

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 27, AUTUMN 1982

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

26 February 1983: Richard Sturch will talk on 'Common Themes among Inklings'.

II June 1983: Annual General Meeting. Professor Barbara Reynolds will speak on 'Charles Williams, Dorothy L. Sayers and Dante'.

Both meetings will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W.I.

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 20 March) Both meetings will start at Ipm at St Basil's House,
Sunday 29 May) 52 Ladbroke Grove, London W.II. Coffee and tea are provided
but sandwiches should be brought. As we make a donation of £5 to the House funds
for the use of the room, each member will be asked for a contribution on the day.
We will continue reading Arthurian Torso.

OXFORD READING GROUP

For details contact either Brenda Boughton (Oxford 55589) or Anne Scott (53897).

LAKE MICHIGAN AREA READING GROUP

For details please contact Charles Huttar, 188 W.IIth ST., Holland, Michigan,
49423, USA, telephone (616) 396 2260.

CWS CONFERENCE 18 SEPTEMBER 1982

A most enjoyable day Conference was held in London on 18 September. Joan Wallis gave a most interesting history of the church of St Magnus the Martyr and its place in the City of London's history - at lunchtime we walked in bright sunshine to the church to admire its great beauty. To continue the thought of T.S.Eliot, Stephen Medcalf spoke on the links between the Williams novels and the Four Quartets of Eliot in a fascinating talk which we hope to reproduce in a forthcoming Newsletter. In the afternoon, Thelma Shuttleworth regaled us with her memories of C.W., which we are very pleased to print in this edition. A very enjoyable day was rounded off by a reading round the Group of the first Masque 'The Perusal'.

PERFORMANCES OF CRANMER

David Dodds is directing a production of Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury in St Mary Magdalen, Oxford (not Magdalen College but the church not far from the Martyr's Memorial) on 3, 4 and 5 March, starting in the early evening. Seat prices and starting time have not yet been settled, but details are available from David Dodds at Merton College, Oxford, or by telephoning him at home on Oxford (0865)54844. Support for this enterprising venture will be very welcome.

NEW BOOK ON C.W.

Members of the Society will like to know that Alice Mary Hadfield's new book Charles Williams: an Exploration of his Life and Work (which will replace her twenty-three year old An Introduction to Charles Williams) has been accepted for publication by the New York branch of the Oxford University Press. They hope to publish in the autumn of 1983.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

Paul Merlino, 674 W. 18th Avenue, Costa Mesa, California 92627, USA

Jean Rawlinson, The Priory, Sayers Common, Hassocks, W. Sussex, BN6 9HT
Catherine Madson) Box 348, Holt, Michigan, 48842, USA
Sarah Thomson)
William and Barbara Thomson, 128 W. Green Street, Olivet, Michigan 49076, USA
Martin Robb, III Beehive Lane, Great Baddow, Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 9RP
Karen Pearce, 'Vista', 6 Valencia Way, Andover, Hants, SPIO IJH.

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We are pleased to be able to reproduce the talk given to the Society at the London Conference in September 1982 by Thelma Shuttleworth.

Love and Friendship, being a brief look at Charles Williams' method of directing the incoherence of a self-contained sombrosity, towards the coinherence of a fitting companion of the household.

"When you are old and grey, and full of sleep', what will you have made of it all, I wonder." So Charles wrote to me, more than fifty years ago.

The other night my troubled spirit woke on the phrase 'Love & Friendship' - shades of Jane Austen : shades of Charles Williams who lectured so brilliantly on her work. Ha! My title, at last. We were friends, and we talked incessantly of the nature of love in living, in the necessity of being.

When I was seven my father died; when I was forty-two Charles died. Now that I am coming up to eighty, the third man in my life (who came in about the same time as Charles) is, happily, still with me. We have been married for fifty-one years, through thick and thin, and for thirty-five of them we have shared a home with our mutual friend. ("Love may not last, darling: I don't say it won't, it may. But it does die, too often. I think though, that it may be born again after a new fashion. I'm not being beastly. I only want you to know to be prepared.")

