

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

NO. 2, SUMMER, 1976

MEETING OF THE
CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

On the 15th May, the 31st anniversary of Charles Williams's death, the first meeting of the Charles Williams Society was held. Nineteen people gathered in the Institute of Christian Studies, which provided a friendly and convenient room in Margaret Street, London, W.1. Our chairman, Richard Wallis, welcomed everyone. Hilda Pallan, a member of the Council, led the meeting.

We sat in a circle and read Charles Williams's play, Seed of Adam. Notes from different editions were read, and discussion followed. Charles Williams had written notes on some original performances to the producer, Phyllis Potter, and also a paragraph for her to send to the Church Times. All these are in Phyllis Potter's collection of letters deposited in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Alice Mary Hadfield found them during her work on a selection of his letters. They caused particular interest. After tea members present read the play again, and during the reading illuminating comments on the text were made by many. The meeting ended at about 5.30 p.m.

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

The meetings will be held at the Institute of Christian Studies, 84 Margaret Street, London, W.1., on Saturdays at 2.30 p.m., and will be followed by discussion and tea. The Institute is five minutes walk from Oxford Street Tube Station, up Upper Regent Street, second turning on the right, and on the right hand side.

1. 10th July: subject: the theology of romantic love; Anne Scott in charge. Books : He Came Down From Heaven, The Figure of Beatrice, Religion and Love in Dante.
2. 30th October: (Please note that the date of the October meeting has been changed). Readings from Charles Williams's poetry, early, middle and mature; Alice Mary Hadfield in charge. Members should bring any books of verse they have.
3. 12th February (1977): subject: Charles Williams's literary criticism. Extracts from his critical works will be read. Speaker to be announced.

FUTURE MEETINGS (CONTINUED)

4. 23rd April: subject and speaker to be announced.
5. 18th June: Annual General Meeting.
6. 23rd July: subject and speaker to be announced.
7. 15th October: subject and speaker to be announced.

Please bring any copies of the books to be used at a meeting. There is no fee for members, but 50p must be paid for a guest (members can bring one guest each) and handed to the person in charge of the meeting.

NEW MEMBERS (June, 1976)

John Allitt, 28a Menelik Road, London, N.W.2.

Lord Beaumont of Whitley, 2 Perrins Lane, London, N.W.3.

Miss Jean Dale, 26 Willow Way, Chiswell Green, St. Alban's,
Hertfordshire, AL2 3DQ.

Miss Alison Day, St. Julian's, Coolham, Horsham, Sussex.

The Revd. Lyle Dennen, 74 Mount Ararat, Richmond, Surrey.

Mrs. Rosemary Fergusson, Tudor Place, The Green, Richmond,
Surrey.

Miss Barbara Griffin, Wheaton College, Wheaton, III.60187,
U.S.A.

Miss J. Harris, Highdown, The Broadway, Alfriston, Sussex.

Miss Edith M. Harry, 23 Harehills Terrace, Leeds IS8 5PZ.

Dorothy Hobson Fitzgerald, 328 West 19th. Street, New York,
N.Y. 10011, U.S.A.

Miss A. S. Maennling, 4 Cotleigh Road, London, N.W.6.

Dr. S. D. Matthews, 103 Windsor Avenue, Rockville Centre,
N.Y. 11570, U.S.A.

Mrs. Phyllis McDougall, Stone House, Highmoor Cross, Henley-
on-Thames, Surrey.

NEW MEMBERS (CONTINUED)

John F. Moultrie, 41 Northumberland Place, London, W.2.

Martin Moynihan, 5 The Green, Wimbledon, London, S.W.19.

John D. C. Pellow, 6 Blenheim Road, St. Alban's, Herts.

Vivian & Anne Ridler, 14 Stanley Road, Oxford OX4 1QZ.

Peter Scott, 25 Corfton Road, London, W.5.

Miss Agnes Sibley, Upper Cranmore, Heyshott, Midhurst, Sussex.

Mr. and Mrs. Switek, 8 Crossley Street, London, N.7.

Stephen R. Tucker, Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford OX9 9ET.

Wade Collection, Wheaton College, Wheaton, III. 60187, U.S.A.

