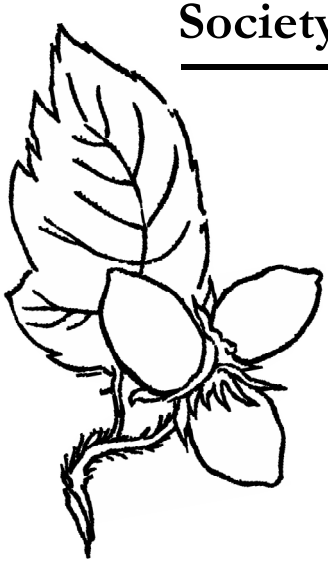
ISSN 1478-0186

The Charles Williams Society



www.geocities.com/charles_wms_soc

Newsletter

No. 115 Summer 2005

The Charles Williams Society

The Society was founded in 1975, thirty years after Charles Williams's sudden death at the end of the Second World War. It exists to celebrate Charles Williams and to provide a forum for the exchange of views and information about his life and work.

Members of the Society receive a quarterly newsletter and may attend the Society's meetings which are held three times a year. Facilities for members also include a postal lending library and a reference library housed at The Centre for Medieval Studies in Oxford.

Officers of the Society

President: **John Heath-Stubbs OBE**

Chairman:
Mrs Eileen Mable
28 Wroxham Way
Harpenden
Herts, AL5 4PP
01582 713641

Secretary:
Revd Dr Richard Sturch
35 Broomfield
Stacey Bushes
Milton Keynes MK12 6HA
01908 316779
rsturch@compuserve.com

Treasurer:
Mr Stephen Barber
Greystones
Lawton Avenue, Carterton
Oxon OX18 3JY
01993 841219
stephenj.barber@btinternet.com

Librarian:
Dr Brian Horne
Flat 8, 65 Cadogan Gardens
London, SW3 2RA
020 7581 9917
brian.horne2@btinternet.com

Membership Secretary:
Mr Guy Carter
67b Ulverston Road
Walthamstow
London, E17 4BN
020 8523 3465
guycarter@bushinternet.com

Newsletter Editor:
Mr Edward Gauntlett
21 Downsway,
Whyteleafe
Surrey, CR3 0EW
020 8660 1402
Edward.Gauntlett@down21.freeuk.com

Contents

Newsletter No. 115 Summer 2005

Reading groups

For information about the **Oxford** reading group please contact Brenda Boughton, tel: 01865 515589.

The Charles Williams Society

No 115 Summer 2005

From the Editor

This issue contains the last of the papers given at the 2004 conference. As you will see from the future meetings section, we will be having only two gatherings next year and it may be the case that these will not include papers as such. It follows that the traditional source of material for the bulk of the newsletter will dry up from time to time and I would, therefore, welcome contributions for future editions.

You will find an agenda for the AGM herewith, together with a booking form for the October one day conference at St Katharine's. Please book early if you propose attending as we will need to confirm the numbers to St Katharine's in advance. I hope many of you will attend as there will be an important discussion on the future of the Society in addition to the AGM. There are also to be papers from two high quality speakers, Suzanne Bray and Stephen Medcalf, whose previous talks (at the 2004 and 2000 conferences respectively) were very well received.

Edward Gauntlett

Society News & Notes

New Member

A warm welcome is extended to he following new member of the Society:

Pamela J Edwards, 27 Kennedy Avenue, Hoddeston, Herts.

Brenda Rushton

We are sorry to announce the death, of which we have only recently heard, of Miss Brenda Rushton. She was a long standing member of the Society d had been a friend of Charles Williams's sister Edith.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will take place at the October meeting at St Katharine's.

There will be two vacancies for ordinary members of the Council and it would be good if these could be filled. Anyone who wishes to nominate a member for election, but who is unable to attend the AGM, may do so by writing to the Secretary. The letter must be signed by the proposer, seconder and nominee.

Olga Markova

We have received a letter from Olga (see page 23) together with other communications, including the Abstract of her doctoral thesis. The Abstract was (of course) in Russian, but we are arranging to have it translated and it will be placed in the Society Library.

