

# The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

NO. 4, WINTER, 1976

OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY'S COUNCIL

Chairman: Richard Wallis,  
30, Wallorton Gardens,  
London, SW14 8DX.  
(01-876 5850)

Joint General Secretaries: Alice Mary and Charles Hadfield,  
The White Cottage,  
21, Randolph Road,  
London, W9 1AN.  
(01-286 4347)

Treasurer: Philip Bovey,  
32, Maple Street,  
London, W.1.  
(01-637 0449)

Joint Membership Secretaries: Jenet and Philip Bovey,  
32, Maple Street,  
London, W.1.  
(01-637 0449)

Librarian: Anne Scott,  
25, Corfton Road,  
London, W.5.  
(01-997 2667)

Newsletter Editor: Xenia Howard-Johnston,  
13, Princess Road,  
London, NW1 8JR.  
(01-722 1595)

Member of Council: Hilda Pallan,  
179, Makepeace Mansions,  
Highgate,  
London, N6 6ES.  
(01-348 3903)

## OCTOBER MEETING OF THE SOCIETY

On 30th October, 1976, fifteen members of the Society attended a meeting at which Alice Mary Hadfield presided. She had prepared a programme which included a complete range of C.W.'s poetry: one or more pieces or extracts from every printed work, including both printed Masques and The Silver Stair were read. Episodes from Grab and Grace were read by a group rehearsed by Thelma Shuttleworth. Most attention was given to the Arthurian books, Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars.

### NEW MEMBERS (January 1977)

Joe R. Christopher, English Dept., Tarleton State University,  
Stephenville, Texas 76402, U.S.A.

The Revd. Walter Hooper, 19 Beaumont Street, Oxford.

Anne E. Marshall, Meadowbrook Road, Wyoming, Rhode Island  
02898, U.S.A.

Margaret Mayer, P.O. Box 1639, Big Bear City, California  
92314, U.S.A.

Mrs. Marjorie Phillips, 17 Lower Quay Road, Fareham, Hants.

### MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

The meetings are usually held at the Institute of Christian Studies, 84 Margaret Street, London W.1. on Saturdays at 2.30 p.m. Each meeting is followed by discussion and tea. The Institute is five minutes' walk from Oxford Circus underground station, up Upper Regent Street, second turning on the right, and on the right hand side near the far end. Please note, however, that the 12th February meeting will be held in the basement under All Saints' Church which stands opposite the Institute.

12th February, 1977: Subject: "Explaining Poetry by Poetry: Charles Williams' Literary Criticism"; Sue Harris in charge.

- 23rd April, 1977: Subject: Charles Williams' novel, Many Dimensions; Richard Wallis in charge.
- 11th June, 1977: Annual General Meeting (2.30 p.m). This will be followed by a talk, "Is Charles Williams a Contemporary?" to be given by Anne Ridler at 3.30 p.m. Members may bring guests to this talk.
- 23rd July, 1977: Subject: "The Theme of Paradise in Dante and Charles Williams"; John Allitt in charge.
- 10th September, 1977: Day conference at St. Albans where C.W. lived until his marriage. The shop in Victoria Road, near the Abbey, which his parents ran, will be visited as well as the grammar school which C.W. attended. The Abbey, which the Williams family regularly attended, will also be included in this expedition. A meeting of the Society will then be held in the St. Albans Town Hall (subject and speakers to be announced) and refreshments will be provided.
- 15th October, 1977: Subject: "The Doctrine of Exchange, Substitution and Coinherence in Charles Williams' Work"; Xenia Howard-Johnston in charge.

Please bring copies of the books to be used at a meeting, if possible. 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.

#### MEETING OF THE S.W. LONDON GROUP

The South West London group will hold its next meeting at 7.00 for 7.30 p.m. on Friday 11th February at Mrs. Fergusson's house, Tudor Place, The Green, Richmond (01-940 1926). Martin Moynihan will read a paper "What Happens Next?" on the novels, and there will be readings from Taliessin Through Logres. All members of the C.W. Society are welcome. Please let Mrs. Fergusson know if you can come.

## THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY LIBRARY

Librarian: Mrs. Anne Scott, 25 Corfton Road, Ealing, London, W5 2HP. (Tel: 01-997 2667).

