

First Taste of England

In the spring of 1929, aged seventeen, Fritz matriculated into freedom. Unlike most people of his age it was intellectual freedom rather than freedom from the restrictions of family and childhood that he wanted. He had great hopes that he would learn things of importance at university. He left home in high spirits, returning to Bonn, the town of his earliest childhood memories, where his maternal grandparents still lived.

Fritz was determined to enjoy himself at university as well as to work. He wrote at once to his sister Edith:

Tennis - you must admit is more important than anything else. I play about 2 hours a day but that can be increased. Otherwise I cultivate peace, read a little, learn a little shorthand and English, go for walks and contemplate the appalling effect of being too busy - Well you see I have fully grasped the seriousness of one's first term.

But he added that he had signed up for twenty-five hours of lectures a week as well.

He viewed his first term at university as an opportunity to look around at what was on offer academically and socially. Like his father he was drawn to law and to economics. Both subjects also had inspiring professors. He found the most exciting was Professor Joseph Schumpeter and wrote to his parents: 'a terrific fellow! I am already looking forward immensely to his next lecture on Monday. He doesn't parade a

dry scholarliness but an incredibly lively knowledge. One feels the whole fellow behind each sentence.' Unfortunately Schumpeter left Bonn for a lecture tour before the term was over, but if one person was responsible for inspiring Fritz to take up economics that was the man. It would be over three years before he was taught again by a teacher of such stature.

The professor of law, Professor Dölle, also ranked high in Fritz's estimation. 'If the whole of Law was as it is with Dölle then it would be something for me,' he wrote home (in April), leaving unsaid that he found the other law lectures deadly dull and therefore soon abandoned the subject.

Fritz's first term was marred only by ill health which was to plague him throughout his student life. He had recurrent boils, often on his face which gave him debilitating headaches, eczema on his hands, often so severe that he would have to wear gloves, and asthma which struck at most inconvenient moments. These ailments, from which Uncle Fritz also suffered, seem to have been closely related to his state of tension. In his mid-twenties they gave way to mysterious stomach pains that remained with him intermittently until his fifties.

His parents wanted to be told every detail of his life: his health, the books he was reading, the other students and the societies he joined. Fritz wrote home dutifully and regularly, nearly always signing himself, 'in grateful love, Fritz'. His father always replied in detail, commenting on each piece of information Fritz had sent him, suggesting that this football club might be more suitable than that, one student society more advantageous in the long run than another. Fritz received all the unsolicited advice without protest, thanking his father for his concern with exemplary filial respect. He knew he was protected by the distance between them and that there was no point in alienating his parents in obvious defiance or argument. He generally did what he wanted anyway but never made an issue of it, even though some of his father's comments must have irritated him enormously. He could not even take a few days' holiday without detailed and critical comment from his father. For example, in July, on Fritz's return from a three-day jaunt by motorcycle, his father wrote:

Basically, I see in motorbikes a mode of transport that leads

to superficial travelling. In this area particularly one should develop a depth of approach. A journey must be a voyage of discovery. One must be able to discover more in the beautiful and interesting than others . . . Only then can one's life be enriched. Even if one does not remember every detail, the formative influences remain. I hope with my heart that you too will still be able to experience this. A few trips on a motorbike are nice. They practically belong to the life of a young person today, but one must be clear that something different and better exists. I would like to believe that you too are beginning to realize this deep down. The things of beauty that do not lie beside the main road are usually the best and the most worthwhile. One has to learn how to find them.

The fact that Fritz had had to cut his excursion short because of an asthma attack served only to strengthen the Professor's case. There was no doubt, he pointed out to Fritz, that this had been caused by the dusty ride on the motorbike. It must be remembered that Fritz's father belonged to a generation that still regarded holidays as essentially a time in which to walk. He and Uncle Fritz had on many occasions put on their walking boots and trekked off across the countryside together in true German *Wanderlust*. Perhaps Fritz, too, took this into account when he replied in defence of the motorbike: 'I can only agree with you about the superficiality of travelling by motorbike. It doesn't develop but rather misleads. And one does not need to let oneself be misled . . . The motorbike is primarily a means to an end . . . I believe we used our motorbike pretty correctly in our last trip, namely only to take us to the area that was of particular interest.'

Professor Schumacher showed less concern for Fritz's work than for his social life. Rather than pressing him to make a decision about which subject he intended to study, the Professor suggested that Fritz should first spend a few months abroad. Fritz agreed at once but was less enthusiastic when his father suggested France. 'I believe it is better - if (I am to go) at all - to wait till the attitude of the French towards us is better and the (German) Rhineland has been vacated (by the French),' he wrote to his parents in June 1929.

Fritz felt deeply with his fellow Germans that France had much to answer for in Germany's economic problems. He was convinced that the occupation of the Rhineland had been responsible for Germany's hyperinflation, and remained convinced of this throughout his life (although this view is refuted by economists such as J.K. Galbraith). Professor Schumacher obviously took France's position in German affairs less to heart than Fritz, otherwise he would not have suggested a visit, but his memoirs show that he was also affected by anti-French feeling. English visitors to the Schumachers at that time¹ and over the next ten years recollect that their politics seemed to be judged less by their attitude to Germany than their attitude to France.

