LOVING THE ENEMY

Building Bridges in a Time of War

ANDREW MARCH

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For Alicia, Isabelle, and Ben.
May you build bridges and dare to love.

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Foreword

Since the dark days of the Second World War, the city of Dresden has been close to the hearts of the people of Coventry. We not only share common ground in some of the horrors of our past, we have built our future upon it, sowing the seeds of reconciliation and nurturing a spirit of mutual trust and peace.

The young Fred Clayton, a recent graduate in Classics from Cambridge, got there first, building bridges between England and Germany in the mid 1930s – not a minute too soon, we can say with the benefit of hindsight. By the time bridge building was on our minds, untold damage had already been done: countless lives lost, cities destroyed, Dresden's Frauenkirche and Coventry's Cathedral both reduced to rubble.

In this story of friendship, cultural exchange, and love, Andy March has allowed us to hear Fred Clayton's prophetic and visionary voice in the midst of a Europe which, clearly in our eyes now – and no less clearly in his eyes then – was sleepwalking into war. In 1936, Fred sets out to Dresden 'with vague ideas of bridge building.' By 1939, with the outbreak of war, he contemplates whether 'the bridges he'd built would surely be destroyed.'

Ultimately, Fred's bridges would withstand the traumas of war and hatred in ways which he, and we as readers, might never have imagined. Through his wrestling with the outrage of conflict and destruction, he captures the sense in which love and hatred are sentiments of a totally and categorically different order. They are not conventionally competing with each other in the way two opponents do battle, one force trying to overcome the other in displays of confrontational power. And so, where human bonds of love and friendship are involved – where, in Fred's own words, one becomes 'emotionally involved' with the people one is being conditioned to hate – the utter madness of war, hatred and evil

becomes apparent. It is senseless and corrupt. It provides no lasting solutions to the needs of humanity. In the end, love wins out for Fred. The point is, though, that love was never engaged in battle in the first place. Love overcomes precisely by resisting the effects of hate. This is something of what it means to say, 'love your enemies'.

I have been privileged to visit Dresden many times. Regularly taking part in the annual Commemoration of the Destruction of Dresden, and doing so in the presence of survivors of the dreadful night of 13 February 1945, count among the most moving moments of my life. Andy March, one of Coventry's parish priests, joined me in 2015 for the 70th Anniversary Commemorations of the bombing. I was deeply touched by witnessing Andy retracing the steps taken by his grandfather, and by following him as he accessed the story of his grandfather's remarkable life and the love that grew between Fred and Rike, Andy's grandmother, whose home city was Dresden.

I am delighted that Andy has now published the results of his very personal research into his family's past. He has captured Fred's frame of mind, his sincerity, and the richness of his thoughts as they reacted to the powerful and horrific forces which swamped Europe in the 1930s and 40s. At the heart of the story, however, is not ideology or politics, but people, places, meaningful encounter and the careful nurturing of relationships. It is a journey which demands tremendous courage of Fred in his open tackling of the dangerous ideologies emerging in 1930s Germany, in his attempts to provide refuge to children from the continent, and in coming to terms with the fact that, following the bombing of Dresden, 'barbarism on our side as well as theirs has beaten tolerance.' To quote the prayer that lies at the heart of Coventry Cathedral's ministry of peace and reconciliation, *all* must say, 'Father, forgive'. And to borrow from Bonhoeffer, Fred's peace is one which 'must be dared.'

Cultivating these meaningful relationships, acknowledging these wounds and, in the fullness of time by God's grace, healing them, is at the centre of Coventry's mission. We live in a very different

world, of course, and readers will be struck by advancements in technologies of travel and communication. But just as Fred built bridges which weathered the severe storms of his time, so his story will stand the test of time itself. It is my hope that, thanks to Andy's efforts, the story will inspire you as much as it has inspired me, and that it will find its place as a signpost, even a landmark, along the path of reconciliation, trust and love which links Coventry and Dresden; Britain and Germany.