Founded in love, grounded in love, compounded in love and friendship - that is my life, thanks to Charles who saw the light in a self-contained sombrosity (his summing up) and thought it worth pursuing. Certainly over the next eighteen years he showed me the meaning of all I thought I knew, and much that I didn't, and most that I never could have known but by knowing him. He was unique. He once remarked in discussion that the astonishing thing about life was that at 40 one realised that all one had learned at one's mother's knee was merely true.

There's no doubt that Charles and I had always been in love with love. I believe, too, that we both preferred the ideal to the real, the cerebral to the physical - I mean Coventry Patmore's Unknown Eros, for instance, to the boy or girl next door. Once, for example, Charles was chatting idly about the awkwardness of having young women fall in love with you, and tell you so, and expect some reaction. "By the way", he interrupted himself, "why aren't you in love with me?" "Me?" I said, "It never occurred to me. Anyway, it doesn't arise, I'm in love with someone else you know. You and I, Charles, are together in love, but not with each other. Isn't that it?" But that was later.

When we first knew each other, each had begun to see love reflected in one special person. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven". From the place of our friendship he directed my love for my friend, and his friend's for himself.

He soon knew all about my innermost feelings and behaviour - and misbehaviour: I had never in all my 23 years had anyone like this to talk to! I knew nothing of his love, but, as Rosalind says, "the sight of lovers feedeth those in love". And we talked of the poets whose language he spoke, whose language he was teaching me to hear.

Occasionally, the O.U.P. librarian came to our lectures and held his entire attention through the coffee break. This had come to be, usually, mine, naturally! And I used to leave my family to go home on their own whilst I, ostensibly waiting for my own friends as usual, went off with Charles to his bus stop, still talking! Of course the Cycle Literature lectures at Brixton Women's Evening Institute were run by the L.C.C. but with University lecturers I was going to tell you something about those because it was through them that I came to know Charles.

On a September evening 56 years ago, a group of some 15 assorted ladies - the eldest, twins (my mother and aunt) were about 52, the youngest, my sister, 19 - sat waiting for yet another lecturer. Over the years, we had endured the dry-as-dust, wallowed with the ultra-romantic, delighted in the Oxford-Bensonian (who had only left us because, he said, he couldn't be bothered to mug up anything but Shakespeare) and been mildly irritated by the scholarly young lady who countered our opinions with "Oh you think that, do you?" Now we had come round to Shakespeare again, and our Principal, whose hobby was the Streatham Shakespeare, wanted something a bit more dramatic. Besides, she might get the sort of man she could ask to play for her! The Oxford-Bensonian had done Mr Thrale in the Johnson scene of the Streatham Pageant. Here she comes now, an autocratic, Queen Victoria-like, little lady in a tricorne hat, being ushered in ceremoniously by the new lecturer who fetches up beside her, slim, tallish, dark, with old-fashioned pince-nez. He bows his head in acknowledgement of her introduction, and proceeds to bow her out. She seems a little taken aback at being played off her own stage ... still! Shutting the door, the Presence returns to the table, fishes a fistful of notes from one pocket and a watch from another, places them squarely on the table before him, and is off - literally. To and fro he pranced before us, hands in pockets jingling keys and coins, as a spate of words fell from those mobile lips - oration, quotation, incantation ... and all in that strange voice and odd accent. It was terrific and we didn't understand a word of it. After an hour he stopped as suddenly as he had begun, checking with the watch and flinging himself onto the wooden chair as if it were a divan and he the great Tamburlaine having disposed of the "pampered Jade of Asia" now ready "to entertain divine Zenocrate". As I've said we crept out stunned, and returned wondering how we'd get through an hour's discussion with this strange phenomenon. We needn't have bothered. By the end of the evening we were hooked. We had never known till then how clever we all were. We looked at each other with new eyes, and at our new lecturer with a wild surmise. The accent wouldn't suit Miss Massey, but we heard it as they heard the Apostles at Pentecost, each in his own tongue.