Olga's viva was in Moscow on 31 May and we all hope it went well.

She informed the editor that the Institute of World Literature in Moscow has suggested that she publish a monograph on Williams, based on her thesis and that she is planning to do so.

A number of Williams's novels have already been published in Russia and we have every confidence in the success of Olga's mission to promote his work there.

Charles Williams Society Meetings

- **Saturday 8 October 2005**
  Royal Foundation of St Katharine **,** 2 Butcher Row, London E14.
  The fine tuning of timings has not yet been finalized, but the provisional programme is as follows:
  11.00 am Suzanne Bray speaking on 'Charles Williams and the Sacraments; 12.30 pm AGM; 1.00 pm Lunch; 2.00 pm Stephen Medcalf speaking on Owen Barfield and Charles Williams;
  3.15 pm Open discussion on the future of the Society; 4.15 Tea;
  4.30 Close

Proposed dates for next year:

- **Saturday 25 March 2006** (Oxford)
- **Saturday 14 October 2006** (London)

Council Meeting Report

The Council of the Charles Williams Society met on Thursday 26 May 2005 at Dr Horne's home.

Susannah Harris Wilson was welcomed as a new member of the council.

The abstract of Olga Markova's doctoral thesis had been received as had a number of editions of the George Macdonald Society's newsletter and the Inklings Jahrbuch.

This was the last meeting at which Eileen Mable would be in the chair. Brian Horne would act as temporary chairman of the council until a new chairman was elected.

Discussion of the October meeting of the society at St. Katharine's Foundation took place. Details of the programme of the day conference there would appear in the next edition of the Newsletter. Those attending would be asked to pay in advance and it was agreed that for non-members a charge of £20 would be made. This, however, would include a year's membership of the Society. It was hoped that as many members of the society as possible would come to St. Katharine's not only because the day would include the AGM but also an open discussion of the future of the society. It is felt that the society cannot go on as it has been during the last few years and the views of as many members as possible about the future are urgently requested.

It was agreed that the Oxford meeting in April had been extremely successful and that future meeting should include greater participation by members – play and poetry readings etc.

London venue. Brian Horne had visited St. Matthew's Church, Westminster and reported that the facilities offered there were very much better than those at St. Matthew's, Bayswater and suggested that future meetings should take place there. St. John's Wood Church was a further possibility.

Brian Horne (Acting Secretary in absence of Richard Sturch)

DAY CONFERENCE 8 OCTOBER 2005 - ARRANGEMENTS

For our day conference in London this autumn we are going back to the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, which some members will remember from previous occasions. We are offering a longer programme than usual and are including lunch, together with morning coffee and afternoon tea. We have been considering various venues in the London area which are both reasonably priced and also accessible by public transport. Even so, if we want pleasant surroundings together with refreshments, we shall need to pay more than we have been used to.

We are therefore asking for a voluntary donation of £10.00 towards costs. Of course if this is not possible we should be pleased to see you anyway. We need to be able to confirm numbers well in advance, so we ask to have your booking form back as soon as possible and in any case by 9 September.

If you know a non-member who would be interested in coming, we are offering the conference plus a year's subscription to the Society, including four copies of our Newletter, for £20.00.