Rt Reverend Dr Christopher Cocksworth,
Bishop of Coventry

PART ONE

Fred: The Disquiet of Peace
1931-1939

CHAPTER ONE
1931-1936: A journey of discovery in Cambridge and Vienna

It was May 1934. Frederick William Clayton, small, slight with sharp blue eyes emphasised by a splash of jet-black hair, was twenty, a year younger than the rest of his cohort, when he completed his final paper for his undergraduate degree in Classics. He already knew what his next challenge would be whilst waiting for his Masters to begin in the autumn; he skirted round the freshly mown lawn, flicking through the pages of the German textbook, delicately balanced on a dictionary he was cradling in his arms. Here was an opportunity to get to grips with another language and culture, to discover new worlds, to read the works of Goethe, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and other Romantics in their native tongue. Here was an opportunity too to gain an understanding of this new movement, this revolution, spreading like a disease across Germany. Little did he know this decision would shape the course of his life.

Fred had begun life at King's College, Cambridge in 1931 and his time there had coincided with an increase in political tension all around a world still reeling from the impact of the Great War and from the Great Depression. In Germany the wounds and recriminations still festered, leading to the rise to power of Adolf Hitler, who promised to restore Germany's national dignity. Meanwhile, in the East, a Red Beast rose up, with Soviet Russia claiming that it was the only country that had rid itself of the war-mongering clique that had been responsible for the Great War in the first place. There was no escape from these issues, not in the debating chambers of Oxford or Cambridge, whether in the dining

hall, in fellows' rooms over lunch or tea, or on the lawns, where the rise of National Socialism and Communism and their various merits were topics of hot debate. Indeed, while the Oxford Union voted in February 1933 to 'never again fight for King and Country' causing uproar in the national newspapers, with the Daily Telegraph announcing, 'DISLOYALTY AT OXFORD: GESTURE TOWARDS THE REDS', a substantial number in Cambridge turned to Communism as the only safeguard of peace.

In contrast to his peers at King's and the other colleges in Cambridge, who hailed from Eton and other public schools, Fred had been brought up in a semi-detached house in Mossley Hill, on the outskirts of Liverpool and educated in a state grammar school, the Liverpool Collegiate School. Whilst his peers' relatives were overwhelmingly wealthy, his father, William, was a headmaster of a small village school near Liverpool, his mother, Mary, was a housewife and among his relatives were post-office workers and shopkeepers. Fred's older brother, Don had been prevented from pursuing his own dreams of university because his parents were unable to afford the costs involved, instead working for the Pioneer Assurance Company in the city. Fred could hide all this, pretend he wasn't so different, until he opened his mouth. His Scouse accent gave the game away. At King's he was a fish out of water, a novelty and, he suspected, a figure of fun. He hadn't been entirely happy at first, being made aware of his Lancashire accent and his being 'different', even by people meaning to be kind. Someone even suggested he change his name – people called Fred didn't go to King's – Francis or Hilary (weren't those girls' names?) were proposed as acceptable substitutes.

It had been a heady time, socially as well as academically. Despite his initial feelings about not fitting in, thanks to his precocious academic brilliance, the red carpet was laid out for him and he was welcomed into the cabals of the intellectual elite. Here he made good friends, people to whom he was passionately attached. He dined in refined company such as the world-renowned economist, Maynard Keynes, and literary giants, E M Forster and T S Eliot. Keynes had invited him to dinner once and lunch twice in his rooms in Webb's Court, which had oak panelled

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walls dominated by eight extraordinary murals by painters Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell depicting the muses of arts and sciences.

Fred wasn't much of an arts aficionado himself, but he knew that Keynes was and had the good sense to ask about the work that Keynes himself had commissioned. At the second lunch, Keynes had invited Fred along with Basil Willey, an English Literature fellow of Pembroke College and T S Eliot. Though he had been greatly anticipating socialising with someone so renowned, Fred was disappointed; Eliot hardly said a word, which Fred had thought strange, only to learn later that this was not uncommon. This particular lunch was turning out to be an excruciatingly awkward social occasion and Willey managed to escape early. In desperation, Keynes turned to the topic of Fred's dissertation, and much to everyone's relief, Fred entertained the remaining guests as he shared his passion for his subject.

