

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 38, SUMMER 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 2.30 pm.

LONDON READING GROUP

16 March 1986 Sunday: 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 please contact either Anne Scott (Oxford 53897) or Brenda Boughton (55589).

LAKE MICHIGAN AREA READING GROUP

For details please 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.

1. St Albans

Notice has already been given in the Spring 1985 Newsletter of the Commemorative Eucharist at St Albans Abbey on 24 May 1986 followed by a reception in the Chapter House and a visit to St Albans School. Arrangements have also been made with the City Librarian for an exhibition in the City Library in May / June 1986.

The Chairman and Adrian Thomas have both been to the site of 36 Victoria St., St Albans but no development has yet taken place and building plans could be delayed up to 2/3 years. This is a disappointment as the Society had hoped to put up a plaque during the centenary year on the development to mark CW's residence with his parents and sister from 1894 - 1917 in a house and shop on this site. Regrettably this project will have to be postponed.

2. 3 Caedmon Road, Holloway, London N7

The Chairman with the Hon Secretary and Adrian Thomas have had a very cordial meeting with the present owners of 3 Caedmon Road, the birthplace of CW, who have given permission for a plaque to be affixed to the house recording this. We hope to order the plaque shortly at a cost of about £150 and that it will be in position early in 1986.

The London Borough of Islington have invited us to arrange an exhibition

to illustrate the life and works of Charles Williams at Islington Central Library, Holloway Road (about 15 minutes walk from the house) from 30 June to 12 July 1986. We hope that as many members as possible will be able to see the house and plaque and visit the exhibition.

3. Oxford

Preparations are being made by Anne Scott and Brenda Boughton, in conjunction with Mr Porter of the Bodleian Library, for a further exhibition illustrating CW's life and works. This will be in the Divinity Schools but the dates have not been fixed until other Oxford events have been arranged.

4. Anne Ridler has made a selection from CW's poetry for a small anthology to which she will add a short introduction and has arranged for this to be printed for the Society by The Perpetua Press. It will be available for sale to members in April 1986 at a price of £5. The Council of the Society feel that this publication will be a fitting way to further CW's literary reputation in the Centenary Year.

5. Publicity

Advice and help is needed in organising publicity for the events of the Centenary year, in designing posters and leaflets and preparing material for the exhibitions at St Albans and Islington. Would any member who can offer help in these ways please get in touch with the Chairman.

6. Centenary Fund Appeal

The Chairman is grateful to those members who have responded generously to the Centenary Fund Appeal which now stands at £387. In addition the Council of the Society has decided to add £100 from the profit over the last four years from the sale of second hand CW titles towards the cost of the plaque but as you will realise from the ambitious programme that is being arranged, more is needed. If you have not yet contributed, please send a donation now to swell the fund to me at 6 Matlock Court, Kensington Park Road, London W11 3BS. Cheques should be made payable to the Charles Williams Society.

PROPOSED CAMBRIDGE READING GROUP

Drs Geraldine and Richard Pinch have recently moved from Oxford to Cambridge and are interested in starting a Charles Williams Reading Group in Cambridge. Would any members interested please contact them at 5 Oxford Road, Cambridge CB4 3PH, telephone Cambridge 311465.

ST. CROSS CHURCH, OXFORD

We hear from the Secretary of the Oxford C.S. Lewis Society that St. Cross Church, Oxford, where Charles Williams is buried, is faced with an urgent and sudden repair bill of £16,000 for the roof. The architect says it will not survive another winter as it is. For a small congregation to raise such a sum quickly is a daunting prospect and they would be grateful for help. Please contact Anna Kingsmill - Stoker, Somerville College, Oxford OX2 6HD if you would like to make a donation.

BOOKS WITH C.W. CONNECTION

Gillian Lunn, the Society's Hon. Secretary writes:" It is always a pleasure

to come upon sympathetic and unexpected reference to Charles Williams in books likely to be widely-read; people who do not know C.W.'s work may seek it out. Humphrey Carpenter, in his fascinating Secret Gardens : The Golden Age of Children's Literature (Allen & Unwin 1985: £12.95p. ISBN 0-04-809022-0) makes a connection which will perhaps be new to many of his readers, though perhaps not to C.W.-admirers, when he suggests that the Wild Wood in The Wind in the Willows can be thought of in relation to the Broceliande of C.W., whom at that point he names. Near the end he again quotes "the place of making" ('the centre of Arcadia' here) when he writes about Mary Lennox's Secret Garden itself. I highly recommend this delightful book, which, having a strong and important theme, is not simply a celebration of its texts, and is likely to be much appreciated by anyone who enjoys the great children's classics.

Members may like to know of an interesting book containing a chapter about Charles Williams' Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury and its first production. This is Drama in the Cathedral : The Canterbury Festival Plays 1928-1948 by Kenneth Pickering, published by Churchman Publishing Ltd, in association with The Friends of Canterbury Cathedral (Churchman Publishing Ltd, 117 Broomfield Avenue, Worthing, West Sussex), 1985, price £14.95p. ISBN 1 85093 018 X.