Stephen Barber

Treasurer

CHARLES WILLIAMS AND DOROTHY L SAYERS AS LETTER WRITERS

By Brian Horne

This paper was read to the Society at the 2004 Conference

Why might it be thought that an attempt at a comparison between the letters of Charles Williams and Dorothy L. Sayers would be interesting and fruitful? It is surely their work that is of central concern to us, not something as ephemeral as their correspondence? Here, of course, historians will undoubtedly argue that occasional pieces like letters can be just as important for the understanding of a person and an era as any other kind of artefact. This may be true, but I have to confess that this kind of activity is somewhat in conflict with my own instincts and normal procedures as a scholar and critic, which is to address and scrutinise the work rather than the person who created it; to try, in the first instance, to understand the novel, the play, the poem, the theology, the essay, then to analyse it, to illuminate it and judge it - if necessary - by certain demonstrable standards of what we call literary criticism or philosophical principle. As far as I know, there are no criteria for judging the art of letter-writing - at least not in the sense that one could argue that there are criteria for judging poetry, drama or theology. Furthermore, I am not even going to use these letters as a means of interpreting, except indirectly, their novels, plays, poems, theology, etc. or even as a means of throwing light upon the age in which they were living. I shall be trying to do something different, perhaps something more vulgar - even reprehensible. I am in search of persons: what do their letters reveal about Charles Williams and Dorothy Sayers as persons? Is this a morally dubious quest? What kind of propriety is there in the action of poring over documents not originally intended for our eyes? (Public letters: letters to newspapers, periodicals, committees etc., are, of course, quite another matter) I know that this is often the stuff of history, and that letters provide biographers often with but the richest source of information about their subjects but mere fact that historians and biographers are constantly

engaged with precisely this kind activity does not absolve them - and us - of the charge of ethical impropriety. I have misgivings about the moral propriety of publishing intimate writings intended only for the eyes of the recipient.

'Intended for . . . . ' Here, however, the situation can become even more complicated. When and how can one be certain that a letter is intended only for the addressee? How many men and women whose lives have been devoted to literature, not had an eye, or even half an eye, perhaps rather guiltily, on posterity, as they sat down to their correspondence. (The same might be true of those who keep diaries) Charles Williams is a case in point. I was surprised to learn that Williams himself had hoped that his letters might be collected and published; to read in Roma King's introduction to his selection of his letters to his wife, *To Michal from Serge*, that some 'American Professor' might discover them and edit them. Was he being serious? I really cannot tell - perhaps he was; and perhaps this is why his wife Florence kept the many letters he had written to her. She, by contrast, burnt all her own letters to him. In 1953 she wrote: ' . . . . I burnt all my letters to him in the fireplace of the room in which I am writing. Charles had liked them. Their purpose was fulfilled. I watched them burn. Red and gold the flames from them. Red and gold my love for him.' (Charles Williams Society *Newsletter*, No. 78. 1995) Nowhere in Dorothy L. Sayers's letters, as far as I can see, did she express a similar hope that her letters might be collected and published. And here is a curious fact. I am not at all surprised that Barbara Reynolds judged it to worthwhile to collect and publish Sayers's letters as so many of them read like documents intended for public consumption: rhetorically poised, eloquent, fluent, clear, invariably intellectually forceful. Even when she is writing to close friends there is the sense of a collected, deliberate, self-conscious stylist and persona behind the carefully chosen phrases and elegantly shaped sentences. Williams, by contrast, writes in a variety of styles: letters that sometimes are almost shockingly intimate, occasionally ungrammatical, often hurried, misspelled, jagged, opaque: very much, one would have thought, a private person writing a private letter to a particular person; shaped to meet the emotional and intellectual needs of the particular person, given distinctive flavour by the unique quality of the relationship.

In saying that I have already given some indication of their contrasting styles as

letter-writers. and will hope to demonstrate these further in a few minutes. There is one final preparatory remark to be made. This exercise in comparison is, so to speak, not exactly a fair one. In Sayers's case we have all the letters that could reasonably be collected: four volumes of them, meticulously edited in a scholarly way by BR. In Williams's case we have, in published form, only the slim volume *Letters to Lalage*, letters to a single person, Lois Lang-Sims, written over a brief period of time, and the larger volume, *To Michal from Serge*: letters also to a single person, his wife, Florence, also written over a short period of time, but under unusually difficult circumstances: the years of the war: 1939 - 1945. There are the unpublished letters culled by Alice Mary and CharlesHadfield from their own collection and from the archives of the Bodleian Library and Wheaton College. We know that there is an enormous number still lying in the Marion E. Wade centre at Wheaton - Roma King has estimated 680 letters to his wife alone - but they are unknown to most of us.