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven". That was the theme of those early years. Charles related everything he said about everybody and everything to us and ours. Their lives and works - which we had been hearing about with appropriate dates and relations to their times and tides of fortune - their lives and loves and ours, he insisted, were an integral part of Life itself; and love for Love's sake only, made the whole agonising wonder endurable, workable, possibly even - surprise surprise - enjoyable. That was why we studied the works of Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and the rest - precisely because they had the wisdom, power and imagination to gather the essence of it all and turn it into words, the commonest medium of

exchange between man and man. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the word was God and God was love.

"The kingdom of heaven is within" (he was writing in one of his earliest letters though not till 1929) "and what is the kingdom of heaven? Love and lucidity - the advent of God - in all relationships and all occupations: not in sex only, nor in religion only, nor in art only nor in beauty only, but everywhere and at all times. But if the Kingdom is within, what I meant is that you must submit yourself to it. As for example - to empty the mind of thought, to still the emotions, to concentrate on God (and I do recommend God instead of Love - for, though they are the same word, Love has so many associations though you may say, so has God. Well, I leave it to you). And to submit all things to It. Keep silence. Attend. 'For what I mean to say', you can't have it both ways. Either our mortal love is to be believed in as an epiphany and presence of the Divine Perfection, or it is not. And to accept it as such without doing something about it is sentimentality. Which you won't let yourself slip into will you? It may be the beginning of something which is at last to be the final end of the soul. But to find it that, we must believe on it and submit to it - whatever doom it brings. And how terrible some of those dooms are only those who have endured them know! It sounds silly, but a number of people have got themselves into hell, and nothing but hell, by allowing their own visions of themselves to dominate them. And the smallest effort even to remind oneself that our own vision is often a monstrous blur is worthwhile..... And I did want to urge that salvation comes from submission to the Centre, and that the practice of the prayer of entire silence is one way of learning the mysteries of Love. But when you pray, pray; and when you play, play (and don't be too solemnly sacred - only remember to set Love in order: which is indeed, one way or another, our only purpose in this dispensation)."

Later he was to write that he thought one should pay as well as pray and play. But this letter came about because he thought he saw me wince, and wondered if I'd seen him wince, when, in the course of discussion the word 'sacred' was applied to love and friendship. "After all, my dear child, don't you and the great poets and I think it sacred?" Oh dear; the mere difficulty of communication through words, what with each personal connotation of each word, and the general looseness in the use of words but poets have the power and the desire to use words accurately, so back to the poet and the poets who had been, in a way, the cause of my appearing to Charles in the first place as a self-contained sombrosity. For the fact is that at 18 I hadn't been able to square all that I had picked up of poetry and Christianity in ten years at the London Orphan School, two at a Women's Teacher Training College and in oddish home surroundings, with the great world outside into which I had been precipitated. Neither poetry nor Christianity appeared to be a viable proposition. Certainly the Christians I encountered put me off - including the new vicar especially the new vicar. I therefore eschewed Christianity, in spite of my Mother's distress and my own at hers. But poetry? Shakespeare? If that had to go, then what matter anything? 'Come death and welcome'.

Miss Massey and the Shakespeare Players had rescued me from that, and owing to her altruism I was now established happily teaching at St Leonard's School, Streatham. Charles, at this time 40 with a wife and child, was happily established in the new O.U.P. at Amen House in Warwick Square under the shadow of St Paul's.

You can read the matter of the lectures on the great poets in The English Poetic Mind, etc, and you can guess at the manner, from the Masques, and

The Myth of Shakespeare; the latter written as a framework for scenes to be read or acted; but how can one convey the Pentecostal flame with which he put it all across?