'Did I conquer King's by being so novel—so naive but potentially promising?' he was later to wonder. He never attempted to deny his origins, developing a good-humoured critical awareness of English class snobbery, chuckling at the naivety of the elite classes as much as his own. He enjoyed telling how, at a dinner party given by Keynes, he was faced with a plate of oysters for the first time in his life. Fred was visibly embarrassed, not sure what to do with this disgusting looking delicacy especially when his host asked 'Well, Clayton, which are you, a swallower or a chewer?' The uproarious laughter of his fellow diners made him suspect there was more than a hint of innuendo in Keynes' question. Ignoring this, he tried to focus on the task in hand, deciding to go for swallowing, as it would surely go down quicker, trying not to think of all those faces looking at him. Later on, he would be able to see the funny side of this incident, even if he didn't at the time.

Though he eventually got used to the teasing, Fred was irked more by the way that his background made him a target for those who wanted to enlist him in their political cause. He experienced this one evening in November 1933 when he was having drinks with his new friend and fellow Kingsman, Alan Turing in the Junior

Common Room of Trinity College. Fred had first got acquainted with Turing through rowing. Though he wasn't sporty, his slight size did give him certain advantages and he became cox for Turing's boat. They quickly became friends, discovering a mutual recognition and understanding of their intellect and their shared experience of being outsiders – Fred, because of his diminutive size and working-class background, and Alan, his sexuality. Fred was very interested in exchanging views and emotional experiences, and was drawn to Turing, who was always very frank and open with Fred about his homosexuality, sharing stories about his experiences at public school. Fred was in awe of Alan's confidence in this area, as he himself felt more than confused – he'd been told by a Fellow he seemed 'a pretty normal bisexual male', but this was completely out of his experience. He didn't know what he was and besides, even if he felt drawn to his own gender, he knew he would never be able to explore this; not only did it seem culturally impossible for a man of his background, but it was also illegal. To make matters worse, Fred had almost no access to or experience of any woman other than his mother. He felt he'd never had the opportunity to be attracted to women – any he'd come across seemed either formidable and frightening, or seemed to barely acknowledge his existence, probably because he was too small, a boy in their eyes.

Fred was an avid reader, devouring Havelock Ellis's *Psychology of Sex* and Freud, and also made discoveries in the classics which he would convey to Turing who was a mathematician and knew little of Latin and Greek. Fred was in the middle of sharing his latest discovery with Turing in the Common Room bar when they were approached by a man with movie star good looks wearing a striped suit jacket, spotted tie, and cream trousers – ostentatious, even for Cambridge. He nodded to Alan, and focused his attention on Fred. 'Hello, I don't believe we've met. Can I get you a drink? I'm having a Gin Fizz – would you like the same?'

'Oh, thank you – no, half a mild, thank you.'

'Right you are.' The man sauntered towards the bar.

'You've caught someone's eye,' Alan muttered. 'Believe me, I can tell.'

'What do you mean?' Fred protested. 'Oh stop it, Alan.'

Turing raised his eyebrow, but before the conversation could continue, the man returned to the table. 'Mind if I join you?' and sat down without waiting for an answer. 'So, you're clearly not from around here.'

'No, I'm from Liverpool.'

'Liverpool? How interesting! I've heard things are terrible up there. Thousands of people unemployed. It just goes to show that the capitalist system is utterly bankrupt. I'm sick of it and so are a lot of us, I suppose that's what took me into the Party. They're a great bunch. There's a demonstration happening at the weekend for the Armistice Day celebrations by the War Memorial. Why don't you join us? I've heard you'll be there, Turing, won't you?'

Turing nodded.

'Well, I, err, I'm not sure what my plans are yet,' Fred replied.

'Oh, right,' the man responded, seemingly affronted, 'Anyway, I must be going.' He proffered his hand, 'Nice to meet you – '

'Fred Clayton.'

'I'm Burgess. Guy Burgess. I'm sure we'll meet again.'

Fred felt perplexed by this encounter. At first, he was flattered by the interest shown in him, but he wasn't sure what it was about him that had piqued Burgess' interest. Over time, though, he came to realise that because of his modest origins, it was assumed that he would be naturally sympathetic to the burgeoning Communist movement, but it wasn't quite that simple for Fred – things never were. He found it galling that upper-class public schoolboys, Old Etonians, like Burgess, were trading on their style and charm and sounding off about the working class, whilst knowing very little. They pressed Fred very hard in their attempts to convert him. But he distrusted their dogmatism, the extension of Marxism to all the spheres of life, and sometimes their remarks seemed plain daft. He couldn't get over his suspicion that he was a target so that he could become the token working class member of the Communist party and he also didn't like their tactics. He didn't like being encircled.