A list of the Library's contents was printed in Newsletter No. 1. In addition to the acquisitions listed in Newsletter No. 2 and No. 3, the following have been received:

1. Charles Williams' Experiment in the Novel, by Thomas Howard. A Ph.D thesis at New York University, 1970. Thomas Howard is now Professor of Literature at Gordon College, Wenham, Mass., U.S.A. This is a clearly written appreciation of all seven novels, showing weak points in early technique and important new developments for British novel-writing in Descent into Hell and All Hallows' Eve.
2. The Early Poetry of Charles Williams  
Dorothy Fitzgerald: A paper written with great appreciation of this unfamiliar subject.
3. Photo-copies of extracts from American journals or books which deal with C.W.'s work, and which are not available in the U.K. These have been sent to the Library by Mrs. Dorothy Fitzgerald.
  - a) Gnomon, ed. Greene & Marcus, Gnomon Press, 526 W 111 S N.Y. 100025. First issue, 1965. Contains C.W.'s note for C.S. Lewis, intro. and ed. by Glen Cavaliero; three poems by Jonathan Greene, with many references to C.W.'s Arthurian verse.
  - b) Books with Men Behind them  
Edmund Fuller: Random House, N.Y. 1962, pp. 197-234; chapter on "The Images of Charles Williams". Deals with the novels, Taliessin poems, Arthurian Torso, Descent of the Dove, Figure of Beatrice, He Came Down from Heaven, Forgiveness of Sins.
  - c) i. Christian Scholar, XLV, No. 2, Summer 1962.  
"Charles Williams' Judgement at Chelmsford: A Study in the Aesthetic of Sacramental Time", by Williams Spanos. A first class and exciting study of C.W.'s work "a significant contribution to verse drama".

- ii. Christian Scholar, XLIII, Spring 1966. "Mysteries Great and Small", by John Mellin.  
On War in Heaven, with an assessment of C.S. Lewis, Eliot, Auden and Sayers.
- d) Religion in Life, Spring, 1960, Vol. 29, 2, pp.277-285. "Religion and the Arts: Charles Williams, a Novelist's Pilgrimage", by Patricia Spacks. Interesting literary criticism, with glances at C.W.'s Figure of Beatrice e.g. Wentworth's progress as the analysis of The Inferno. "Williams invented his own forms ... He rose beyond debilitating conventions".
- e) The Episcopalian, August 1965, "Books". Three columns on the novels. "Spiritual cliff-hangers". "Guns, fast cars and fists are rather tame for anyone who has watched the soul of a Williams character disintegrate".
- f) Union Theological Seminary's (Henry Sloane Coffin's Administrative Building, Room 207, 3041 Broadway, N.Y. 27, N.Y.) productions of Cranmer of Canterbury, 1959, and The House by the Stable and Grab and Grace, 1963; programmes and notes.
- g) i. The Saturday Review, 17 Feb. 1949. Review of Many Dimensions by Richard McLaughlin. "Extremely witty". "These novels ... beautifully fill the gap left by our boyhood reading ... and, at the same time, answer all our requirements of creative writing".  
 ii. The Saturday Review, 23 Sept. 1950. Review of Shadows of Ecstasy by Richard McLaughlin. "Dazzling course through his novels". "The laughter at the heart of things".
- h) i-ix The New York Times. Eight reviews of novels (one by Dorothy Sayers) and one of Descent of the Dove. Reviews of all novels enthusiastic, review of The Descent of the Dove cautious.
- j) i. Herald Tribune, Book Reviews, 3 Nov. 1951. The Place of the Lion, by Sylvia Stallings. "His theology and his mysticism are his tools, not his masters".  
 ii. Herald Tribune, 4 Dec. 1953. James the First, by Robert Pearsall. A good review.
- k) The Living Church, 13 May 1951. Review of Place of the Lion, All Hallows' Eve, War in Heaven and Shadows of Ecstasy, by the Rev. Albert Frost - favourable.

1) Modern Language Association Annual Bibliography  
Entries from 1960-1969.

4. Studies of Type-Images in Poetry, Religion and Philosophy  
O.U.P. 1951, by Maud Bodkin; pp. 139-142, extract on  
Charles Williams.

BOOKS, ARTICLES, REVIEWS, REFERENCES

Please would members send the Editor any references to Charles Williams which they find in books, articles etc. giving an exact description of the source.

The following books contain material on C.W.:

- Charles Moorman: Arthurian Triptych (Mythic materials in Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis, T.S. Eliot), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1960.
- Charles Moorman: The Precincts of Felicity (The Augustinian City of the Oxford Christians), Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1966. Includes a chapter (III) entitled "Zion and Gomorrah: Charles Williams".
- Gerald Weales: Religion in Modern English Drama, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961 (and O.U.P., London). Includes the following chapters: chap. IV "Doctrine of Substitution"; chap. VIII "Charles Williams and Dorothy Sayers".
- Charles Huttar (ed.): Imagination and the Spirit (Clyde Kilby Festschrift), published by William Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971.  
Includes an essay (pp.229-249) by A.M. Hadfield, "Coinherence, Substitution and Exchange in Charles Williams' Poetry and Poetry-Making".
- Mark R. Hillegas (ed.): Shadows of Imagination (the fantasies of Lewis, Tolkien, Charles Williams), Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1969.