So, is there enough? I believe so. Can we learn something of interest from this attempt at comparison. Despite all I have said, I hope so, and, perhaps the best place to begin is their own correspondence with one another where their two personalities emerge in vividly contrasting ways. So that is where we shall start - at the very end of Charles Williams's life. Indeed in the last few months of that life: 1944 - 1945.

The story of Sayers's encounter with Dante and the *Divine Comedy* has been told in fascinating detail by BR in her book *The Passionate Intellect*. We all know that it was through Williams's book on Dante, *The Figure of Beatrice,* published in 1943, that Sayers made her acquaintance with the text that would be her principal occupation for the rest of her life, *Divine Comedy*. Although they knew one another before 1944 they could hardly be called friends, but for Sayers the relationship, almost from the first letter about Dante, intensified into a spirited and joyful intellectual friendship. The correspondence began on 16 August 1944; less than a year later Williams was dead, but what marvels of letter-writing flowed in those few months - especially from Sayers. 'There are thirty letters in all, nineteen from Dorothy Sayers and eleven from Williams .. . . . . '. 'Out of this brief exchange', Barbara Reynolds writes, 'arose all Dorothy Sayers's work on Dante' *(The Passionate Intellect,* pp. 16 - 17) The correspondence is not

symmetrical; while Dorothy Sayers realised that she was embarking upon something that would henceforth be at the centre of her life, Charles Williams had other preoccupations - as the Serge/Michal correspondence shows. Sayers is intensely serious and enthusiastic from the beginning, sensing immediately something of the greatest significance for herself. In reply to a straightforward and quite short letter from Charles Williams early on in the correspondence which he ended, somewhat surprisingly, 'Yours adoringly', she answered at once with a letter of twelve pages.

Williams was occasionally playful - even whimsical. There is an exchange of letters which on the surface seems unpromising, nothing more than a game, but which I deem to be extremely illuminating. Charles Williams answered one of Dorothy Sayers's letters in mock heroic style:

Given at the King's Court in Caerleon 1 September '44

The King's Majesty heard with great joy the news contained in the dispatches received this morning from the distinguished commander of the Expeditionary Force. The King has caused these dispatches to be published throughout Logres, and has proclaimed a public holiday in His capital city of Camelot. He awaits with serene impatience the fuller information promised. The achievement of the City by all coheres in His complete intention. The Lord Taliessin permits himself to add his private congratulations, and so do all the Lords of the Table.

At the command of the King and by the hand of Taliessin.

Barbara Reynolds remarks 'Dorothy Sayers enjoyed literary games' and she replied in the same lofty mode:

To the High Singer, Taliessin, at the Court of Camelot in Logres

Sir, Agreeably to the King's command, received by me this day at your

hand, I have the honour to send you the further detail of the Empryrean expedition. That of the Purgatory campaign has, I trust, reached you already. I hope His Majesty will pardon the rough and familiar style of these dispatches, for, to tell the truth, we have none here can set hand to a pen but Dinadan the Fool, and he, being of but a rambling and feeble intellect, plays himself half the day and sleeps t'other.

The troops are in good health and spirits, and desire me to thank His Majesty for His gracious and encouraging message, which I have caused to be posted throughout the camp.

Given from the field this 4th day of September. D.L. Sayers. O.C. Expeditionary Force.

(*The Passionate Intellect,* p. 34)

Now these delightful (if one likes that sort of thing) or irritating (if one doesn't) pastiches are mirror images of one another and equally accomplished, but I am convinced that they are generated from quite different impulses. This kind of thing came spontaneously to Williams - you can see similar examples of it scattered across his whole correspondence. He was an incorrigible pasticheur. Dorothy Sayers was not a pasticheur in the same way. She could do it and do it with flair, but it was not an essential part of her command of literary devices. There is something more than mere playfulness in Williams's little letter. Deliberately designed to be amusing as it is, it also shows us something of his urge to mythologise; to throw over everyday, ordinary experiences, persons, events, relationships, the glamour of the extraordinary, the mythological; the desire to *name* the quotidian in grand manner. His wife, e.g., became Michal at an early stage of their relationship. The Oxford University Press at Amen House was transformed into an empire; a classical empire complete with classical names for the characters in the masques. All amusing and meant to entertain, but also serious. A thing, a person, an event, could be seen quite differently if one knew how to look at it. A thing, a person, en event could be something other than it was. It could be both itself and not itself, both itself AND something else. Both this and that.

