

# The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 48, WINTER 1987

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

27 February 1988: Eileen Nable will speak on the subject "The August Predecessor: Julian of Norwich and Charles Williams".

4 June 1988: The Society will have an all-day meeting including the AGM in Pusey House, Oxford. George Sayer will be the speaker.

12 November 1988: Doreen Berry will speak - subject to be announced.

The meetings in February and November will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W1.

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 10 April 1988: We will continue reading C.W.'s biography Rochester. We will meet in St Matthews Church Vestry, 27 St Petersburg Place, Bayswater W2 (nearest stations Queensway and Bayswater) at 1pm. Tea and coffee will be provided but please bring sandwiches.

OXFORD READING GROUP

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

CAMBRIDGE READING GROUP

For information please contact Geraldine and Richard Pinch, 5 Oxford Road, Cambridge CB4 3HJ, telephone Cambridge 311465.

LAKE MICHIGAN AREA READING GROUP

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

Miss H K PALLAN - MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

The Chairman writes: "Hilda Pallan, a founder member of the Council and our Membership Secretary since 1981, has said that she wishes to give up her duties this year. The Council has accepted her decision with regret and would like to take this opportunity to express their gratitude to her for her efficient work over the last seven years in keeping the register of members, receiving their subscriptions and assisting the Editor of the Newsletter.

I, with all the other members of the Council, will greatly miss her presence and helpful comments at our Council meetings.

Peter Couchman, a present member of the Council, has agreed to take over the duties of Membership Secretary and we are asking members, when renewing their subscriptions on 1 March 1988, to send these to him (unless paid by standing order to the Society's bank) as follows:

P E Couchman Esq., 85 Hangleton Way, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 3AF."

## CHARLES WILLIAMS' LETTERS TO PETER

Anne Scott writes: "Our wonderful Secretary, Gillian Lunn, has unearthed from the British Library a series of six articles contributed by C.W. to G.K. (Chesterton)'s Weekly - which ceased publication half a century ago - between March and July in 1936. Each of them would appear to have some connection with a recently-published book, but to call them 'reviews' would be extremely misleading; they are written in the form of letters to a (just grown up) son, and discuss the writers preoccupations of the moment in a way which is simultaneously colloquial, far-ranging and completely personal.

There is much in every one of them which one feels that no-one else could possibly have written. Thus, from the first: 'No one (thank God!) is less like a mystic than Shakespeare, but he sometimes seems to find, by a mere concentrated natural energy, what other minds have found by the supernatural'. From the second: 'Decide how much, and how, you have determined to believe, and what you have not, doubt. And remember that the Christian name of both Brother Belief and Sister Doubt is Good Manners'. From the third, which contains a long parable about 'the pertinence of curiosity' as a weapon against illusion. 'It is said in the heavens that it was of the small angel Why? that Christ was thinking when he talked about becoming as little children'. From the fourth: 'I was shown a musical criticism lately which contained the obscene phrase: "Shakespeare or Walt Whitman might ....". My dear Peter, there is nothing that Shakespeare or Walt Whitman might - nothing'. The fifth was published immediately after Chesterton's death and ends with a tribute to him: the final sentence is 'The last of my lords is dead'. The series end with no. 6, from which I will just take one snippet to show what C.W. would have thought of the most frequently repeated criticisms of his novels: 'The business of fiction is not the creation of real character (no, whatever they may tell you, Peter, no!).'

It would be very pleasant, if permission could be obtained, to publish all the articles in full in future Newsletters. As even these brief extracts show, CW's cast of thought and use of language are vividly represented in them."

### CAN ANYONE HELP?

An author researching for a book to be published under the title: The Evidence of Things Unseen: W.B. Yeats and the Tarot Dance, wishes to include a section on The Greater Trumps. He is looking for related C.W. documents. What happened to C.W.'s own copy of The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal? Do any known letters to or from C.W. mention "Waite rituals" or Tarot? Do any draft notes or documents relating to the writing of The Greater Trumps survive and when exactly was it written? Do we know of review(s) by C.W. of Yeats' A Vision or other Yeats titles? Also do we know of any extant letters between C.W. and T.S. Eliot?

Could anyone able to help please contact Gillian Lunn.

### REFERENCES TO C.W.

Vol VIII of Seven contains a long review by Stephen Medcalf of Alice Mary Hadfield's biography Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work.

Gillian Lunn writes: "In Tarot Transformation: A Workbook for Discovering Your True Self" by Mary E. Greer (Aquarian Press 1987) Charles Williams' name appears, as author of The Greater Trumps in the 'Additional Keys to Tarot' section of the Selected Biography. A section of The Greater Trumps is also reproduced in a chapter called 'Design and Creativity with Tarot'."

