

ANDREW WINSER

My memories of Merton are naturally scattered and all pre-war. It is difficult, therefore, for me to add anything useful to an appreciation of his personality and character since, when I knew him, he was not the Merton of later years. Of course, the latent elements were there for recognition by those who could recognize them — I don't think I could claim to have had that insight.

For me — at school — he was an amusing and interesting companion, more intelligent and sophisticated than my other contemporaries. He had traveled, knew France and was a natural linguist, read Italian literature without any help from the then staff at Oakham, and was in general more adult in his approach to life than the average schoolboy of his age. This gave him a tendency to mock the spurious and pretentious. He never adopted conventional attitudes.

Another characteristic was in his whole-hearted enthusiasm for anything he was engaged in. If he played rugger, he enjoyed it and played hard. He was not conventionally musical — did not sing but loved the “hot” music of that time and used to improvise his own in the music rooms. I remember seeing the notes he wrote on his programme of *The Messiah* which the school choir performed — “Good bass parts,” etc. He had a natural appreciation of the “good” in all art, particularly in painting and writing.

I think the words which occur to me in trying to describe him are genuine, honest, whole-hearted. He was always honest with himself and that of course led him to be deeply self-critical and penetratingly thoughtful in his spiritual life. Together with his whole-heartedness this led almost logically to a monastic life. All or nothing for him. I was perhaps the only one of his contemporaries who was not surprised when he became a monk.

At Cambridge we drifted a little apart — in different colleges — in different circles. I think he rejected the “academic” life of the University as being too removed from “real life.” He would rather drink beer with boon companions in “The Red Cow.” This gave the impression of a dissolute life, but it was more in the nature of a protest against the atmosphere of the undergraduate attitudes of his day. He had no use for “class distinctions.” To some extent he was a “loner” and had no close friends, though I think he was, perhaps, a friend of mine. My family was the only one which “received” him in England and I am glad to think we accepted him into our home though it was only a brief stay that he made with us. He was, however, always cheerful, never bitter, rebellious, or aggressively critical of society. He was always “fun” and genuine. I remember him throwing himself down, his arms outspread on a hillside and exclaiming, “I love the ground,” or was it “the earth”?

I am afraid this has not been a very helpful letter — too scrappy and incoherent — but I hope it may give hints and fill a few gaps.