

# The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 37, SPRING 1985

## MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

16 November 1985: Renée Haynes, writer and critic, will speak on "CW and the Affirmation of Images."

22 February 1986: Dr Rowan Williams will speak on "CW and Church History", looking particularly at The Descent of the Dove.

24 May 1986: Centenary meeting at St Albans - see further details below.

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W1, at 2.30pm.

### LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 11 August 1985: We will meet in St John's Parish Room, 2 Lansdowne Crescent, Ladbroke Grove, Notting Hill Gate, London W11 at 1pm to continue reading the Taliessin poems. Please bring sandwiches - coffee and tea provided.

### OXFORD READING GROUP

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

### LAKE MICHIGAN AREA READING GROUP

For details contact Charles Huttar, 188th W.11th St., Holland, Michigan 49423 USA, telephone (616) 396 2260.

### CENTENARY YEAR 1986 - a note from the Chairman, Richard Wallis.

The preparations that the Council of the Society are making to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Charles Williams are well advanced and I wish to draw the attention of all members to the special events that have been arranged for 1986.

#### 1. St Albans

On Saturday 24 May 1986 there will be a Commemorative Eucharist at St Albans Abbey Cathedral at 12 noon as the Eucharist was at the centre of CW's religious apprehension. The Bishop of London has accepted an invitation to preach at that service. It will be followed by a reception in the new Chapter House.

The Headmaster of St Albans School has kindly agreed to arrange for members to visit the school at which CW was a pupil from 1898-1902, at 2.30pm on the same day.

A plaque has been ordered to commemorate CW's residence with his parents and sister at 36 Victoria Street, St Albans from 1894-1917. The house has been demolished but permission has been given by St Albans City Council for the plaque to be affixed to the new development at the site but as this may not be completed by May 1986, the plaque may not be in place until a later date.

The Librarian at St Albans is keen to mount a small exhibition about CW's life and works in the City Library for May/June 1986.

#### 2. Oxford

On Saturday 20 September 1986, which is the centenary of his date of birth, it is proposed to arrange a service at University Church, Oxford (at which church CW had been invited to preach in 1945 but his death intervened) with a visit to CW's grave in Holy Cross Churchyard.

An exhibition in conjunction with the Bodleian Library is planned for the period late September / October 1986.

### 3. London

Gillian Lunn has asked the GLC to consider the provision of a plaque for 3 Caedmon Street, London N7, the house in which CW was born, but the GLC have such a backlog of requests they cannot consider it but will give permission for a plaque if we provide one and will assist in obtaining permission from the present owners.

The Librarian of the Borough of Islington is also keen to have an exhibition and it is proposed to provide material (additional to the proposed Oxford exhibition) for an exhibition that can 'travel' between St Albans and Islington.

Efforts are still being made to persuade the BBC or Channel 4 to mark the centenary with a programme either on radio or TV.

A selection from CW's poetry is being made by Anne Ridler to be published as a commemorative production for the Centenary.

### 4. U.S.A.

Dr Lyle W. Dorsett, Curator of the Marion E. Wade Collection at Wheaton College, Illinois, has said that he will put together an exhibit at Wheaton to commemorate the centenary and we hope to welcome American members at some of the events here in 1986.

### 5. Germany

Dr Gisbert Kranz, President der Inklings - Gesellschaft, is planning an exhibition in Aachen and probably at other places in Germany.

### CENTENARY FUND APPEAL

All members will appreciate that a proper commemoration of the centenary of CW's birth will require funds over and above those provided by your subscriptions. A centenary fund has now been opened to which some donations have already been made and I ask you all to contribute to the fund so that your Society can mark in a manner worthy of its objects the centenary of the birth of Charles Williams. Please send cheques, made out to the Charles Williams Society, to me, Richard Wallis, at 6 Matlock Court, Kensington Park Road, London W11 3BS.

### PUBLICITY FOR THE CENTENARY YEAR

Help is needed in organising publicity for the events of the Centenary Year, designing posters, leaflets and other information material. Would any member with experience in these fields please get in touch with the Chairman.