That reminds me again of Charles telling me how a young man had rushed down from Liverpool to tell him that he, Charles, was a burning flame, and The English Poetic Mind a masterpiece. "Did you ever think of me as a b.f.?", he wanted to know. "I know what sort of b.f. I think I am." (I wonder what happened to those remarkable lectures on, for instance, 'The Ring and the Book', and 'The Unknown Eros', and the notes on the Metaphysicals.)

'From the round world's imagined corners

Blow your trumpets angels!' I wish I could give you some idea of the sheer fun of it! A bit puzzling sometimes, that fun, for the Twins, I know. What was Augustine up to with the oft re-iterated "Oh God, make me chaste, but not yet! Then there was a paper I wrote for him (we were encouraged to write papers and get free entrance for a University Diploma Course in English Literature. The authorities liked it. "I have to tell you about it", Charles said, "but I don't press it".) He returned the essay to me, as being merely devastating, but every time I had disagreed with his views on the subject (and I was giving my, no doubt jejeune, opinions on Wordsworth) he had written 'Pig' in the margin. If any of us younger ones made comments which he felt were not quite up to standard, or whatever, he would mock-moan, "Oh Sophonisba!, Sophonisba, oh!" or "Hunka Hunka" for a change! He would suddenly shout "Under which King, Besonian, speak or die!" when we were all arguing at once.

Of course we knew about Michal, his wife, and her bad back, and why she was called Michal; and were always ready to hear about the latest cleverness of the young Michael - 5, when we first heard how he had brought his parents tea in bed, with fearful care. At 7 he was telling his father the only way to cook sausages. At 10 he was chiding his father for spoiling his, Michael's poem 'The singing fish has golden eyes, Has golden eyes that look so wild', by putting a lot more on the end of it. (The Singing Fish occurs in Heroes and Kings with appropriate acknowledgements.)

You should have heard Charles doing the great Barrymore 'doing' Hamlet! It was the slowest thing you ever heard, and the funniest. One day I said something which caused him to remark, "So dear young lady, you wish to respect yourself?" It sounded pretty silly put like that, but I floundered on. It transpired that self-respect was simply improper pride, which led to a feeling of injured merit, which was exactly what led Milton's Satan into Hell. "Heaven ruining from Heaven". He came down really heavily on me once because I had reported, with some smugness, that I had said, "Oh no, I am not wanted here." He got up in the middle of the night when he realised the enormity of the offence and wrote in such terms that I have never forgotten it - though I might say that I have lost that particular letter.

A day came when I wrote "there's no need to be so stuffy and middle-aged". He apologised, saying how strange it was that 'the Middle Ages' should sound interesting and romantic, while being middle-aged did suggest dullness and stodge. But in his view there should be a glory of youth, a glory of middle-age and a glory of old age - and when the time came he would show us just what the glory of old age could be. Bless him!

I have said elsewhere how, when our lectures clashed, we met sometimes for tea after work, or in the school holidays for lunch. What fun that always was. We always ordered mushroom omelette and brown bread and butter to save having to stop talking. There was a bizarre occasion on which he decided we would have a $\frac{1}{2}$ bottle of Chablis. The waitress brought champagne, already opened!

He waved it away, insisting on the Chablis being brought. "But what shall I do with this?" the waitress wailed in consternation. "Oh? Drink it yourself I should think", he said going on with our conversation. That wail reminds me of one of mine. I remember wailing at him, "But it's all spoilt when I get home. I'm expected to give an account of an occasion of love which can't be accounted for, and it's all spoilt." "What utter rubbish", he countered, "your moment of perfection is absolute in eternity. Even you can't spoil it. You must see that. Try not to be merely silly!" Oh and quite early on he had called me a "blodge". "I've never called a young woman a blodge before", he said somewhat smugly. No offence meant, of course, but I gather I was somewhat cast down for he is bolstering me up in another letter.