Another day, Fred was sitting with Turing on the Bodley's Court lawn (it was a favourite spot that year as Turing's room was on the 3rd floor of Bodley's building; they would often make their

way over there after dinner). They were sitting on the impeccably cut lawn, enjoying the evening sunshine, looking out to the trees by the river, when they heard the familiar clipped voice. 'Turing. Clayton. Together again. Thought I'd find you here.' Without waiting for an invitation, Burgess sat down and continued, 'You know, Clayton, of all the people here you really should join the British Communist Party – we understand the sufferings the oppressed working classes, I'm surprised at you, really, coming from where you do...'

Fred and Turing exchanged exasperated looks; Fred had lost count of the number of times Burgess, Blunt and their associates had attempted to recruit him. Until this point, he had joined in their discussions, good-humouredly batted their attempts away, but after Burgess ignored his polite refusals a second time, something snapped.

Fred stood up. 'Look, Burgess. I know you'd like me to be your poster boy and you go on as though you really know what it's like for us poor backward people in the depressed North. You pontificate about the working classes and lecture me on their sufferings, but you don't have a bloody clue what you're talking about. I doubt you even know anyone in the working class – and no, I don't really count, do I? You think that Communism is the sole safeguard of peace on earth, but refuse to look at the atrocities that are being done to opponents of Stalin and his cronies in Russia – the only peace for those who don't toe the line there is in the grave. Quite frankly, I've had it up to here. I won't be joining you, now, or ever.'

Fred glanced over at Turing who could barely suppress the grin on his face. 'I'll see you later, Alan, I'm going back to my room.' He swept off, leaving Burgess with a stupefied expression on his face, for once, speechless.

Despite this resistance Fred was a political animal. He was a convinced pacifist, but he wouldn't pin his beliefs to one particular political mast; he refused to be boxed in. He distrusted the national stereotyping that was painting all Germans as villains, and he never lacked the courage to weigh into the political debate and

air his own political opinions, however controversial. Thus, when he was appointed editor of the important *Cambridge Review* – the youngest ever, at only 20, as well as the first to come from a non-Public School, he was determined to shake up what he saw as a rather grey, dull, publication. He excelled at the job, but it made him sick with worry. He never re-read what he wrote, hoped it was good, and was always rushing on to next week, all the while trying to write his fellowship dissertation, which, after all, was what he'd got the grant for.

As well as the staple of reviews of theatrical performances and new books, Fred saw his tenure as editor of the *Cambridge Review* as an opportunity to raise awareness of the political debates that he found himself embroiled in, publishing articles first criticising then defending Marxism. Then, inspired by his own experience, in February 1935 he penned a satirical article entitled, 'Conversations with Communists'. This alluded to the way that Communists would manage to relate every topic and conversation to the class struggle. The article envisages a new parlour game:

> The object of the game might be described as not so much to keep the ball rolling, as is done in orthodox conversation, as to roll it on to the class-struggle. It is assumed by your opponent, for the purposes of the game, that a point is scored whenever the class-struggle emerges naked and unashamed on to the carpet. I say 'for the purposes of the game,' because it is doubtful whether any further end is served.

The article then continues to give advice about how one might play the game successfully and concludes:

> How cynical you are allowed to be is a difficult question. I think it should be considered a foul to say 'Blast the masses!' On the other hand, some players consider that all's fair in this game. My own opinion's that, if used at all, this species of body-line should be reserved for when your opponent threatens to produce 'the facts'. But, even then, may I say, here and now, that I consider it in the worst of taste?

Fred knew he was stirring a hornet's nest and he continued to do so a fortnight later by publishing letters on the subject as well as an article that defended Communism and criticised him:

> Only a self-conscious and intelligent writer like F. C. must realise just how much he is rejecting. He is saying, in effect: the suffering and oppression of the majority of men does not interest me; I refuse to allow it to interest me; I shall laugh at the idea that it interests anybody; and it certainly has no relevance whatever to anything that I may think or do.