'This also is Thou' Glen Cavaliero remarks in his introduction to *Letters to Lalage* ' . . . not only did his fantasy world issue in poetry and fiction, it was also imposed upon the circumstances of his daily life and in due course even upon the people who shared in them. He thus sought to combine the roles of both poet and magician through the projection and acting out of an intellectual and imaginative myth'. (*Letters to Lalage,* p. 4)

The sensibility of Dorothy Sayers was utterly different. She could play the game, perform all the tricks, produce any kind of literary form she liked, but all of these antics remained firmly in the arena of intellectual play, in the realm of literature. The brilliant clarity of her mind focused on facts and concepts - those were what really interested her. Her manner of proceeding was cerebral and analytical - even in personal relationships - as the letters demonstrate; Charles Williams's was, not emotional, but what I shall call 'synthetic', by which I not mean false, but having the tendency to to make connections, to bring things into combination. Whereas she separated things out, he wove them together. Where Sayers strove for conceptual clarity, Williams drove towards poetic density. She knew perfectly well how a symbol, whether in poetry or art, worked, but she was quite sure that the symbol differed from that which it symbolised and was convinced that the distinction must be upheld. In Williams one senses the drive towards the fusion of the image and the reality and a belief that, in some mysterious way, images not only have a life of their own, but that we somehow participate in that life. And yet, immediately having said that, I am brought up short by the second half of his famous epigram: 'Neither is This Thou'. I am convinced that he was aware of the perils of his inborn imaginative drives and had a much more sceptical cast of mind than is usually deemed to be the case. This is part of the frustration and part of the delight of engaging with him. But trying to grasp him is like trying to hold quicksilver. Every new correspondent - I am tempted to say every letter- produces a new turn of the kaleidoscope to reveal new colours and patterns of his extraordinarily mercurial personality.

With Dorothy Sayers it was not so. Whatever the complications of her life and whatever the complexity of her character, the personality that expresses itself in the letters is remarkably consistent. The instantly recognisable intellectual flame burns consistently through all these thousands of pages. And one might even ob-

serve that the wide variety of the addressees of her letters call forth very little variation of register. A letter to a close friend may differ greatly in subject but not greatly in tone from a letter to a stranger. This is not to suggest that she is cold, distant, but that she is extraordinarily objective in her way of approach: there is always the distinctive precision of her expression and her particular analytical prose style even when she is upset or angry about something. In a review of the second volume of her correspondence for the *Times Literary Supplement*, AN Wilson wrote of his having 'developed an affection for the extraordinarily abrasive tone of her letters'. (*TLS,* June 2004) There is some truth in this observation. Take, for instance, the correspondence with various employers at the BBC and friends about the production of her radio plays, *The Man Born To Be King* in 1940. The unfortunate recipient of this letter was the producer of several well-known children's programmes for the radio.

I must make it plain to you that I am concerned with you as a producer for my play. In that capacity, you are not called upon to mirror other aspects of your work at the B.B.C.; you are called upon to mirror me. If you prefer to act as the director of a committee of management, well and good; but in that case you cannot also exercise the functions of a producer. You can reject the play, in which case the matter is closed; or you can accept it, in which case you must offer me another producer with whom I can deal on the usual terms, which are perfectly well understood among all people with proper theatrical experience. (*The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers,* Vol. 2. p. 201)

I am not persuaded that her tone is one of consistent abrasiveness, as Wilson seems to imply; but she was always direct, forthright, sometimes even rude, and she seemed almost to enjoy entering into quarrelsome arguments, but it is worth noting that many of her arguments are conducted with, one would not say humility - except perhaps in the cases of Charles Williams and T.S. Eliot people for whom she had boundless admiration, - but, certainly, civility and, often, patience. She, also, seems to have answered nearly every letter that came her way, however foolish or time-wasting it might appear. Though she could be harsh in her judgements, she took both people and ideas seriously - never dismissively.

