



WILLIAM MICHAEL ESDAILE WINTER

1940

In August, 1939, shortly before Michael Winter came to St. Paul's to spend one year there, as probably for the duration of the war the last of our exchange scholars from England, the Headmaster of Eastbourne College, which he was leaving, wrote of him to the Rector: "You will find that he is a very nice boy, rather reserved perhaps, but that, as you know, is a fault of a lot of English people. He gets on well with other boys, and I have tried to explain to him that he is as it were an ambassador from us to St. Paul's."

In November, 1942, Michael Winter's father, the Reverend Canon E. E. Winter, Vicar of St. Anne's, Eastbourne, in reply to a request for information about Michael's war record and death, wrote to Mr. Nash:

"Michael volunteered for Air Crew Service with the R.A.F. as soon as he returned home from St. Paul's, in July, 1940. He began his training in September, 1940, and got his wings and his commission as Pilot Officer in July, 1941. He commenced operational flying in November, 1941, as a Night Fighter Pilot. He was promoted to Flying Officer from July, 1942. Now for a little account of the closing days.

"On September 13 Michael came home on nine days' leave. Our daughter, Mary, was also at home from school so we were all four together. We have always been a family who have done things all together, and we had, during those nine days, a gloriously happy time. . . . On Tuesday, Sept. 22, we saw him off from the station here, and just before six that evening he was killed.

"His station was not very far from here, in fact we used to see him fly over quite often, and he used to get home for a night every few days or so. On the 22nd, he took off in his plane, which he had often flown, to give it a short test before going up that night. After about twenty minutes flying, the plane, for some undefined reason, broke up in mid-air and crashed, killing him instantly, and his two companions with him.

"As my Church had been burned out in a raid some time ago, it was arranged that the funeral service should take place at Chichester Cathedral, as I have a Prebendal Stall there and the place where Michael was killed was not very far from the Cathedral. This took place on Friday, 25th Sept., and on the following day his body was buried here at Eastbourne, close to us.

". . . pray God our nations will *keep* together in the immensely difficult days that must follow for many years after the fighting ceases. If Michael helped, as I like to think he did, towards a better understanding and appreciation of each other between English and American outlook, he served a good purpose."

In a letter to his parents, which he had left to be opened only in the event of his death, Michael Winter had written, "The best thing you ever gave me and perhaps the one I misused least and so enjoyed most, was America. For that marvelous experience I can never thank you enough."

Short as was his stay at St. Paul's, Michael Winter fulfilled his Headmaster's hope. For all his reserve, he responded instantly and with warmth to what was best there and he proved himself a fit ambassador.