In the same issue of the *Cambridge Review*, he published an article about the forthcoming visit to Cambridge of Sir Oswald Mosley who would be attending a dinner of the University Branch of the British Union of Fascists. Warning of the dangers posed by Fascism in Britain, contributor Colin Clout argued,

> It is hardly necessary to point out the disaster that would overtake English culture if Fascism should gain the ascendency in England. The Fascist state has no use for advanced culture. It cannot utilise the inventions of scientific workers. It does not want highly trained critical brains, but dull-witted brawns that will serve its interests and fight its wars without criticism or question.
>
> As yet Fascism in England is only a small cloud on the horizon, no bigger than a man's hand. But in times of storm and crisis such a cloud may swell until it darkens the air. Let this be a warning to all those who have the interests of culture at heart, who are concerned for the future of Cambridge and all it stands for.

These articles in the *Cambridge Review* were provocative both to Communist and Fascist students and staff and also those dons who didn't seem aware of the strong wave of somewhat startling, very radical opinion that was sweeping the university. At first it was fun, as he enjoyed imagining the raised eyebrows in Senior Common Rooms across the city; however, it became less so as he realised he had pushed it too far, ending his tenure as editor having offended both sides of the argument and a threatened libel on his hands.

Fred and his King's College year group at graduation in 1934. Below, Fred is in the 2nd row, 2nd from the left. Alan Turing is on the front row, 2nd from the right.

He also caused a stir at home when, half-sick with fear, he announced to his father, William – who, like many, had fought in the Great War – that he was a pacifist. His daring declaration, 'You're talking nonsense about the Germans. Your war was pointless,' was instantly rebuffed by his father:

'Mark my words son, you'll get to know what the Huns are really like.'

Typically for Fred, his father's admonition gave Fred even greater motivation to learn German. He would indeed get to know the Huns, and show his father what they were really like. So, in summer 1935 he planned to visit the country, improve his German and find out the truth for himself in the long vacation. After all, the books he'd been reading could only take him so far; he needed to immerse himself in the language and culture. A friend of his had a contact in Vienna willing to put him up for a night or two while he tried to find somewhere longer term to stay. This seemed perfect – Vienna was a place brimming with culture and renowned for its beauty.

When he arrived in Vienna, Fred's priority was to find somewhere more permanent to stay. Thankfully, after a rather uncomfortable night sharing the cramped apartment of his friend's contact, Fred was informed that a lady round the corner might have a spare room. She was a young Jewish widow, Helene Schneider, he was told, who lived alone with her two half-Jewish sons, Robert and Karl, and could probably do with the money.

The next day was May Day, 1935. Long red and blue pennants in the colours of Austria hung from the buildings all over the capital, a city and nation clinging onto its sovereignty, though still feeling the aftershocks of the previous year's chaos, orchestrated by the Nazis, in which in an attempted coup, Chancellor Dollfuß was assassinated. Though the Army had intervened to back up the government, the atmosphere was still tense. The shadow of Hitler loomed large over the nation. Fred wondered whether the fluttering flags would prove to be enough to keep Herr Hitler at bay. People thronged the streets for the May Day celebrations, reminding Fred of a street soccer scene. He made his way through the crowd to the Weihburggasse near the city centre where he'd been told the lady lived. Before he knew it he had been welcomed into their home; perhaps it was the novelty of offering hospitality to a foreigner that made the family so willing to give him a room.

Over the next few weeks Fred spent increasing amounts of time with them, and it was not long before he felt part of the family. When he learned that their father had committed suicide,

this brought him even closer for reasons he did not fully understand.

Helene and the boys gave no hint as to when this tragedy had hit this family, how long, how much they grieved. But clearly the paternal absence had created a father-shaped hole in their lives – one that Fred, to his surprise and satisfaction, found himself filling.

He discovered that they too, filled a hole in his life. He was yearning for tenderness and affection, tired of the make-believe and need to put on airs and graces that made up much of Cambridge social life. As one who had always been the youngest and always the smallest in his class at school, at King's – he was also desperate to be looked up to, to be needed. Even his younger brother, George, nine years his junior, was socially confident and had never needed looking after by his older brother. Helene's son Karl, aged ten, small and slight with thick black hair, on the other hand, looked up to Fred as a father figure. Fred felt needed and admired for the first time in his life, and it was gratifying. He grew fond of this boy, a fondness that became love.