Williams was, I suspect, more like the rest of us and did not show the same patience.

Charles Williams himself was quite capable of abrasiveness on occasion, though seldom towards the addressee of the letter. But here, e.g., he is on the subject of one of his admirers. He is writing to Michal from Oxford in January 1944.

I have made up my mind that if Margaret is hoping to come to any of the lectures, she must read Shakespeare properly. I simply will not stand for being merely me - so to put it. The Divine Shakespeare is the thing, & she must get to it . . . . . You will think, madonna, I am in a bad temper! It is not quite so, but the English upper classes sitting cosily round the divine poets agonizing over their task always has and always will rile me. It's all over and around us. (*To Michal from Serge,* p. 187)

When one reads these letters one cannot help but be struck by the extraordinary energy of both Sayers and Williams, demonstrated not merely by their astonishing fecundity i.e. in number of letters that they wrote, but an energy of a different kind: of the mind and the imagination. However, in the deployment of their energy they stand in marked contrast to one another. Sayers's energy is always under control, even when she is most upset: she knows exactly what she is doing and why she is doing it. This energy is always directed by, her intelligence. In Williams's letters the energy is frequently barely under control. The urgency of his intentions almost breaks the grammatical and syntactical conventions of ordinary dialogue. His thoughts shoot off in dozens of directions often causing the syntax to bend and break and his sentences to verge on the incoherent. What are we to make of this paragraph in a letter to Thelma Shuttleworth 15 November 35?

Cowslips - 1 And the notes do but say - ' here is a thing to be looked into, and everyone pretends they knew it. They no more knew it than they know

the value of Troilus till I told them. Three centuries of criticism, and that speech unnoticed. And so here, only I write lightly and briefly. Had you observed the inimical effect of the animals? did you ever apply Vaughan's phrase to poetry? Or did anyone? 'Hector thou sleep'st: awake thee!' (*The Unpublished Letters of Charles Williams,* Collected by Alice Mary and Charles Hadfield. p. 60)

He is defending his edition of the *New Book of English Verse* from the criticisms of Grigson and Rylands.. And he ends with a torrent of allusions:

. . . . . *the world will have me stand by my guns, will it? Up then! St. Thomas and charge, Zion. Thistles and oaks against my cowslips! and against these people who have sneered at Tennyson and disregarded Palgrave, until now, suddenly, Tennyson must be a master and Palgrave an example, and Edward Young - and Ebenezer Jones? I have given them back a poet they should like, and Tom o' Bedlam and - yes, and offered them the First Annivesarie as a document upon poetry? I; and had they seen it? Damn all! And have you read it, and disagreed? No. Or Crashaw, in the same way? No. Have you considered the other Coleridge? No. Or the Heywood poem, or Cleland? or that most exquisite thing queried as by Campion? No.* (p. 62)

There is what I can only describe as a kind of wildness in many of his letters, as though he simply didn't have time or patience to be more sedate, more considered, more ordered - even when he is writing to someone whose mind and sensibility he obviously respected like Anne Bradby, later Anne Ridler. He has a characteristic habit of rhetoric which inserts clauses into a sentence like hortatory interruptions. These interpolations make the style much more like speech; it is both breathless and immediate, they also increase tension: where is this onrush of words taking us? how is the sentence going to end? A similar rhetorical habit can be observed in many of his other prose writings where it is consciously and deliberately. It has become a style. (*The Forgiveness of Sins*) But here he is

writing to Anne Ridler still on the subject of the *New Book of English Verse*:

Altogether, including this, that, and t'other, we seem to have about 1100 pages of anthology, instead of 700: including some we haven't yet got. . . . . I shall have, I fear, O I fear, to cut Nymphelidios (sic) *and - can it be? - the Anatomy of the World. Hudibras is a shadow and Skelton - no, I fear there is still a good deal of Skelton. . . . . It is certainly curious that we moderns - Colin has some justification - don't easily contemplate plucking out eyes. Are we entranced by eyes? Or is it that we have an intenser sense of God in them? A dangerous method, of course. I m aware sometimes that 'my Gospel' - as distinguished from 'that of the Lord Jesus' - needs a little tearing up of nettles? or no?* (pp. 55 - 56)

I want to make a final point of contrast. In Sayers's letters one would probably be able to deduce from the internal evidence of the letter itself what kind of person it is to whom she is writing and what the contents of the original letter to her might have been - in cases where she is replying to one she had herself received. Here is a tart note to F. Sawden written in May 1949. Barbara Reynolds says the identity of F. Sawden is unknown; but then we do not need to know the identity of the person to grasp the content of his or her letter to Dorothy Sayers:

'Many thanks for your letter. I fear, however, that I entertain very strong objections to pacifism and no-more-war campaigns. They offer far too much encouragement to dictators and such-like fry, leading them to suppose they can do what they like without opposition. Peace Pledges and so on played right into Hitler's hands last time, helping to disarm us and waste the lives of a great many men in France, and I think it would be better not to start that dangerous game again. (Vol. 3. p 440)

With Williams it is often not so. Such is the immediacy of his address it is often only because Alice Mary Hadfield has been able to identify the addressee that we know the circumstances of the letter Williams has written. This does not mean that the kind of things he says in his letters to particular persons who have particular problems are not of general application. If this were the case then reading the letters would be little more than an exercise in vulgar curiosity. I shall end with two examples: one to Thelma Shnuttleworth on the notion of a just war (She with her husband Bertie were conscientious objectors and had even spent time in prison) The year was 1940:

As far as something "after death" goes - yes I do. At least I believe two things. I believe that every soul experiences and understands fully the entire and living justice of the universe. I believe that Justice to be a living, responsive, and intelligent Existence - and one with Almighty Love. And I believe It makes Itself clear to every soul in the way that that soul chooses . . . . . I believe that we shall see our thoughts, words, and actions in that lucid Justice - that the past lives there, and we shall jolly well know it . . . . . .I cannot go so far as to say that the use of physical force against another is always wrong; nor can I say that to take life is always wrong . . . . . Of course I think we ought to love; you will laugh at me if I say that war does not exclude love, and you will be wrong. . . . . I am not, most conscientious Lady, trying to convert you. I am only saying what I think. (pp. 119 - 120)

The second was a letter he wrote to Alice Mary on the death of her husband Peter in France June 1940. It is one of the most extraordinary letters of comfort and sympathy that I have ever read - and only Charles Williams could have written it:

He dies for my life, and I live his actual death; in a way perhaps he lived through - if not my death at least my pain. And both of us mysteriously live and die through you. O there is no end to it, or to our despair. But in you it is a living despair; it is knowledge, princess - a living death. The past is our food: what you had you have. No damned nostalgia. The phrases of communion at the

Eucharist hold it. "The body . . . which was given for thee, preserve . . . unto everlasting life. Take and eat this . . ." Eat it: Peter and me. Pain, pain, everywhere, for ever, pain. I do not presume to be sorry for you. (p. 123)

Quotations are taken from:

The unpublished letters of Charles Williams. Selected by Alice Mary and Charles Hadfield.

To Michal From Serge. Letters from Charles Williams to His Wife, Florence, 1939 - 1945. Edited by Roma A. King Jnr. The Kent State University Press. 2002.

The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers. Vol. 2. 1937 - 1943. From Novelist to Playwright. Chosen and Edited by Barbara Reynolds. The Dorothy L. Sayers Society. 1997.

The Passionate Intellect. Dorothy L. Sayers' Encounter with Dante. By Barbara Reynolds. The Kent State University Press. 1989.

Brian Horne

July 2004

On a bright April morning – spring flowers, trees in their early green and sunlit college buildings – seventeen members of our Society, including one on a visit from the United States, met together at the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Oxford.