Martin Moynihan has also written to say that he has come across All Hallows Eve translated into Italian by Professor Giorgio Spina of Genoa under the title La Vigilia di Ognissanti, published in 1975 by Ruseoni Libri of Milan.

Whilst on the subject of books, the Editor owes her mother an apology for omitting from the review of Charles Williams - an exploration of his life and work the formal details about the book - it was published in 1983 by Oxford University Press at £15, 268pp, ISBN 0-19-503311-6.

THE GREAT EXHIBITION : 2001 A.D.

Gillian Lunn writes: "As Hon. Secretary of the Charles Williams Society, my name appears in a number of directories and as a result I receive some varied letters offering me, for instance, office furniture for sale, filing systems, London hotel-lists and details of luxury conference centres. But one was different! I was invited to the very first planning meeting for The Great Exhibition in 16 years' time. At present just a gleam in the eye of the clever publicist ("communication-specialist") who had the wit to "get in first" it is none-the-less probably something of which we will be hearing more. Questions at the meeting were mostly from commercial firms wondering what might be in it for them and I cannot at this stage see quite where the C.W. Society will fit in ... but, meanwhile, there, on the long list of those who accepted their invitations to the very first meeting, can be found, among the giants, the name The Charles Williams Society (followed, I am proud to say, by mine!)"

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:
P. Allen Hargis, 1022 E. North Path, Wheaton, Illinois, 60187, USA.
Herr St. D.Berthold Hutten, Grote Laarweg 131, D-4180 Goch 3, FRG.
Michael Starkey, 102 Windy Arbour, Kenilworth, Warwicks, CV8 2BB.
Miss J.L Ponsen, Oostdwardsgracht 1, 2312 PM Leiden, Netherlands.
Jere Coddington, Box 26095, Trotwood, OH, 45426, USA.

SUPPLEMENT

There is no supplement with this Newsletter.

"A little-known Anthology" - contributed by Martin Moynihan.

A lovely thing happened to me in Bodley recently. I was looking up "Charles Williams" in the catalogue - and lo and behold, a book by him which, in my ignorance, I had never heard of. Or, rather, not a book but a compilation: an anthology by him and one fellow-compiler, V.H.Collins:- Poems of Home and Overseas (Frederick Page made a similar collection of prose passages).

It was hugely enjoyable. Published in 1921 by the Clarendon Press, it is, simply as an anthology, a fine example of its kind. It contains what you want to re-read and a deal more you never knew of and are delighted to get to know. Whether C.W. or V.H. Collins be the more to be thanked we need not ask: it is a good joint work! As for Charles Williams himself, it compares, as an early production, with his later anthology, The Christian Year. Indeed, there is a significance here. First the natural; then the spiritual. First patriotism; then faith.

The marks of true patriotism are that it shall not be the foe but the friend of other patriotisms; and that, while it is ever of the soil it is a thing too of the heart and thus for the cause it stands for, wherever that cause be engaged.

"Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry" -

the book opens with that passage from Richard II. British empire, which began with Arthur, and is wherever the Royal Standard flies, has always been part of Europe's age-long resistance against heathen encroachments, whether from within or without. Subtract this and the poetry of our native landscape would lose half its poignancy. In the same way, of Blake's "Jerusalem" it is said in The Forgiveness of Sins that "we do the poem less than justice if we read it, so to say, unpatriotically".

There is a polarity here which inspires Charles Williams' own contribution to this volume (it was incorporated in Windows of Night) entitled Sub Specie Aeternitatis. [It is interesting that in The Darkling Plain John Heath-Stubbs writes of Doughty's The Dawn in Britain that ".... though apparently remote from ordinary experiences it conveys an image of our own country seen 'sub specie aeternitatis'."] It is, we can now see, about Logres:

'This is the heart of England: it is found
Only by such as set their souls to find
The harbours and great cities that abound
Beyond the waters of the temporal mind'

[The verse is quoted by Glen Cavaliero in Charles Williams Poet of Theology]

'Beyond the temporal'. It is this - death, in one's country's cause - which binds together home and overseas:-

'And the Nile spills its overflow
Beside the Severn dead'.

Housman (not here) we know. But I, for one, did not know that (as here) Hardy had a poem ("The Khyber") on the First Afghan War (1842). The survivor

of three friends, when back in his School Chapel (tell Newbolt!), feels it true that it is they who lose their lives that keep them:-

'Transcendence rayed the distant urn
Where slept the fallen twain'.

There is all the magic of place-names. "Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban" - poetry loves geography; there is plenty here with names more far-flung than Milton's. Bhamo and Chiengmai - I thought (ahem) I was the first to enverse these. But no, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle names them long before, when there was a demarcation to be done between Burma and Siam. Again, the note is one of transcendence - of self-sacrifice in the execution of duty -

' 'Tis where
They lie - the men who placed it there
That marks the frontier line.'

Bors' bones!