Includes: A.M. Hadfield "The Relationship of Charles Williams' Working Life to His Fiction", pp.125-138; Chad Walsh "The Man and the Mystery", pp.1-14; W. R. Irwin "Christian Doctrine and the Tactics of Romance. The Case of Charles Williams", pp.139-149.

N.B.

Professor Thomas Howard (130 Blueberry Lane, South Hamilton, Massachusetts 01982, U.S.A.) would be grateful for any help in constructing a complete list of recent articles, theses, books and bibliographies about C.W. This information will be used for a review of the current state of C.W. scholarship.

#### POET UNDER THE MERCY

Sermon by Canon A. M. Allchin

This sermon was preached at St. Katharine's Foundation on 26 October 1975, during a conference on Charles Williams which led to the creation of the C.W. Society. It is reproduced by kind permission of the Editor of CR: Quarterly Review of the Community of the Resurrection.

The Scriptures for this Sunday are those for the first Sunday in the year in the new, experimental calendar and lectionary. The Old Testament lesson speaks of the creation of man and woman in the beginning. The Gospels tell of a new creation of mankind through water and the Spirit. The reading for the Epistle comes from the Book of Revelation, and points to the consummation of all things in the heavenly city. All three stages of the activity of God, creation, redemption, fulfilment as our faith has been accustomed to set them forth, are placed before us.

There could hardly be a set of readings more appropriate to our meeting here this week-end. In it we are celebrating the words and deeds of one who was above all a "maker". On Charles Williams' grave in Oxford, there is the simple inscription, "Poet. Under the Mercy". He was a maker, one who used words



to create not only a pattern of sounds, but a pattern of images and meanings to be at the service of man's life, and at the service of the City of God. In making, he knew that he lived under and in the mercy, the forgiveness, the loving-kindness of a faithful Creator. In exercising his craft and art, he was exercising that God-given faculty of creation in which man comes very close to God, realising the image and likeness in which he was made. For if man is a maker, it is because God is a maker, creator of heaven and earth and of all that is in them

Yesterday, in our conference we read a number of passages in which, from a variety of view-points, Charles Williams spoke of the Eucharist. In one passage he spoke of its celebration explicitly in terms of the creation of man, male and female, in God's image and likeness. In the Eucharist we are not only redeemed, we are made. As by God's gift we are enabled here to remember, recall and represent the creative and saving acts of God, so those creative acts become real and living in us and for us. Man becomes himself, grows into his true nature, here in this Sacrament, in which he is enabled to offer to God the things that this world gives and the things which human hands have made, and thus to return to God, marked with his praise and thanksgiving, the gifts which came from God in the beginning

All this comes to pass in the power of God himself, in the power of our Lord the Spirit. The Breath of God, breathed into man in the beginning, so that man became a living soul, the Breath of God, moving as and where it will, brings man to a new and second birth into life in the Spirit.

It is a matter for great rejoicing that in our new Eucharistic rite, in Series III, as in the new anaphoras of the Roman Catholic Church, the action of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist is much more clearly specified than it was before. This prayer to the Father that the Holy Spirit may come upon us and upon the gifts set forth on the altar had, for various reasons, become somewhat obscured in the West.

To Charles Williams it was evidently of great importance. In the final poem of the Taliessin cycle, "Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass", he writes:

"Then the Byzantine ritual, the Epiclesis, began;  
then their voices in ours invoked the making of man;  
petal on petal floated out of the blossom of the Host,  
and all ways the Theotokos conceived by the Holy Ghost".

Charles Williams is in some special way a theologian of the Holy Spirit, of the descent of the Dove. He is a spiritual flame, whose flesh and whose spirit leaps up in response to the Spirit's call, to the Spirit's coming. "Joy to new joy piercing from paths foregone; that which had been Taliessin made joy to a Joy unknown; manifest Joy spreading in a Joy unmanifest".

What is the source of that joy? It is the coming of the Holy Spirit and the fulfilment of the work of creation in the bringing forth in the heart of creation of the Child of God. "And all ways the Theotokos conceived by the Holy Ghost".