It was decided that Fritz should visit England. He began at once to prepare himself by acquiring a rudimentary knowledge of the English language, attempting his first letter in English in August. It was to his sister Edith: 'We must learn, awful many things, but that's a graet plesure for anyone, who know that he learnt and who does it with joy. What I have done in the last quarter of year except the learning for the study and the later life.'

Had Fritz known that England would later be his home he would have been very dispirited by his first impressions that autumn. The English, he soon concluded, were not very civilized, particularly the doctor's family with whom he stayed in Tottenham. He could hardly believe his eyes when the boiled potatoes were served still in their skins. He began to appreciate the little comforts of his home that he had always taken for granted. He wrote to his father, in German:

My housing here is not exactly ideal. But it does not matter . . . The wallpaper hangs in tatters and the ceiling is falling down in places. But that doesn't matter. The only unpleasant things are the bad bed, but I have managed to make it bearable with all sorts of devices; and the lack of electric light. There is a gas light here. But it is very weak and flickers like a film which strains the eyes. Apart from that it always stinks of gas. Still, while there are still long hours of daylight it is not too bad.

As there was little to do but work, Fritz risked the eyestrain

from the flickering gas light and set himself the daily task of learning a hundred new English words and reading *The Times*. Soon his vocabulary was extensive enough for him to read Bernard Shaw, and Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. It was the beginning of a life-long admiration for Shaw and a life-long involvement with economics, although he did not finish *The Wealth of Nations* on that occasion because, as he wrote to his parents in September, 'though I was interested Ad. Smith had a rather old language, which is not quite as useful for me as a more modern one. For that reason I am reading now with no less joy: *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* by B. Shaw.'

Fritz's father was more interested in the progress of Fritz's English. After a month Fritz wrote to him in English and thereafter letters home in German became the exception. The English letters were not without mistakes but they were written with confidence and style. As Fritz never mastered any other modern language, but relied almost exclusively on his knowledge of Latin and his inventiveness to communicate in all other European languages, his speedy mastering of the English language must have been entirely the result of hard work. Fritz's struggles with English had their amusing moments. When describing the beauties of the Rhineland he told a shocked audience, 'It is of course, a region famous for its rapes.' Puzzled by the reaction he clarified his statement by adding that he preferred the rapes once they had been transformed into wine. He did not, he said, like his wine 'en pillule'.

Fritz stayed with the family in Tottenham for less than a month before finding other lodgings in Chorley Wood. The move improved his surroundings but not his landlords who merely confirmed his opinion that the word 'gemütlich' could not be adequately translated into English because the English had never experienced its meaning. Clearly Britons were a nation who specialized in uncomfortable beds and bad food. Even the famous English gentleman seemed to be non-existent. Disillusioned, he gave up family life and found a room in Student Movement House in London which, if not more comfortable, at least offered the possibility of more stimulating company.

In his new location Fritz promised himself great things. London was now much more accessible to him. He wanted to attend some lectures at the London School of Economics. But neither the L.S.E. nor London came up to his expectations. He wrote to his father in November:

At the School of Economics I heard ... a public lecture by Prof. Bonn, Berlin ... His lecture was simply scandalous ... The other lectures are not particularly interesting. The most attractive man at any rate is Prof. Laski. But his lectures are from beginning to end nothing but propaganda for his socialism. I think the School of E. is very disappointing ... London is becoming more and more dirty, ugly, misty, noisy - whatever you like or rather: you don't like nor I. The streets are covered with almost everything you need, and the wind is blowing it straight in your mouth, nose, eyes or wherever you don't like it. If you look for the sun, which can never be seen, you see a grey kindless heaven, as far as you can see it. All other is some dirt, houses of the most terrible architecture, streets, red busses making noise and smell, what is the advantage of the houses that they don't. You see at every corner begging men, who painted some silly pictures on the pavement and looks on you simply bursting with unhappiness. If you escaped and hope to see something more pleasant you find yourself surrounded by a crowd of the dirtiest children you ever saw, crying for a copper and following a long time.

Fritz's negative view of London may have been partly coloured by one feature which dismayed and upset him. He was struck by the respect the English had for their war memorials, particularly in Whitehall where not a bus passed without every male passenger raising his hat: 'A wonderful gesture,' he wrote home. 'If only we had such a Memorial and such a custom.' But the inscriptions hurt him: 'To Those Who Gave Their Lives For The Freedom Of The World.' His view of the war was quite different. He came to the conclusion that the English were as anti-German as ever, without any real idea of how Germany had suffered as a result of the war, still entertaining

the heinous lie about Germany's so-called 'war guilt'. He wrote angrily to his mother, abandoning his customary English.

I read here an English description of the outbreak of war. It was not a good idea because it is so upsetting. Today we are fifteen years further on. But, nevertheless, it was incredibly instructive to see how England, by the slogan 'Right for Belgium', attacks a race to which it is related because it is frightened of German recovery, and how, because of its own fanatic bent for power and gold, builds up a picture of lies about Germany's 'lust for power over the world' so that in the midst of the storm the hearts of the people can be conquered.