Arri Honsen from The Netherlands has written to draw our attention to A.E. Waite, Magician of Many Parts by R.A. Gilbert, ed. Crucible, Wellingborough. 1987 ISBN 1-85274-023-X. She writes: "It is not for the first time that Mr Gilbert, who is an expert on both Waite and the Golden Dawn, is criticizing the attitude of most studies on Charles Williams in respect to his involvement in 'the occult'. Last year his Golden Dawn Companion was published, in which the 1983 edition of Mrs Hadfield's biography is mentioned as an example of inaccuracy, because she states that CW joined the Order of the Golden Dawn, while in fact he was never a member of the Order itself. In his latest book, Mr Gilbert seems to have lost all patience with those among us who still don't know that it was the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, founded by A.E. Waite, which Williams joined in 1917. The details he gives in his description of CW's involvement in the Fellowship are new, but the general picture had been drawn previously, by Mr Gilbert in his The Golden Dawn, Twilight of the Magicians (1983) where he informed us that CW remained with the Fellowship for at least eleven years, and 'possibly much longer'. In a book first published in 1975 (Ithell Colquhoun, Sword of Wisdom, MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn) there is a whole section relating to CW and his works; Mrs Colquhoun suggests that the influence of Waite on CW's works is much greater than is generally assumed; she gives some examples of his influence from the novels and the Arthurian poems, but she clearly lacked the material Mr Gilbert has accumulated in the course of his studies on Waite and his Fellowship. He can base his conclusions on the diaries of Waite, his letters and the minutes of the Fellowship's meetings. So it can't be overlooked any longer: we'll just have to get used to the image of Williams, dressed as Master of the Temple, in a green robe over a black habit, with a collar of red silk, and reciting his part in the ceremonies rather than reading the words from a piece of paper, and generally 'celebrating with dignity'. Indeed, as Mr Gilbert says, 'after Waite he would undoubtedly have been the most impressive Master'. Why Williams left the Fellowship is not explained by Waite's papers; perhaps the possibility that he never really did is one more idea we should be getting used to."

#### AN IRREPARABLE LOSS?

Anne Scott writes: "Early in 1968 (I think) my husband and I called on his friend Fr. Gervase Mathew O.P. at Blackfriars, Oxford. He mentioned a pupil of his who was writing a thesis about the development of poems from their first beginnings to their final published form. I said that I had some verses which Charles Williams had written for me, and which finished up as 'the queen's Servant in The Region of the Summer Stars, and asked if his pupil would be interested in seeing them. He said certainly, and I sent them to him to show to the pupil, whose name I never knew. (I'm not sure if photo-copying was widely available at that time: certainly I knew nothing about it.) The family was taking up all my time and attention, and although every year or so I would think 'I must write to Fr. Gervase about those poems' I never did, and then in 1975 I heard the news of his death and said a mental farewell to my poems. But now I wonder whether, through the Society, there might be the slimmest imaginable chance of hearing news of them.

I must explain that when, as an undergraduate, I became friends with CW, he

would ask me from time to time to write something for him, usually in the character of a pupil (called Irene) in a school where he was a teacher. At our last meeting towards the end of one term he said with mock, but portentous, severity: 'And what about those essays which you never showed up?' I said defensively: 'There were only two in the whole term' and the next morning got a set of verses in the post which began:

'Pure in speech as in action, did you make plea,  
"It was only twice in the term"?'"

#### MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

You are reminded that the 1988/89 subscriptions fall due on 1 March 1988. A renewal form is enclosed.

#### NEW MEMBER

A warm welcome is extended to William G Willis, 1 Amott Road, Peckham, London SE15 4HU.

#### SUPPLEMENT

There is no supplement with this Newsletter.

+++++

Members may be interested to read Charles Williams' review of Good and Evil Spirits: A Study of the Jewish and Christian Doctrine, Its Origin and Development (S.P.C.K. 15s.) printed in the November 1942 edition of Theology and reproduced with permission,

"The subject of this book is the world of praeter-nature and its relation to nature and arch-nature; the exploring by man's imagination of everything which is called 'the world of spirits', of its and their relation to this world of man, and of the relation to it of man-after-death. I say 'imagination' because beliefs are generally made significant to us by images. At bottom, perhaps, beliefs are not so, and in great crises of the heart they are often not so; then we believe abstractly, even if we do not know it, and act without symbols. It is certainly such beliefs and such acts which are required.