The Council welcomes Miss Edith Williams, Charles's sister, to the Society. She has accepted life membership and we are delighted.

THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY LIBRARY

Librarian: Mrs. Anne Scott, 25 Corfton Road, Ealing, London,
W5 2HP (Tel: 997-2667)

A complete list of the library's contents was printed in the Newsletter No. 1. Since then the library has acquired photostat copies of:

The early sonnet-sequence The Silver Stair (23 $\frac{1}{2}$ p)

The Masque of the Manuscript (18 $\frac{1}{2}$ p)

The Masque of Perusal (18 $\frac{1}{2}$ p)

The Masque of the Termination of Copyright (21p)

[postal charges are shown in brackets after each title]

None of the Masques have ever been available before except in a very small number of privately printed copies.

Miss Anne Spalding has given the following books to the library:

Seed of Adam and other Plays

The House of the Octopus

The Descent of the Dove (American edition with an introduction by W. H. Auden)

Witchcraft

Dr. Stephen Matthews has agreed to be a bibliographical consultant for the Society.

CHARLES WILLIAMS COLLECTION

Besides our lending library, the Society aims to build up a complete bibliographical collection of all Charles Williams's works. Where originals cannot be obtained, photostat copies will be used. This will be open to the public for reference and study, and we hope it will be housed in a London library. A magnificent start to this has been most generously provided by Ralph Binfield, who has given us 23 titles gathered during his years of working for Charles Williams, many of them signed, and some unpublished or small works. He has also given five copies owned by Fred Page (also signed) which he passed on to Ralph. This gift will be called the R. D. Binfield Collection, because he was always known in the O.U.P. as R.D.B. Some copies were used in the office for indexing or reference and have notes written in them.

Bibliographical work is going to be a long and absorbing part of the Society's life: this reference collection needs to be built up, recorded and annotated. We are lucky in having as a member, Dr. Stephen Matthews of Rockville Centre, New York, who has been working for some years on a bibliography of Charles Williams's writings. He is willing to be a bibliographical consultant to the Society. We shall want plenty of help. Will any member who would like to share this kind of work write to the general secretaries, The White Cottage, 21 Randolph Road, London, W9 1AN. Experience will be valuable, but so will people willing to learn.

LONDON READING GROUP

The following meetings have been arranged:

3rd July, Saturday, at 7.30 p.m. in Peter Thornber's flat,
29 Ashchurch Park Villas, W.12 (unlabelled bell).

The Figure of Beatrice will be read in connection with
Dante's Purgatorio.

8th August, Sunday, at 1 p.m. in David and Dulcie Caro's
house, 50 Drayton Gardens, S.W.10. Taliessin Through
Logres will start to be read. Please bring sandwiches.

9th October, Saturday, at 7.30 p.m. in Richard and Joan
Wallis' house, 30 Wallorton Gardens, S.W.14. Continuing
The Figure of Beatrice in connection with Dante's
Purgatorio.

7th November, Sunday, at 1 p.m. in David and Dulcie Caro's
house, 50 Drayton Gardens, S.W.10. Continuing Taliessin
Through Logres. Please bring sandwiches.

CHARLES WILLIAMS AS I KNEW HIM

This is the first in a series of personal recollections which will be published in the Newsletter. We start with a contribution by Ralph Binfield, Charles Williams's office assistant for twelve years.

I was taken on at the O.U.P. to be office assistant to Charles Williams and Fred Page, to type, get books from stock, look up references, post letters etc. How lucky I was in my patient tutors! They were a contrasted yet harmonious pair, quiet, scholarly, pedantic F.P., and restless, eloquent C.W., looking, in those days, like a stage poet, with his pince-nez, untidy hair, and his tightly braced trousers. His chair not only swivelled, but tilted back, and he wrote usually with his feet on the desk and pad on his knee.

From these two Christians I learned much in a short time. F.P. taught me the technicalities - indexing, proof-reading, annotation. C.W. taught me how ignorant I was and how to learn. His precise evaluation of the various Oxford series of poets made me drop all my preconceived notions - "Pope was not a dry Augustan", "Lascelles Abercrombie is not a mystic".

