoon gazing 'dotingly in my face throughout the play': vexation alone restrained my tears.

Meanwhile, what about work? Oh, dear: work and the summer term at Oxford are rather incompatible. I was hard put to it.

24 May: A day of ferocious, headlong work. An hour's reading of Oman, two lectures on early English history (rather much of a muchness: I am getting sick of township, burgh, hundred, and shire with all their infernal and inexcusable courts). Lunch and all the afternoon spent in writing an essay on the Anglo-Saxon Church. A hurried tea in the J.C.R. during which I tried to reread my essay, condole with Box who has fractured his elbow, carry on an argument about the lack of ability in the present Conservative leaders with a rotund person, whom I imagine to be Shaw-Kennedy (one of them). All at the same time.

Just as I was finishing writing my essay I had a visit from Pollard,

who turned up in a most disreputable state, dirty red handkerchief around his neck, slovenly coat and trousers, heavy knapsack of books on his back, slouchy soft hat, untidy hair and unshaven face. He hadn't been to bed the night before: he looked it. He had got interested in a volume of that gorgeous edition of the *Arabian Nights* that he has, and just couldn't find time to undress and go to sleep.

Let that stand for a pen-portrait of the eminent bibliophile in his unregenerate youth.

Next morning I spent with him, supposedly over *New Oxford*