It was a good day. Dr. John Feneley, the Principal, welcomed us most warmly and gave us a brief history of the Centre. We were then free to explore the building and, in particular, to visit the Society's Reference Library which is housed in the Charles Williams Room. As well as the books there are a number of card-

A GOLDEN OXFORD DAY – SATURDAY 2 APRIL 2005

board boxes containing press cuttings and other intriguing items. Time was too short and several present quietly resolved to revisit the Library at a later date.**

Then it was time for lunch and we were again out in the Oxford sunshine on our ways to the Eagle and Child and other favourite hostelries, and perhaps a quick visit to a bookshop.

On our return to the Centre, Brian Horne introduced our reading of *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury* with extracts from E. Martin Browne's memoirs recounting preparations, the solving of production difficulties and then the play's successful first performances in Canterbury Cathedral in 1936. Very interesting this all was.

Some of us have bee fortunate enough in the past to see the play enacted by fully costumed and talented actors. Our reading could not match that, but it was very effective. Stephen Barber as Cranmer and Richard Sturch as the Skeleton were impressive, as was Richard Jeffrey as a regal and forceful Henry VIII. Other parts were shared around and everyone joined in as the voices of the Commons. Afterwards there was a short discussion.

At the close of the meeting Brian Horne, on behalf of the Society, thanked Eileen Mable, who retires as Chairman at the end of June, for her work for the Society during her twelve years in office, and presented her with flowers and a cheque. Eileen expressed her thanks, spoke of what a privilege it had been to hold office as Chairman and of how she owed this to her late husband who had first introduced her to Charles Williams's writings.

The sun was still shining when we left the Centre. A few of us made for teashops and others straightway commenced their homeward journeys. For some – I hope for all of us – it had been a golden Oxford day.

** It is important that any member wishing to visit the Library should contact the Centre in advance of their visit so that proper arrangements can be made:

Telephone: + 44 01865 241071

Fax: + 44 01865 243740

LETTERS TO THE SOCIETY

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Charles Williams Society and in particular to Dr. Brian Horne who has posted me the books and provided me with other materials on Charles Williams I needed from the CWS Library, and to Mr. Edward Gauntlett who has published my paper in the CWS Newsletter, for the kind assistance in my work on my PhD thesis, devoted to Charles Williams. Without your help and participation it could hardly have been completed.

With gratitude,

Olga Markova

Senior Research Fellow
of the Institute of World Literature
of the Russian Academy of Sciences
Moscow

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the bouquet of tulips and the amazingly generous cheque given to me at our April meeting in Oxford. The affection and friendship that prompted your gift is indeed precious to me. I have not yet decided how to use your cheque but you may be sure that it will be for something special – something that I would not otherwise do or have.

It has been a great and wholly unexpected privilege to be Chairman of the

Charles Williams Society. The first time I came to a Society meeting in Liddon House in 1987 I knew that I was among friends. That friendship, which I think is characteristic of our Society, has been a great help and encouragement to me throughout. I am truly grateful for the support so many of you have given to the Society and to me personally over the years.

We have done some good and enjoyable things together. There will be good and possibly new things to do as we continue to work to promote a wider knowledge of Charles Williams's life and writings. I believe that the future holds both promise and enjoyment.

Always sincerely yours,

Eileen Mable

Editorial Policy

The Charles Williams Society's Newsletter and Web site have two functions. Firstly, to publish material about the life and work of Charles Williams. Secondly, to publish details of the activities of the Society.

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome. If you wish to submit a contribution, please take note of the following:

- Submissions should be sent to the Editor, preferably on floppy disc; otherwise by email attachment to: Edward.Gauntlett@down21.freeuk.com.
- Submissions on paper should be typed double spaced and single-sided.
- All quotations should be clearly referenced, and a list of sources included.
- Submissions of just a few hundred words may be hand written.
- The Editor reserves the right to decide whether to publish a submission. Usually the main article in any issue will be a paper previously read before the Society; in most cases such papers will be published as received, with little or no editorial input. Other submissions may be edited.

Copyright

Registered Charity No. 291822