

stained noticeably. His study held the smell of stale smoke. Yet with all this he had a secret shrine, never untended, a candle always alight.

He was not naturally gracious. There were some who felt that any friendliness displayed was chiefly an act of will. He was certainly shy, happiest when in the seclusion of his study. A sunless childhood and lonely growing up doubtless contributed to the shaping of his temperament.

His home life in Oxford, helped enormously by a devoted wife, was strictly organized round the one dominant purpose of his life, that of his duty as principal of the College. He guarded and enhanced its reputation for evangelical integrity and sound scholarship. Punctuality even for meals was almost a fetish. He was fond of music, Beethoven naturally. His chief hobby was walking. He had no interest in games or sport of any kind. He never found any interest in gardening wherein he might have found refreshment of soul and body! Family life was a bit austere. One story has it that he tore himself away from a Christmas dinner table in order to wrestle with the deciphering of some obscure Syriac text.

A few weeks before he died Wheeler wrote me a letter about my R.A.F. chaplaincy service. Among other things he said "Tell the men that Grace reigns." I remembered that they were the last words of Mr. Honest. Wheeler must have been thinking about him in days and nights of weariness. I wondered how he would have shaped a sermon on that text. I recalled the five pointed star of Baptist Principles in Helwys Hall, its strange omission of charis and agape; and I came to feel and see that he knew with his own kind of special intensity, behind all the doctrines he so faithfully taught, there were the infinite distances, the background of light and love, yes, and of truth about which he cared so greatly, out of which they all came.

H. J. WHITE.

The Closing Years

MY FIRST MEETING with Wheeler Robinson was in the summer of 1938. He had invited me to lunch at 55 St. Giles' at one o'clock. I had arrived a few minutes before the hour and sat talking to Mrs. Robinson. Precisely as the clock chimed the hour, he entered the room. Punctuality was one of the rules of his life; not a moment was to be wasted.

After lunch we talked in his study about the course I might follow if I were to come to Oxford. Then he led me to the bottom of the garden and through a door where we halted. "There" he said, indicating the space beyond, "will be the college."

There was no sign of declining powers as he pointed out to me where the various parts of his projected college were to rise, though he was then in his sixty-seventh year. He seemed to be full of life and hope and full of this new venture which was to be the climax of his years as scholar and principal. To someone not yet out of his 'teens, it was exciting and not a little daunting to contemplate having a very small part in all that the great man had in mind.

He referred to himself that afternoon as "a mixture of a minister and a schoolmaster", at least as many people saw him. This would hardly be an adequate description of the impression he made on those of us who came up to Oxford in October, 1939, to be the first inhabitants of a partly finished college in the strange days which marked the beginning of the War. He appeared to be rather austere and not easy to approach, but always impressive and, as more than thirty years of subsequent experience have proved, quite unforgettable.

The burdens which rested on his shoulders during those months must have been immense. For the first year of the War, the building of the College was permitted to continue. So we were glad to be able to use what had already been completed, the Helwys Hall and Library, the Senior and Junior Common Rooms and the Collier Lecture Room, while all the noise and general disruption went on towards the completion of the residential wing on the north side of what is now the quadrangle. We were a mixed company who used what was already finished. Mansfield College had been dispossessed of their buildings because of the War, so the two colleges joined forces in the new building, sharing members of staff, having dinner together in the new Hall, and virtually forming a combined Senior Common Room and Junior Common Room.

Soon we were joined by the School of Slavonic Studies from the University of London, who were forced to leave the capital for the relative safety and quiet of Oxford.

To preside over all this with the added hazards of the black-out, food rationing, air-raid warnings and the general uncertainty about the future as the war gathered its own terrible momentum, was a burden indeed for a man already two years beyond the normal retiring age and by inclination a scholar rather than an administrator. But his shoulders were broad enough and his faith rugged enough, and he carried the business through in a way on which we now look back with unmingled pride.

The new session in October, 1939, began with a Communion Service in the old Chapel in which Dr. W. B. Selbie, the former principal of Mansfield shared. Though far from ideal in many ways, that underground chapel had a certain quality about it, and the

memory of the principal taking morning prayers and the weekly Communion Service on Saturday mornings is still quite vivid. The eye of the worshipper was always held by the large picture which stood behind the Communion Table, which the principal himself had chosen. Showing our Lord striding down the mountain-side ready for the tasks of a new day, it expressed that same sense of strong purpose and determination that Wheeler Robinson had drawn from his faith in the living God.

We never came away empty after he had led us in worship. He had a wide knowledge of the saints of every age, and in his prayers he drew freely on the great prayers from the historic liturgies of the Church, as well as leading us in prayers of his own. One of the phrases from the latter still lives on in my memory. I cannot recall the precise occasion, but these were his words; "Lord, we come not to be comforted and soothed: we come to be shattered and broken." He had little time for sentimental religion.

It was in the chapel too, that I first heard him talk about the prevenient grace of God. To him, God was supremely the living God, at work in history and continually going before his people with his love and grace. He made this a vivid experience for us and urged us to do the same for others. He was particularly anxious that this should be brought out in all our thinking about Believers' Baptism; too often it was envisaged in a way which laid too much stress on the human decision to "follow Jesus", and he was desirous to see the baptismal experience as a response in faith (itself the gift of God) to all that God had already done in Jesus Christ.

My first three years in Oxford were spent in reading Modern Languages, but the principal was anxious that I should get a taste for theology in preparation for my subsequent Theology Schools. So I went to his Seminar on Tuesday evenings in the Senior Common Room, when we would discuss some important book together. It was here that I first discovered Baillie's *Our Knowledge of God* and the famous *Christus Victor* by Gustav Aulen. Years later, at a reception given by the Bishop of Lund, I met Aulen himself, now an old and failing figure of a man sitting in the corner of the room, and was reminded of the debt I owed to him for what he had written and to Wheeler Robinson for the way in which he had illuminated this from his own deep insight into the victorious work of Christ.

I have already referred to his great sense of punctuality. It sprang from the conviction that time was a sacred commodity, a gift from God that was not to be wasted. It might be said that the proper use of time calls for a larger place for leisure and relaxation than he appeared to allow for. But beyond any doubt, he held his time on trust from God, and it was not an uncommon occurrence, if for some reason he had arrived at a lecture forty-five seconds too soon, to see him filling up the gap by reading a paragraph or two of a book, casting an occasional eye at his gold pocket watch until it was the exact second to begin.

But if he taught us that life was a serious business, he left us in no doubt about the resources at our disposal for facing it. The God in whom he believed was great and glorious, the God of the prophets, the Lord of history and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We bade him farewell as principal in 1942. In 1943 we heard that he had been taken ill at a Teachers' Summer School in Cheltenham, and wondered whether he would be able to give the Speaker's Lectures which were due later that year. His health was not equal to the task, but in the spring of the following year he resolved to give the lectures, sick man though he was. I still remember him, sitting at the table and giving his lecture, the voice that used to be so firm now wavering from time to time as he struggled to control his breathing. We knew that he would carry on as long as God gave him breath.

Later that year I went to see him at his home in Iffley Road. He was sitting in an arm-chair, with a rug over his knees. I had come to wish him good-bye and to tell him that I was to begin my ministry at Cirencester. He knew the old town well, and some of the congregation, and he talked about the Cotswolds that he loved so much.

Then he took my hand, gave me his blessing and said farewell. Another of his students was ready for the ministry, always to be proud to be one of Wheeler Robinson's men.

IRWIN BARNES.