By this time, 1929, I was engaged to be married, and though I did not know it, the glory of his idyll was fading. He was bouyant as ever, and a sort of incandescence never failed if the switch was touched, but the constant radiance of those first halcyon years was dimmed. It was around this time that he first talked and wrote to me about bearing one another's burdens. We thought it a good idea and we practised it together. The first time he asked me to do it for him was when Miss Kassey had told him there would be an inspector at his class on Monday. He was in a panic, poor lamb. I understood only too well (though I knew there was nothing for him to worry about) and agreed to worry about it for him. And I did. And I got a postcard by the next morning's post to pay that she had not come after all. Hurray!

When I was asked to worry for him because Celia was going away for the weekend and he wished she wouldn't - I suppose it was a good thing I was doing the worrying. He had enough to do with the calamitous results, the ends of which were his story and not mine. I only heard that she had fallen from her horse and broken her leg, which was bad enough.

In 1939 Charles carried a special burden for me. My husband, by now a professional actor, was on his first six-month assignment from home - we had never been parted before - and after four months thought I might venture to leave our flatlet business in the hands of the servant supervised by relations, and go up to Scotland to stay with him. Do you know what it is like to have your flesh shuddering like jelly on your bones? That was how I felt as the day for departure came. I rang Charles. We had a conversation like that of Peter Stanhope and Pauline in Descent into Hell. Come to think of it, our conversations must usually have sounded like those in his novels. Not surprising really, as they were mostly concerned, like Charles' and mine, with the integration of living and loving with body, mind and spirit. Not discussing it exactly, but sort of pinning things that happened to it, and unpinning and underpinning and repinning, in an effort to get the perfect adjustment between what we were saying and what we were doing, and what we ought to be doing. (Do you suppose that was one of the reasons Charles loved Woodhouse - because his characters talked naturally, like a book, and full of apt quotes adapted?). Anyway, Charles said - about my jellied state - that I was not to worry, he would see to that. I must simply attend to my affairs, setting all in order and then leaving it to Love. No problem. If I needed to, I must ring again. I was to be not afraid amazedly, enjoy myself, Go with God. All will be most well And it was, instantly! When Charles was gone from amongst us, and I had to do it all without him, when I was really, at last, fending for myself in the great world, it was, in fact, just like Cranmer and the Skeleton. When you work with people, for people, their lives get between you and yourself. Only when I got out of it again, after another 20 years, could I see what a mess I had been making of it. I remembered how Charles and I - and Bertie of course - had thought the Millament's approach to marriage,

in Congreve's Jay of the World a very wise one: 'Let us be very strange and wellbred; as strange as if we had been married a great while, and as well-bred as if we had never been married at all.'

My spirit quails at the thought of the sort of person I should have been if I hadnot known those 18 years of constant communion, of love and friendship. Blodge? Child of lucidity? Blodge? BLODGE. Charity begins at home, they say. "You must always be kind to your grandmother", Charles said. Charity? Caritas? Love and courtesy, in fact. At home.

No more now but the lines of Yeats' with which Charles prefaced his first book (his sonnet sequence of love The Silver Stair), and which, we thought, were the rub of the whole thing;

Forgael: It is love that I am seeking for
But of a beautiful, unheard-of kind
That is not in the world.
Aibric: And yet the world
Has beautiful women to please every man.
Forgael: But he that gets their love after the fashion,
Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness ...
Aibric: All that ever loved
Have loved that way - there is no other way.
Forgael: Yet never have two lovers kissed but they
Believed there was some other near at hand,
And almost wept because they could not find it.

Afterthought - I should have stressed, as Charles always did, the necessity of common sense in this burden-bearing business. No use offering to carry somebody's luggage if you're bowed down with your own. On the other hand, an exchange might help both, both willing. Charles writes somewhere to the effect - what's so silly about the Scillies taking in one another's washing? Other people's chores are rarely as tedious to do as one's own. And when you are doing all for Love's sake

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OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

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