

”When I Was a Fresher”
That is now 16 years ago – 1932¹

by
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Dunedin. A smaller city than Christchurch and a larger university. The town’s people take a much greater interest in the university than here. Due to the Scottish reverence for learning. Capping procession more or less a civic function. Everybody turns out to see it. And the university sits at one end of the town, so that the procession goes right down the main street – somewhat as if it went from Moorhouse Avenue to the Victoria street fountain. I am told that V.E. day happened to coincide with capping procession, and it was turned into a sort of improvised celebration and the mayor asked the Capping band to play God save the king. I believe they didn’t know the tune and were pretty tight anyway, but go through it somehow. Anyway, the University and the community closer than here. Also the University and the Church. By the Church, of course, I mean the Presbyterian Church. University services at Knox – now alternate with the Cathedral. Relations not so cordial now as they were.

Residential Colleges – Knox. A huge magnificent structure up on a hill with lots of grounds. Presbyterian theological hall housed in same building. But not for divs.² only and not for Presbyterians only. A very fine library. Selwyn. St. Mags.³ Studholme. – now a lot more. Also digs. – people in trams who look like washerwomen, gabbling away about terms and so forth. I went to Knox.

Home Science. St M⁴ supposed to be a nat. business⁵, but nothing on Studholme. – Medical school. Numbers of more senior students in SCM than here.⁶ Study male leaders.⁷ {2} Mainly divs.⁸ of course, but some meds. Owen Eaton – Mornington and this family.⁹

Surroundings – wonderful plans for rambles.

Well, to Dunedin then I came. Was, to begin with, a med. And did the summer exams, and changed over. Was very interested in organic chemistry. Also in religion. Had figured out a sort of religion of my own. Probably very well read for a fresher. But one thing I hadn’t really thought about was social and political responsibilities. Was an unthinking young conservative. And these were the days of the depression. Men were rioting, and special police were called for – at physics lecture – early in first term. Went to enrol, but they had gone away for lunch. And started to think about it.

¹ Edited by Martin Prior, David Jakobsen and Peter Øhrstrøm. The original MS is kept in the Prior collection at Bodleian Library, Oxford, Box 11. The original page numbers have been put in {...}. All underlinings in the text are Prior’s.

² divinity students

³ St. Margaret’s

⁴ St. Margaret’s

⁵ The text is unclear.

⁶ In margin: good help in canteen and SCM.

⁷ This seems to be Prior’s note to himself

⁸ divinity students

⁹ Dr. Owen L. Eaton (1909 – 1938). Lived in Dunedin in 1932.

Asked Father Jansen¹⁰. Decided against it and a little later Paddy asked me to a week end camp - Miller and Richards. Then political outlook coloured by (1) depression (2) failure of disarmament conference.

Odd memories of the depression. I didn't see any riots. But I remember a curious scene in Queens Garden. A place like the fountain, only a bit larger. Several old cannons there. (Kennedy and the cannon). During depression, crowds of people sometimes addressed from cannon. On this occasion, a lot of unemployed. Addressed by Geddes. And Goldsmid and McArthur - "Popoffski" - then the police - about 40 strong - to tell this man to get of this cannon. It was laughable. McArthur - brother of a Presbyterian minister. Himself knew his bible backwards. Loved to quote it in the paper. A Communist. Had a wife and family, a dole of 27/6 a week and 20/ for rent. Other men with families being sent out to public works camps. I remember a meeting addressed by the dean about the breaking up of family life involved. (Crookshank)¹¹ Clergy often talk a good line - Percy Paris.¹² Open season. Students asked to beat up men old enough to be their fathers. Miller dead against Capitalism, but disbelieved in violence. This brings me to another point. - failure of disarmament conference. That was a great disappointment. And it seemed to many people very senseless. What where the armament being build up for? Air bombardment Lord Londonderry said we must keep bombing planes to keep the NW frontier tribes in order. Such a thing that made people ashamed to be British. The same man later one of the Cliveden set. - the use of our warships. Machinations of armament rings in the air. Nationalism, imperialism and exploitation not worth defending. And if the governments can't agree not to fight then the people should. It was about this time that the Oxford union resolution shocked people. Miller a pacifist as well as a socialist and gave both a Christian trial. The New Testament against violence and private property. - Miller and Co aware that was not the only use of power. The police - shouldn't have been and X.¹³ shouldn't appeal to them. At weekend camp all these things put forth very forcefully. And the logic of it appealed to me. I was a quick convert, and a keen one. Lost a bike.

[Miller and Co lived fairly simply at a place called "the Bank".]¹⁴

{3} Other students there. John Allan - the Mornington¹⁵ drawing - how he found the missing thesis 14 pp¹⁶ long in all (2nd volume) - read his thing.

Miller keen on dogma. Inspired by Barth of the R.¹⁷(3.¹⁸ Christian faith hard to believe and life hard to belief appealed to the heroic in man, and expected to gather only a minority. Took us a while to around to this. Theology and social questions the main thing debated at the SCM at this time.

¹⁰ Or Jensen.

¹¹ George Craig Cruikshank. Born 1881, and became Dean of Dunedin at 1932. A position he held until 1944.

¹² Paris, Percy Reginald (1882-1942)

¹³ Probably Christians.

¹⁴ This has been crossed out.

¹⁵ Suburb of Dunedin

¹⁶ The text is a bit unclear.

¹⁷ Reformers.

¹⁸ Probably a reference to point 3 taken up later.

(Insert) Three strains in Miller, Communist, Dogmatic and “Agnostic”. Miller inevitably the centre of this talk - was the centre then. Richards, his offside. Less “unbeatable” Lex¹⁹ admired Chesterton, Richards tended to identify G.²⁰ with the “life-force”. M.²¹ thought that life-force was punk. (The need for dogma – perhaps not felt so much now, but some very queer views circulating there under the name of Christianity.) “What Lex really means is”.

The stump. A short course on a Friday night – Miller and a few divs. – used to get crowds. Answered questions. – Miller wont to say it was a good preacher’s (sic) duty to drive people away. His message was upstanding didn’t do it himself. But punk children’s sermons. (Describe)

Selwin Grave

MacLure - came to S.C.M. camp. – died in Spain –

When A.M.R.²² got married....

Lloyd Ross at S.C.M. camp too. (Refer again G. John Allan.) And S.C.M. men participated in Radical Club etc. – Miller Silverstone debate.

¹⁹ Alexander (or Lex) Miller

²⁰ God

²¹ Miller

²² Alan M. Richid ?