The name "Theotokos", the one who gives birth to God, belongs, of course, primarily and of right to Mary, cause of our joy, joy of joys, she who without stain of sin did bear God the Word. It is a name which belongs at the centre of the work of our redemption. But the whole creation is made in order to be, in some sense, God-bearing, to bring forth God. This is why Mary can rightly be called the good earth, the land of promise. She is at the heart of all creation, and all creation rejoices in her. So that in the very beginning as the Spirit broods over the land and over the waters, they become fruitful and in their measure give birth to the life of God. They bring forth the wheat and the vine from which men make the bread and wine which here became the Bread of Life, the wine of God's kingdom.

If in this way we can read the title "Theotokos" back to the beginning of all, so we may very properly read it on to the very end. For every human life in which Christ comes to dwell is, in some way, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. Without taking away from the unrepeatable calling which is Mary's, we may say that in a derived sense, every believing life is to be God-bearing, to bring forth God, until all together, the whole redeemed community, the heavenly City rejoices in the presence of God with us and within us, rejoices in the marvellous exchanges of heaven and earth, of creation and Creator, "the glories intertwined".

Whatever his limitations may have been, it is clear that wherever Charles Williams came there were wonderful exchanges of love and knowledge. Here in our meeting those exchanges have

continued, thanks above all to the presence with us of those of you who knew him personally and who have so generously brought the rest of us into such direct contact with him. All these various exchanges had their origin for him in that one great exchange of man and God in Christ Jesus, and in the descent of the Dove which preceded and followed it. From that central point there flow out into all the world the healing, reconciling, fruitful powers of God, and they reach even to us and to the gifts which we will place on this holy table. "And all ways the Theotokos conceives by the Holy Ghost".

"In the dispersed homes of this household", as later today we go back to our places of life and of work, "let the Company pray for it still". May we pray for one another and for ourselves, that in the coming of the Spirit, the joy of all joys may come to birth within us and among us.

### CHARLES WILLIAMS AS I KNEW HIM

by Jo Harris

This is the third contribution in a series of personal recollections. The first two appeared in Newsletter Nos. 2 and 3 respectively.

Jo Harris was a junior member of the clerical staff at O.U.P. in the 1920's and took part in the Amen House Dramatic Society to which C.W. gave much time and attention.

My memory has dimmed a lot after so many years, but it would be ingratitude to forget that it was C.W. who was responsible for my transference from a department whose head was not conducive to happiness in that department. I thought he was much too preoccupied to be so observant. But such was C.W.'s nature, always thoughtful and kind to the young who, let us face it, were certainly more unsophisticated than the young of today.

I was in the department some time before I had working contact with him, and found myself typing (badly I'm sure) some correspondence for him. I think he must have needed extreme patience, but then he was one of the most patient men when dealing with the young. He also taught me that his generation

too had respect for their seniors. On one occasion Mr. Milford as he then was, asked to see him. He was absent at the time and I omitted to leave a note for him, trusting then to my memory. The result was that a short time elapsed before he entered the Holy of Holies. I had never seen C.W. cross before that moment when he stormed at me. My memory has never dimmed over that occasion and I'm sure I left notes galore! He made it quite clear to me that when God calls he has to be answered. But it was typical of C.W. that it was never referred to again.

C.W. was interested in most happenings in the O.U.P: the staff magazine, The Lantern, for instance. I think he gave great help editorially, and occasionally he contributed. The Dramatic Society had a great deal to thank him for also; he was one of the instigators and helped a lot with the first production three short plays performed at the Century Theatre. I cannot remember a lot about these although I had a small part in Fantasia. I do remember, however, some years later when he was rehearsing me in, I think, Barnet's Folly, he let me go through the whole scene. I remember feeling pleased with myself for he did not pull me up once. Then, when it was over he said: "I'm sure that was excellent Jo, but it was the wrong scene". He had a great sense of fun.

He would admit that he was not a tidy man in the office and had occasional clean-ups. On one such occasion, after one paper basket was full he turned out a large typescript which he said could go as it had been refused by all the publishing houses. I said what a pity. He shrugged and said that I could do what I liked with it. So I sent it to Michael Joseph who had recently started publishing. It was accepted and appeared with the title War in Heaven. The following is an example of his generosity. One day he called me into his office, opened a parcel, took out the first copy of War in Heaven, inscribed it "The spark that lit the fire" and handed it to me. He said then that poetry was his first love, but novels would be bread and butter.