But - that was fifteen years ago.

The highlight of Fritz's first visit to England came towards the end of November when he obtained an introduction to a man he already admired: John Maynard Keynes. He left for Cambridge at once. Despite his slight knowledge of economics, Fritz made such an impression on Keynes that he was invited to attend Keynes's highly selective seminars, a triumph which impressed even Professor Schumacher: 'That Keynes has actually invited a young person as yourself to his famous seminars exceeds even my wildest expectation,' he wrote to his son when he heard the news.

The encounter with Keynes and other Cambridge economists such as A.C. Pigou and D.H. Robertson removed any remaining uncertainty about which subject Fritz should study. His first English journey had begun with Adam Smith and ended with Keynes. Moreover, as England had unexpectedly provided this stimulation Fritz began to consider whether it might not also be the place to continue his studies. With this in mind he returned to Germany for Christmas, his whole future uncertain. Should he return to England? If so, how could his studies be financed? There were stringent currency regulations even if his father could find the money to assist him.

The answer came almost as soon as Fritz arrived home. He saw announced in the newspaper that the Rhodes Scholarships to Oxford, discontinued for Germans during the war, were to

be resumed. On closer examination, Fritz saw that he had missed the closing date for application by six weeks but he applied anyway. He was summoned for an interview by return of post. But for Edith he might have missed it - and an opportunity which set the course of his life. It was a beautiful winter's day and Fritz planned to take an English visitor on a walk through the Grunewald. He loved the forest, with its paths through beeches and silver birches, oaks and ashes, an oasis of silence broken only by the songs of birds and the cackling of wild fowl. As the two young men were about to leave, Edith decided that she would join them and disappeared upstairs to dress for the cold. Time passed. Fritz grew impatient. He did not like to keep his visitor waiting. As he paced up and down there was a flurry of excitement at the door: a message had been delivered. Fritz Schumacher was to come at once to the Rhodes Scholarship Selection Board; the committee was waiting. Without stopping to change out of his knickerbockers into formal dress, Fritz left his friend to Edith and hurried to the Berliner Schloss where a dozen other candidates were already assembled.

The qualities for which the selection committee were looking had been laid down by Cecil Rhodes in his Will when he founded the scholarships in 1901. His vision had been 'to promote freedom, justice and peace throughout the whole world by awakening a desire for unselfish public service in a number of young men in every generation, selected from all parts of the English-speaking world and Germany'. They were to have 'the qualities of mind and character to enable them to see visions and devote their lives to realizing them in action',² in the hope that 'an understanding between the three strongest powers [Britain, Germany and America] will render war impossible, for educational ties make the strongest ties'. To fulfil these lofty aims candidates had to possess the qualities of truthfulness, courage and devotion to duty; sympathy for the protection of the weak; kindness, unselfishness, fellowship; moral force and leadership. It was a demanding brief for the selection committee and a responsibility for the scholar to live up to such a picture of perfection.

After a day at the Berliner Schloss, which consisted of a lot of waiting about, an interview in English and a luncheon

during which the candidates were on trial all together, the scholarships were announced. The selection board decided that the potential they required was evident in the young and handsome, if excessively thin candidate, whose sense of humour and intelligence had become quite obvious as the day proceeded. Their opinion was backed by the high praise of the warden of Student Movement House in London who had written to Dr Morsbach of the Akademischer Austauschdienst saying that he had been deeply impressed by Fritz's 'keen intellect and ripe judgment . . . I can vouch for his complete integrity, his strength of personality and his high moral character.' In the late afternoon Fritz and a candidate from Hamburg, Willi Koelle, were told that they had been selected to represent Germany at Oxford University the following autumn.

There were two terms to go before Fritz left for Oxford and New College, the college of his choice. He decided to spend them in Berlin, living at home and attending lectures at the university. There are no records of these eight months except for an event which gave Fritz one of the few memories he later recalled with a touch of bitterness, and which suggests that he continued to study economics. After some months of attending lectures he decided to write down some of the ideas he had had. It was his first attempt at an independent paper on economics, as opposed to a set essay by a university tutor. Proudly he gave it to his father to read. The Professor, so concerned with the welfare of his students, showed less than courtesy to his son. The paper remained unread on his desk. It was a bitter disappointment to Fritz.

At last in early October Fritz left Berlin for Oxford. His intellectual expectations were high. After his brief experience in Cambridge almost a year earlier, he had no reason to believe that Oxford economists would be less stimulating. It did not occur to him that he would find the Oxford academics as uninspiring as his schoolmasters had been. Otherwise he was much as other young men of his age. He was particularly fond of dancing, and he found girls an attractive addition to life's pleasures. He had already made one or two conquests, including an attractive Swedish girl who sustained him with affectionate letters. He enjoyed tennis and some winter sports, and he was always ready for a serious discussion,

putting the world to rights over a glass of beer or wine. All this, he assumed, would be part of Oxford life as it had been part of student life in Bonn and Berlin. But he was to be disappointed.