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY 1985

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on Saturday 11 May 1985 at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W1 at 2.30pm. The Chairman welcomed those present, especially new members and Dr Charles Huttar from USA.

The General Secretary of the Society reported as follows on the events of the past year: "After last year's A.G.M., at which Dr Ralph Townsend addressed us on 'Williams & the Anglican Tradition' we have had two further meetings of the Society, one in November when Canon Raymond Hockley, Precentor of York Minster, gave us 'Reflections on some aspects of the theology of Charles Williams' and the second in February when Joan Wallis spoke on 'Charles Williams & the poets - Wordsworth'. Both papers have been printed in the Newsletter.

The Reading Groups in London, Oxford and the USA continue to meet.

At last year's AGM a suggestion was made that we approach Whitaker's Almanack, asking them to include the Society in their 'Societies' and 'Centenaries' sections;

I wrote to the publishers and received an acknowledgement - they would consider our request and let us know the outcome. I have heard nothing further.

Dr Kranz of the Inklings Society in Aachen, Germany, is planning an exhibition in October to mark the 40th anniversary of C.W.'s death. Our Librarian is advising him on appropriate exhibition material and Dr Kranz has visited the Society's library in King's College to photocopy documents there.

Most members may be aware that the US publishers Eerdmans' have in recent years republished several C.W. titles, some of which have been obtainable in this country also. I believe that the Paternoster Press is in association with Eerdmans and - all publicity being helpful - I quote from the "Church Times" of 8 February 1985:

'Charles Williams, who died forty years ago this year, still has a loyal following, though it is his seven novels, described as "supernatural thrillers", which are most read nowadays. His theological books, however, received critical acclaim during his lifetime, and three of them - "The Forgiveness of Sins" (£4.40), "He Came Down from Heaven" (£4.40) and "Descent of the Dove" (£5.30) - have now been reissued in paperback editions by Paternoster Press.'

In December 1984, I received a letter from the Secretary of the Oxford C.S. Lewis Society, drawing attention to plans to modernise the Oxford pub the "Eagle & Child" - or the "Bird & Baby" as it was affectionately known - in which C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, J.R.R. Tolkien and the other Inklings used to meet to read and discuss their work. I also heard from the Secretary of the Tolkien Society about it. Reports had appeared in the "Oxford Mail" and the "Oxford Times" so, as suggested by the other Societies' secretaries, I wrote to their Editors expressing, on behalf of this Society, a hope that the charmingly traditional pubby atmosphere and character of the pub would not be spoilt. I also wrote to the Master of University College, the landlords. None of these replied. I also wrote to the brewers who run the pub and had a nice conciliatory reply - they will do their best etc. etc. and they are in touch with the C.S. Lewis Society about it. I also wrote to the Oxford City Architect who passed my letter on to the Conservation Officer and we have had quite a correspondence: the pub is a Grade 2 listed building in the Department of the Environment's lists of buildings which are, to a certain extent, protected from "undesirable" development. He sent me a photocopy of the actual entry in the list, which mentions only its "historic character" as a building of architectural interest. As the criteria for listing buildings include "literary association" I wrote, at the Oxford Conservation Officer's suggestion, to the English Heritage Commission to suggest that the Bird & Baby's literary associations with the Inklings be included in the list-entry, and to express hope that the inside of the pub should be protected, not just its frontage on St Giles. I have not had a reply yet. But the Conservation Officer had kindly included with one of his letters to me a photo of C.W.'s gravestone which he had recently taken; I rather incautiously expressed a fear that perhaps Holy Cross Churchyard, which I recall as a charming if almost too overgrown wilderness, might be going to be modernised too. And the Conservation Officer replied by return of post that he and a friend are 'tidying it up' but that I should set aside my fears - they won't over-tidy it. Looking over the pile of correspondence resulting from Terry Barker's original letter to me (on behalf of the C.S. Lewis Society), I find that I have written 20 letters - so far ...."

The Resolution for the amendment of the Constitution and Rules of the Society to enable the Society to apply for registration as a Charity was proposed by the Chairman and seconded by Dr Brian Horne and was approved by all the members present.