C.W. arrived punctually at 9.15 a.m. from Hampstead, so I had to be in on the stroke of 9 a.m. to change his calendar and date stamp. Each morning he put up with a lot from me. "What do you think of this poem, sir? I wrote it last night. It just came to me". "Well, it shouldn't have, poetry is hard work". He always read my products. "Oh, you've been reading Hardy. He did it better". And while I talked, he wrote all the time, and as soon as I had gone someone else would come in to chat, while he still wrote on. Only when his telephone rang would he signal me to stop. "I can do two things at once, but not three".

CHARLES WILLIAMS AS I KNEW HIM (Continued)

One of C.W.'s tribulations was an unpoetic lady who had written a book about Keats. He laughingly denied having caricatured her in one of his novels, but if you look you can find her. Another trial was Aylmer Maude and his 21-volume Tolstoy Centenary Edition. Whenever I saw the bearded idolater of Tolstoy coming across Warwick Square with his portmanteau of trouble, I would tip C.W. the wink, and as Amen House had five staircases and two lifts he could seek sanctuary and leave Maude to me.

We received many MSS., some so bad that, after a glance, he would say, "Return it with our regrets in a couple of days". But there were compensations. The receipt of Middleton Murry's Keats and Shakespeare was one. I heard him murmur, while appreciating the MS., "Middleton Murry has a mystical mind". Another was the receipt of Dru's book on Kierkegaard, unknown then in England.

C.W. never ceased writing. He did his own O.U.P. work at such a pace that no one could complain because he wrote some of his own books in the firm's time. He would bounce into the office, hang up his hat, gloves and stick, and plunge straight into pages of verse which he had obviously been composing mentally on the tube or walking down Newgate Street and bounding up the stairs.

I have never known a man with so much energy. Until his operation, he bounded up all staircases two at a time, wrote thousands of words a day, and then went off to lecture at Literary Institutes.

CHARLES WILLIAMS AS I KNEW HIM (Continued)

My years as C.W.'s assistant are the years of my working life that I remember most vividly. The atmosphere of Amen House was unique, and C.W. was the centre of it. I was in the Army when, alas, he died. I read of his death in Calcutta just after buying a novel of his.

The next contribution in this series will be by Anne Scott. As Anne Renwick, she was an undergraduate in the war years when the O.U.P. was at Oxford, and when C.W. was lecturing in the University and for many societies.

These personal recollections will be filed in the Library. The general secretaries will be glad to receive any such contributions, which may be 500 words or more. Although the Newsletter can only print 500 words, the whole MS will be kept.

REVIEW

Gunnar Urang: Shadows of Heaven: Religion and Fantasy in the Fiction of C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams and J. R. R. Tolkien, SCM Press Ltd., 1971, £2-25, 184pp. Clothbound.

This book, which was originally published in the United States, examines and compares Lewis's space trilogy and other novels, Williams's novels, particularly Descent into Hell and All Hallows' Eve, and Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings.

The author, who is Associate Professor of English at Newark State College, Newark, New Jersey, considers the contemporary relevance of such literature and concludes that it leaves us incredulous because the world of Boethius and Aquinas, on which their ideas are based, is not our world. Although the author praises Williams highly, he finds him in the end disappointing because the supernatural elements operate so as to inhibit the "freedom, temporality, and concrete individuality" necessarily flowing from the proposition that the "energy of love" is "the power of being itself". One wonders whether he would say the same of, for example, the poem "The Queen's Servant" in The Region of the Summer Stars: the Way of Affirmation may involve a passage through the Way of Rejection, but beyond lie greater affirmations, and in these may be found the freedom, temporality, and concrete individuality of love which the author finds to be missing from Williams's presentation in the novels.

There is, of course, a problem: whether the undoubted insights of modern thought render all previous religious speculation false, and, in particular, what is to be made of literature built upon that speculation. Urang gives one answer, but it is not necessarily the only one. This book demands refutation. It is nonetheless worth reading.

Philip Bovey

THE SOCIETY'S CONSTITUTION and rules are available on application to Philip Bovey, 32, Maple Street, London, W.1. Please send a stamped addressed foolscap envelope.

Any information for The Charles Williams Society Newsletter should be sent to the Editor, Xenia Howard-Johnston, 13, Princess Road, London, N.W.1.

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