Karl took Fred to his first ever football match – despite it being in June, and, as Fred murmured, hardly soccer weather. Despite being no football fan, Fred found himself drawn by the rhythm of the Austrian roars, and in spite of himself, felt his own blood rise until he roared along with them. It was his first experience of the power of mass-hysteria.

Before Fred knew it, it was time to return home to Cambridge. Although his stay in Vienna had only been brief, Helene and her boys had captured his heart. No sooner had he returned to England, than he began to arrange another, shorter visit to Vienna, for the spring of 1936. His excuse was that he wanted to improve his language, although his real reason was that he wanted to see the family once more and Karl in particular. He did not fully understand and in any case could not stop the feelings that grew in him uninvited, unbidden, within him. He couldn't help but get involved. Towards the end of this second stay, the three went together on an evening walk. Karl was kicking a pebble along the

street, bored by the adult conversation going over his head. After a while, he exclaimed, 'This is *zwecklos*' – aimless, he said.

'Ach, Karl,' his mother replied with her tired smile, 'all life is aimless, and yet we all like living.' Fred reflected how, unexpectedly, his life had been turned from being *zwecklos* by this family who'd shown him the joy of living.

After his return from Vienna, Fred continued to write to Karl and sent him a birthday present. He had brought one photograph of young Karl back with him to Cambridge, which took pride of place on his desk. A friend walked in, saw the picture, and remarked, 'Good-looking boy, but aren't you baby-snatching? Ten? Nearly eleven? All right for your classical Greeks but it's not quite the thing these days old boy?'

'Don't be disgusting,' Fred snapped, 'The boy likes getting letters, and it gives me the chance to practise my German. There's no harm in it, don't paint me with your public-school vices!' His friend looked sceptical. Fred, though, could feel no harm, no wrong in his feelings for this boy. Though he was confused, one thing he was certain of on his return – his visit to Vienna made Fred feel more consciously than ever how much he wanted to be a father, and what a fine father he'd make, given the chance.

Then, in July 1936, just as Civil War broke out in Spain, Fred received a letter from Helene. She and her sister ran a hat-shop in Vienna and were contemplating emigrating to London or Liverpool or Dublin. Business in Vienna was bad, and she was writing to ask for advice about the possibility of such a move. Fred replied, writing an ultimately discouraging letter. He knew something of the difficulties of immigrants, refugees from Germany, as regards jobs, work permits, adapting to life in England. The uprooted boys would find it very difficult to adjust, and he knew German Jews who were not very happy in their adopted country, as a result of the antisemitic sentiment they had encountered. Besides, he argued, they would have plenty of time to get out should it be necessary. Though he had seen plenty of signs of antisemitism in Austria, which Helene had lived with and was

used to, Fred felt optimistic about the prospects of peace enduring in that country. No, he concluded, Helene and the family were better off staying in Vienna.

Shortly afterwards, the correspondence with Karl and Helene ceased, but his experience in Vienna had awakened a hunger, another obsession, a growing and deepening hatred of Hitler. Fred read *Mein Kampf* while in Vienna – which was more than most Nazis did, despite it being their bible. He found it pretty unreadable. In his opinion, *Mein Kampf* was from start to finish, rubbish. At the age of 21, with perhaps youthful rashness, he decided that Hitler was 'a moron', a maniac, and a murderous would-be Napoleon.

The question that kept niggling at Fred was, could the German population really believe this Nazi doctrine preached by Hitler and his cronies with such violence? There was only one way to find out; by experiencing it first-hand. He wanted to go to Germany to find out what was happening, what the Nazi system was really like. As well as the search for truth, he was also attracted by the idea of making human contact in spite of everything, to somehow build bridges. Perhaps it was the optimism and idealism of youth, but he thought he could make a difference.

And so, having come to the end of his undergraduate studies and secured a fellowship at King's for three years, he decided to delay taking this up in order to carry on his German studies. Fred made enquiries with the *Deutsch-Englisches Akademisches Austauschbüro* (Anglo-German Academic Bureau), which organised the exchange of students and teachers between Germany and the United Kingdom (they probably hope to make a good Nazi out of me, he mused), and he received an offer from Dr. phil. Max Johannes Carl Bogumil Helck, the Principal of the Gymnasium zum Heiligen Kreuz (School of the Holy Cross; hereafter known as Kreuzschule) in Dresden inviting him to teach English for the year 1936-7. Dresden had earned a reputation as one of Germany's pre-eminent cities, renowned for its beautiful architecture, education, and culture. It had even had a large English-speaking population

before the first World War. The school itself, he learned, was the oldest school in Dresden, renowned for educating the world-famous choristers of the Kreuzkirche (Church of the Holy Cross) since the thirteenth century. All in all, Fred felt like it would be the perfect place to spend the year.