Mr Langton presents that praeter-nature, that state of things which has been believed to exist alongside, and even throughout, our own; largely, but not wholly nor fundamentally, alien. Death, it is held, releases us into it, though there many of us, it seems likely, will be like some savages in our own world - stupid, morose, fearful. In that sense the difference between most primitive men and most contemporary men (Christians or not) is not great. To read Mr Langton's first eighty pages, which 'briefly consider all the main conceptions of the nature and operations of spirit beings which have been found, and which still exist, particularly among the uncultivated peoples of the world', is to be convinced of this. I will take only one example from among the facts and theories which he discusses; he says: 'So great and recent an authority as Larett ... is of the opinion that the visionary shapes, such as are seen in dreams and trances, became the typical conception of spirit, to which other aspects of the spirit-belief were conformed.' Omit trances, and substitute anaesthesia, day-dreams, or reading, and what else is the case in most moderns?



and the archaic evil in its own soul, which took shape in witchcraft and even more in the panic fear of witchcraft. Even in the hands of a romantic master like John Buchan the picture of a coven is a hideous one, and the writings of such an expert as Dr Montague Summers, with all their admirable and painstaking scholarship, are far more likely to produce in the reader an obsession with the ugliest aspects of the occult than to encourage a sincere and rational interest in one of the strangest and most humiliating chapters in human history. The subject is really one for the medical psychologist and for the spiritual director, whose business it is to know about the dark places in the human soul, and I am bound to say that I doubt whether the general circulation even of the most healthy-minded books about it ought to be encouraged.

Having said so much I must add that it would be difficult to imagine a more sane and healthy-minded treatment of witchcraft than this which Mr Charles Williams has given us. He has both a sense of historical proportion and, as we should expect from his other writings, a profound mystical insight which enables him to pass behind the incredible record of obscenities and cruelties and to disentangle the pathetic and often courageous striving of the human spirit which is its true background.

As a piece of historical writing the book is very well done. The material is chosen with discretion from the superabundance of evidence, and the story, as a whole and in the individual cases selected, seems to tell itself. The picture is perhaps over-simplified. It starts with the Greco-Roman world, with its mysteries and crudities, and shows the Christian community struggling with an increasing pressure of popular superstition and, later, of increasing and irrational suspicion. Yet behind the suspicion there was some real unity of thought and practice. Mr Williams does not deal with the problems of the extent to which there was a real survival of ancient pagan religious practices. That does not really affect his main purpose, which is to show how the Christian tradition stood the emotional strain. What becomes clear is that neither the influence of the devil nor the powers of heroic endeavour and of mystical questing were all on one side. St Joan of Arc comes near being classed as a witch, and was certainly burnt as one, and her flamboyant admirer, Gilles de Rais, became one of the most sinister figures of black magic. Madame de Montespan, when her vicious circle of associates was broken up, ended her days with some appearance of heroic sanctity. The devil certainly had his way in the horrible cruelty to which fear drove Church and State alike. Yet it was the Church which first asserted, in the Canon Episcopi, the rational duty of disbelief, and which, in the end, reaffirmed that same duty. The record of the Spanish Inquisition, especially in the person of Salazar, stands out alike in its reasonableness and in its charity, and marks the beginning of the return to sanity of which the world, apart from Christianity, seemed quite incapable. The storm was fundamentally a psychological one, a mass-hysteria capable of lasting for two nightmare centuries and of causing hundreds and thousands of deaths, mostly of innocent people. Once the hysteria passed, broken upon the good sense of men like Salazar and de la Regnie, and upon the pity and penitence of the Salem jurors, the actual nucleus of evil practice became dangerous only to the few who indulged in it. The world as a whole went free, until the day came for other evil dreaming."

L..J. Grensted

OFFICERS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

Chairman: Richard Jallis, 6 Hatlock Court, Kensington Park Road,  
London W11 3BS (tel. 01 221 0057)

Secretary: Mrs Gillian Lunn, 26 Village Road, Finchley, London  
N3 1TL (tel. 01 346 6025)

Treasurer: Richard Jallis, address as above.

Membership Secretary: Peter Couchman, 85 Hangleton Way, Hove,  
East Sussex E13 8AF

Lending Librarian: Rev Dr Brian Horne, 11b Roland Gardens, London  
SW7 3PE (tel. 01 373 5579)

Newsletter Editor: Mrs Molly Switek, 8 Crossley Street, London  
W7 8PD (tel. 01 607 7919)

+++++

COPYRIGHT

Everything in the Newsletter (unless otherwise stated) is the copyright of the Charles Williams Society. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any other means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the Editor.

© Charles Williams Society 1988

+++++