The Chairman reported briefly on preparations for Centenary Year and the meeting closed at 3.30pm. It was followed by a lecture by Dr Charles Huttar on the subject of 'The Place of Beatrice in C.W.'s Romantic Theology' but for copyright reasons it will not be able to reproduce the talk in the Newsletter at present.

SECOND-HAND C.W. BOOKS

A few books are still available for sale (plus cost of postage) to members:

- The Forgiveness of Sins £6
- The House of the Octopus £5
- The New Christian Year £6
- The Place of the Lion £2.50p
- J.R.R. Tolkien - biography by Humphrey Carpenter (very poor copy) 25p

Please contact Gillian Lunn if you would like any of these but SEND NO MONEY WHEN ORDERING. When the books arrive please note the cost of stamps on the parcel, add this to the price of the books and then send your cheque(overseas members please be kind enough to pay in sterling) to Gillian Lunn at 26 Village Road, Finchley, London W3 1TL. The account number is 51053922.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to:

- Mrs Joan Northam, 45 Reddown Road, Coulsdon, Surrey CR3 1AP
- Peter McGeary, 37 East Lavant, Chichester, W. Sussex, PO18 0AX
- Glen Lowell Blesi, Rt.1 Bx.126, Brookline, Missouri, 65619-9775, USA
- Leslie S. Archer, Professional Building, University Avenue, Route 1, Sewanee, TN 37375, USA.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Members are reminded that their subscriptions fall due on 1March. If you have not yet paid yours, please do so as soon as possible - £5 for single membership, £7.50p for joint membership and an additional £1 to either category for overseas members to cover the extra postage charges. All cheques from overseas should be made out in sterling.

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CHARLES WILLIAMS - AN EXPLORATION OF HIS LIFE AND WORK by Alice Mary Hadfield  
Review by Canon A M Allchin.

This is a book which will be very precious to all lovers of Charles Williams. It contains a full and careful account of his life and a lucid discussion of all his major works. It is a much richer book than Alice Mary Hadfield's earlier study, An Introduction to Charles Williams (1959), not least because the author has had access to large collections of Charles Williams' letters, written at different periods in his life. One of the great acquisitions of the book is the way in which it enables us to see the inward continuities which link the different periods of his career, and which come together in the last, unexpected culmination of the war years in Oxford.

The book is, as its sub-title declares, an exploration, a detailed and objective look into the circumstances of Charles Williams' life and the influences which affected his writing. But the word "exploration" would be misleading if it suggested a journey undertaken from afar. This is a book written by someone who is very close to its subject. It gives us insights and information available only to someone who had lived and worked with Charles Williams, and had had the opportunity of daily contact with him. It combines detailed knowledge of his work with intimate memories of his presence. So, for instance, in the moving last chapter of the book, entitled "Peace and the Perfect End", we read, "We sat about in bars, chiefly in 'The King's Arms', and ate and drank a little, and talked. He recommended or gave me many books he had found valuable to read on

theology, poetry or Kierkegaard. We walked up and down on sunny afternoons, savouring the time. There was a basking feel about it. .... We talked endlessly, and when I had gone home he would continue the talk by letter. It was talk about poetry or Taliessin and the Grail, or my coming marriage with Charles Hadfield and the nature of love." We too are brought into very close contact with the subject. But if this closeness to the subject is a great strength in Alice Mary Hadfield's book, it is also inevitably a kind of limitation. Are we seeing Charles Williams in perspective? Is his amazing strangeness truly perceived? Are things taken for granted which can no longer be taken for granted? We remember the problem of unshared backgrounds. To say this is not to take away from the great merits of the book. It is to point to the necessity of other books, written from other view-points, books for which this work will be an invaluable source.