Fred would be entering an environment that would engender a maelstrom of emotions and conflicts: the heady hysteria and cruelty of Naziism, the confusing emotions of being at the centre of young men, boys who would offer him the respect and admiration and even affection he craved. Fred had the intelligence to recognise the white-hot crucible he was entering, but the single-mindedness of youth, the stubbornness of his personality and the unstoppable curiosity of his intellect drove him through these concerns.

So, Fred travelled to Dresden in the late summer of 1936, a fresh-faced twenty-two-year-old, flush from a highly successful academic career. The prospect of spending time in an illustrious institution with history going back over 700 years such as the Kreuzschule, which numbered the likes of Richard Wagner among its alumni, caused Fred to reflect on his own academic career during the long journey across Europe.

It was nearly two days' travel on the train from Cambridge to Kings Cross, across London to Victoria, from Victoria to Dover, across the channel on the ferry to Ostend, back on the train to Dresden, changing once more at Berlin. He had plenty of time to reminisce. Looking out of the window, he recalled the feeling of excitement a few years previously when he learned he'd won a scholarship to study at King's College, Cambridge. (This was one of one of only four open scholarships which were not reserved for Etonians.)

Fred had been only 16 when he sat the entrance exam for King's, and on his 17th birthday, on 13 December 1930 he had the best birthday present he'd ever had. He was in his room, immersed in one of his books, a gift for his birthday, when he heard his mother calling up to him, 'Fred – a telegram boy is at the door – I think it's for you!' His mother stepped aside as he rushed down the

entrance hall towards the front door. A boy was standing there, dressed very smartly with a round pill-box hat, highly polished leather pouch fixed onto a belt with shiny brass buckles, his uniform was immaculate, and his bicycle was spotless. 'Telegram for Master Clayton?' he said.

'That's me.' Fred wondered if this was a birthday message or something. The boy handed over the sealed envelope and Fred tore it open, reading with increasing disbelief, 'Mother, it's from King's College, Cambridge. They've offered me a place. I start in October!'

Fred (left) with his parents, William and Mary, and his brother, George.

Fred was still 17 when he began his life at King's in the autumn of 1931. He flourished academically, sweeping up prizes as he went. A Latin essay prize in 1932 followed by the Porson Prize in 1933 for translating a passage from Shakespeare's Henry VIII into Greek, and he won the Chancellor's Medal for English Verse the following year for his poem, 'The English Countryside, Lines written in the Suburb of an Industrial city'. This was a lament to the lost landscape caused over the years by the urbanisation whose beauty you only learn to appreciate once it's gone. In it he asks,

Oh, if I love that blue, why hate
Blue smoke drifting on blue slate,
Steel-blue swords of light that quiver
On the gasworks, by the river,
Where slag makes hills and where oil makes
Many-coloured water-snakes?
Why should I loathe those rainbows there,
And love a rainbow in the air? …
But, whatever comes, I'm cheated,
I'll not see my foes defeated:
I'll not see the meadowsweet,
Back from exile, in this street.
I'll not have the earth to tread,
When the fools fly overhead.
But certain is it that I hate
This red of brick and blue of slate,
This England that I know so well,
This *other E*den, demi-hell.

More awards followed, culminating in a prize fellowship, which he'd been awarded as a result of his dissertation on Edward Gibbon. While he had always loved Shakespeare, his studies in Greek and Latin had opened whole worlds to him in which he could immerse himself. He had always seen beauty in languages, the power of words to move and create new worlds, new possibilities as well as educate. And when he wrote, he discovered he could use that power himself.

He loved the academic life and the protection afforded him by King's, but just a few hundred miles over the sea, people were being radicalised by this extraordinary and frightening revolution called National Socialism. Curiosity and acute political consciousness made him to want to see first-hand what was happening in Germany under the rule of these so-called 'Nazis'.