At the beginning of the war part of the O.U.P. moved to Oxford. Southfield House was in a very pleasant spot, but as a working abode rather cramped. Most folk shared large and small rooms, but C.W. was lucky in being allotted a separate room. Apart

from the help he gave to all who needed it in the Press, he gave assistance wherever possible to the young folk who were trying to study at a difficult time in difficult conditions. Although busy with the work in the Press he never refused help to these young people, and suggested that if bodies were seen approaching the house, let them enter and direct them to the bathroom (his office)! I think a number of young men and women of many nationalities (particularly American) had a lot to thank him for.

#### PRODUCTION OF A CHARLES WILLIAMS PLAY

Terror of Light was performed in St. Aidan's Church, Leeds, on 20 and 21 October, 1976. Miss L. Muir sent the Editor the following account of this production.

The events of Whitsunday are not easy to present dramatically. A study of the comparatively few medieval mystery plays which attempted to stage the Descent of the Holy Spirit will show this. Charles Williams used what we may call a classical convention in Terror of Light: the action on stage is in the interplay of character and relationship, while the visual but theatrically impossible Wind and Fire are described in the vision of Luna, the medium of Simon Magus.

In the St. Aidan's production, the classical quality of the play was enhanced by the use of an open acting area, in the nave of the church, with three raised areas - the "good" area on the right, the "bad" on the left (used only by Simon Magus and Saul), and the "Heavenly" at the top of the chancel steps. Apart from a chair for Our Lady, there was no furniture and no attempt to portray an "orchard". The costumes were simple grey or black robes - with Luna in White - and touches of scarlet in the girdle of Our Lady and a monogram on the breast of Magus. A towering scaffolding on the stage right platform, with a ladder for Luna, was masked in grey on the sides and scarlet curtains in the front. When Judas was mentioned the curtains rose like a puppet show booth and showed him standing with head and arms hanging down, like Petrus waiting for the puppet master. He had a noose round his neck and a tattered tabard of dark blood-red. Nor was this the only attempt to express in visual symbolism the references to things impossible to portray

realistically. The breath of the Spirit blew throughout as the characters moved continually but naturally about the broad acting area creating almost a theatre in the round effect. The mime that accompanied Luna's description of the actual Descent was simple and effective. The Virgin, a stationary black figure on the "Heavenly" platform, was now hidden, now revealed by a weaving pattern of figures of the Companions moving up and down and across the steps while a red glow flickered over them. A similar use of lighting to convey a sense of the upward movement of the death of the Virgin was equally effective. Parallelism perhaps, but Williams' words are none the worse for a visual gloss to an audience untrained in the classical technique. It worked and that must be its justification.

### QUIZ

We hope that members will be interested and amused to try their hands at answering a quiz on C.W.'s novels, set by Alice Mary Hadfield. It is drawn from War in Heaven, Shadows of Ecstasy, Many Dimensions, The Place of the Lion, The Greater Trumps, Descent into Hell and All Hallows Eve.

1. To whom does this refer, and in what circumstances?  
"She rejected what churches and kings and prelates have not rejected; she refused to be deceived, she refused to attempt to be helpful to the God".
2. In what city were "the precincts of felicity"?
3. Where could you return to "leaves and eaves ... and eves", and who felt it?
4. Whose mind recurred "continually to the rooms they shared, to the long discussions, the immortal evenings, experienced reality, eternal knowledge"?
5. Which was the image that did not move?
6. Who, and in what, had "seen the verge of a great conclusion of mortal things and then it had vanished"?
7. Who was intensely concerned that proofs of a book before publication should be treated as private? And why?
8. In which novels do the following characters appear?  
Herr Nielsen, Dr. Rockbotham, Plankin, Mrs. Plumstead, Aston Moffatt, Joanna Lee, Mrs. Ferguson.

To allow members plenty of time to look at novels which they may not have, from the Society's library or other sources, the closing date for postal arrival of entries is 28 February 1977.

Please send your answers to Alice Mary Hadfield at The White Cottage, 21 Randolph Road, London, W9 1AN, marking your envelope QUIZ.

All answers will be opened together after that date. The sender of the first correct answer to be opened (or, if none are correct, of the most nearly correct answer) will be sent a book token for £1-00 or, if resident abroad, £1-00 in cash. Members of the Council are welcome to compete, but are ineligible for the prize. The answers will be published in Newsletter No. 5, together with the name of the prizewinner and of all those who gave correct answers. If any member feels like setting another C.W. quiz, please write to Alice Mary Hadfield.

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Any information for the Charles Williams Society Newsletter should be sent to the Editor, Miss Xenia Howard-Johnston, 13 Princess Road, London NW1 8JR.

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