It is my own conviction that Charles Williams is a thinker whose greatness has as yet hardly begun to be recognised. His life and work was marked by a remarkable fusion of heart and mind, of intellect and imagination; it was this which gave his theology a sense of immediacy. He writes as one who knows God, not as one who knows about God. His theology has a remarkably experiential quality; he has lived what he writes. This too accounts for its surprisingly patristic tone. The early Christian writers shared this same perspective. I recall the remark of a very distinguished Russian Orthodox Churchman, "Charles Williams is one of the few English theologians from whom I feel there is much to learn." We shall need the insights of Orthodox and Catholic, of Lutheran and Quaker if we are to discern the many dimensions of Williams' vision. It was this integration and wholeness in the man and his work which both Eliot and Auden were pointing to when they spoke of Charles in terms of 'holiness'. Everyone who knew him felt that there was something very special about him. What exactly was that special quality, so strange, so powerful, and to many so attractive?

In a letter to Thelma Shuttleworth, dating probably from 1938, Charles Williams wrote, "let us leave that to the Americans of the future when they write studies of me." Let us be grateful that Mrs Hadfield has not simply left it to the Americans, active though we may be sure they will be. She has herself contributed from her store of memory and understanding, and given us this valuable, indeed irreplaceable book.

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MIDWINTER SPRING - COMING LATE TO PRAYER by Susan Coupland (Darton, Longman & Todd, £2.95, 1984). Review by Brian Horne.

"In the midst of life we are in death". But the reverse is also true: "In the midst of death we are in life". At the age of seventy, Susan Coupland 'came late to prayer' - hence the title of her book which she has taken from the opening of the fourth of T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets, 'Little Gidding'. She might equally well have used the closing words of the second 'quartet', "In my end is my beginning", for she has written a book about the experience of a new life at the end of an old one. It is the experience of resurrection, the realisation of life in the midst of death. Midwinter Spring is a little spiritual autobiography with a simple message simply written. But the experience the author describes, in a vivid, unpretentious way, is not at all simple; it is one of the most profound and complex experiences of human life: the discovery of God in Christ and the consequences of that discovery; an enhanced perception of the value of everyday things and occurrences, a sense of deepened happiness, a sharper experience of pain, a renewed awareness of the obligation to loving service, an occasional glimpse of transcendent wonder.

Of particular interest to members of our society will be what she says about

Charles Williams. Her remarks are brief and I should have liked to know more. She mentions her avid reading of his works and describes a 'holiday-cum-conference' held in 1955 at Milland in Hampshire at which Dorothy L. Sayers lectured on Charles Williams' interpretation of Dante. The pattern of her encounter with Williams is not unfamiliar: the sudden hearing, in Williams' writing, of a voice that pierces through the ugly, distracting, humdrum noises of life to the enunciation of truths which are conveyed 'in words of precision and beauty'. It is clear that this encounter, like the encounter with him in the lives of so many others, exercised a powerful influence in her imaginative and spiritual development.

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Hilda Pallan writes:

"Following on Joan Wallis' talk on 'Charles Williams and Wordsworth' and some discussion at the time on the Stone and the Shell, I was pleased to come across W.H. Auden's The Enchafing Flood published by Faber and Faber in 1951, four essays on the Romantic Iconography of the Sea. In Part I, 'The Sea and the Desert' and Part II, 'The Stone and the Shell', he illustrates and explores some mythological strands in Wordsworth's Prelude, Lear's Hunting of the Snark, and extensively Melville's Moby Dick, with others and has many pertinent things to say.

Soon after, I was even more pleased to come across Auden's Secondary Worlds, which were the T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures, published in 1968 by Faber and Faber. The first lecture, 'The Martyr as Dramatic Hero', though it refers to Eliot's own plays, is centered on Williams' play Cranmer and I found it an enlightening commentary on the meaning and force of the Skeleton and his relationship with the Archbishop. I warmly recommend both these books, if you do not know them, and if you can run them down in a library.

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We hope to reproduce in forthcoming editions of the Newsletter some of the book reviews written by Charles Williams and about his works that were printed in the magazine Theology. The following review, reproduced by kind permission of the Editors of Theology, was written by Charles Williams about The March of Literature by F.M. Ford, published by Allen and Unwin at 16 shillings; it appeared in the April 1940 edition of the magazine.