Some of the poets are as unknown as were, erstwhile, their place-names. Who was Thomas Pringle? He writes of deserts - today, Botswana's - which

'the quivered Coranne and Bechuan
Hath rarely crossed with his roving clan'.

Not all the authors are British. How nice to have Wendell Holmes and Whittier. There are some unaccountable omissions. Belloc is here - but not Chesterton. I thought of him, when reading the poems, e.g. by Campbell, about "village Hampdens". There were no village Hampdens, Chesterton remarked, in Hampden village!

But the omissions are outweighed by fascinating inclusions, e.g. Stevenson's Ad Matrem or Rossetti's Emigration. Especially I noted Patmore. Charles Williams owed so much to him. And of Patmore's pieces I single out, as being Logrian, "Return to England":-

'There laughs the realm where low and high
Are lieges to society'.

The Inklings thought of patriotism as something noble, provided, that is, we distinguish in our own and in sister lands, the good from the bad (as we do in our own souls). There is always a duality. Hold to the good:

'This is the truth of England: though she die
On Earth a sinful and unhappy land
She with her sisters speaks immortality
Of all the knowledge that her eyes have scanned.

Within man's soul she dwells and hath her part.
She is inviolable, free and strong,
For ever with perfection and her heart
Is filled with humour, irony and song.'

Elsewhere, in Flint Castle, Charles Williams writes, regarding England, that of all her bequests to posterity, all her victories, even her very landscapes -

'None of these shall last so long
As the measure of her song.'

Words, so Charles Williams felt, following Wordsworth - words and poetry are powers. And fittingly, therefore, does this anthology end with Edward Thomas' poem "Words"

'Words, make me content!
Let me sometimes dance
With you, or climb,
Or stand perchance
In ecstasy -
Fixed and free
In a rhyme,
As poets do.'

"Fixed and free" - how Charles Williams must have loved that.

'Manacled by the web, in the web made free -
There was no capable song for the joy in me'.

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In Newsletter No. 37 we reproduced a book review written by Charles Williams and published in the magazine Theology. There follows another one, also reproduced by kind permission of the Editors of Theology, written by C.W. about Christian Discrimination by George Every S.S.M., published by Christian News-Letter Books, Sheldon Press at 1s 6d; it appeared in the March 1941 edition of the magazine.

"This is a book which ought to be very widely read, and, at the price, can be. It is very much more important than most more directly religious books. The relation of Christianity to art has been insufficiently considered, though much more than sufficiently talked about; the recent discussion in Theology has been almost the first serious example of its kind. Brother George Every is here concerned to discuss discrimination - that is, taste - in the light of the Christian idea and in the darkness of our present discontents. He is perhaps fundamentally more concerned with Applied Taste - taste that will lead to a proper analysis of those discontents - than with Pure Taste. But he expresses the true principle when he says that "a spiritual song that blurs the eye and muddles the brain cannot redound to the glory of God or to the edification of man".

If I follow him correctly, he would insist first, as I should, and as I understood Mr Lewis to do in his contribution in the December number, on the separation of our artistic from our theological judgement. They may both admire; they may both denounce; they may disagree. But they are separate decisions. Brother George, in recommending to the laity "the improvement of standards of Christian discrimination", speaks of "the co-ordination between their secular education and their theological principles". We cannot begin to co-ordinate properly until we have clarified our capacities of judgement. Among Christians it is clear that there are very many who accept unspeakable art or scholarship because the theme is Christian. M. de Rougemont's Passion and Society provides a recent instance. The theme was noble; the moral was edifying; but the literary criticism was (frankly) nonsense.

The only way in which we can be prepared for good style is by submitting ourselves to good style. It is a Christian duty to do so; it is always

a Christian duty to prefer, in any single judgement, the better to the worse. In that sense (and in that sense alone) it is our duty to prefer an efficient attack on Christianity to an inefficient, even if, for theological reasons, we burn the first and spare the second. What we need is a number of instructed Christians who can, in judging a work artistically, whether Christian, or non-Christian, treat Christianity as an element in the whole. The more instructed, the more they will know whether the Christianity in it is sound or unsound. It is likely that this will affect the whole. But Swinburne's sonnet on the King of Naples beginning "Go down to hell" is no less good because Swinburne did not, we understand, believe in hell. There are different categories of good, and it is our duty not to confuse the categories.

There are, of course, points in Brother George Every's book with which I should disagree. I think Browning a great deal more subtle and macabre than he suggests; and, much as I admire Crabbe, I do not think he is more interesting than Pope, unless in the fact that he told stories. And I darkly suspect Brother George of distrusting the great Romantic vision. But I must thank him for the book - and for the reference to myself; and I hope many others will thank him for the one - if not for the other.

Charles Williams".

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OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

Chairman: Richard Wallis, 6 Matlock Court, Kensington Park Road, London W11 6BS (221 0057);

Secretary: Mrs Gillian Lunn, 26 Village Road, Finchley, London N3 1TL (346 6025);

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