

My Mate in Empire: George Winterton and the Republic Debate

Julian Leaser

*[T]hou, my brother, my competitor
In top of all design, my mate in empire,
Friend and companion in the front of war.¹*

I had the honour of spending a couple of hours with George Winterton the week before he died. Although his body was weak his mind was sharp and his eyes were sparkling with ideas. The conversation turned to Shakespeare. George's favourite play was *The Merchant of Venice*. I mentioned that I had chosen my title for this piece from *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Augustus Caesar and Anthony had opposed each other in battle and yet, here, at the end was Caesar paying tribute to his opponent.

On the field of battle that was the republic debate George and I took opposite sides but remained firm friends. Over the years we dined together reasonably regularly and traversed all manner of topics. I always looked forward to these occasions. George's knowledge and reading were so broad that you could not come away without learning something. He would get a mischievous look in his eyes, his broad smile giving you a glimpse of his gold fillings as he imparted a piece of new intelligence. He told stories of people and events that he had encountered in a fascinating life. Yet he maintained a modest self-deprecating tone, common to genuine achievers. He addressed others as intellectual equals, starting his sentences 'as you will know ...', even if you did not. Or he would say 'I hope I am not boring you with this story', as if there could be anything further from the truth. My wife had the privilege of being taught by him. We valued his friendship very highly and will sincerely miss him.

My task is to survey and to pay tribute to George's contribution to the republic debate from the unusual vantage point of an admiring opponent. His contribution reflected his personality: his caution, scholarship, thoroughness and sense of humour. In that context there is a melancholy symmetry that George passed away nine years to the day of the defeat of the republic referendum.

¹ W Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Act V Scene i.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.