"It is with very great regret that one realizes that this is the last book by Ford Madox Ford. As far as possible, 'the present writer' (as he himself so often says) has read all the things he wrote - a few, most fortunately, remain. But no book, of all his, could be more suitable to be his last; in none could his immense knowledge, his high judgement, his eccentricities, his moving and occasionally clumsy style, display themselves more enormously. It is a volume of eight hundred and fifty pages, roughly three hundred and fifty thousand words. It covers the period from Confucius to Miss Dorothy Richardson and Mr René Behaine (though, indeed, they are exceptions; it would be truer to say Dostoeffsky). From the time that Europe begins, it covers Europe; but that means certain things. It means Homer; it most certainly does not mean Virgil. It means Shakespeare, it most certainly does not mean Milton. It means Villon and 'le moyen age'. It means Conrad. And Richardson. And Gibbon. 'Unless a man has read Gibbon he scarcely merits the name of an Englishman, an Anglo-Saxon, or even of a man at all'. That is undoubtedly the way to talk about Letters. There is a story here of how Mr Lascelles Abercrombie wrote an article in praise of Milton which appeared in the Times Literary Supplement. And how Mr Ezra Pound thereupon challenged him to a duel in Hyde Park. But the police intervened, and Mr Pound left England. I do not know if the story is true, and my heart is torn, for, though I should have seconded Mr Abercrombie, I should have felt - then - that Mr Pound was also to be backed. Then. Now it is all

different, for the great traditional John Milton has been overthrown, and the great poet John Milton may at last come into his own, with all his divine lightness and tenderness and accuracy of knowledge of the human heart. Unless, however, one understands that, were duels permissible, one would risk one's life on such things much more willingly than for most (even of those commonly thought more important), one has not begun to understand Letters at all. This, then, is the first thing about the book - a proper appreciation of its great subject. The second is a proper sense, and a way of conveying it, of the hundred or more different groups of writers into which European literature is, as it were, divided, and those in their habits and actions, and those also not only the very great. Thus, in speaking of Archbishop Warham, Mr Ford says: 'He subsidized impartially both Calvin and Erasmus', and goes on to remind us that in the village of Aldington in Kent there is a building 'that Erasmus is still supposed to haunt', having once been its rector. Or again there is an account by Ford Madox Brown of Dickens at Lady Cowper-Temple: 'sitting slumped in an armchair, rather tired looking, but 'with authoratitive eyes. Like a great general'. By which may go the other, more strictly literary, comment that, 'the great quality of Dickens is that his own class existed for him till the day of his death'. And, almost two thousand years earlier, Virgil 'enjoyed among the popular a popularity such as is to-day reserved for the stars of Hollywood'. The making of Greece, the civil wars of Rome, the breakdown of Rome and the Dark Ages, the Reformation and the wars of Religion, all these, with plagues and pestilences innumerable, have passed over Europe, and still the great operation of Letters has gone on. It is older than the Faith. Christendom enlarged, altered, elucidated its preoccupations, but it was there before Ch\_ristendom. The sense of it, in a book like this, is overwhelming. It outlasted such things as the awful moments when, 'contrary to law and the dictates of humanity', certain medieval generals - did what? Employed against Bertran de Born 'devilish new instruments that, hurling stone balls both with fire and flame against his castle walls, brought them down'. The law and the dictates of humanity are outraged, tyrants control authors, Europe rocks with grief and pain, but nothing has interfered with the continuous of that operation, nor (under God) will.

Charles Williams "

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OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

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- Secretary: Mrs Gillian Lunn, 26 Village Road, Finchley, London N3 1TL (346 6025)
- Treasurer: Richard Wallis, address as above.
- Membership Secretary: Miss Hilda Pallan, 167 Holly Lodge Mansions, Oakeshott Avenue, Highgate, London N6 6DU (348 3903)
- Lending Librarian: Rev Dr Brian Horne, 11b Roland Gardens, London SW7 (373 5579)
- Newsletter Editor: Mrs Molly Switek, 8 Crossley Street, London N7 8PD (607 7919)

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