

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 56, WINTER 1989



MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

19 May 1990: The Society will hold an all day meeting starting at 11am. The plan for the day is to hold the Annual General Meeting at 11am. This will be followed by the reading of short extracts of CW's work by members. The criterion is to choose one extract of CW's work to recommend him to others. Readers will need to explain their choice. Each reading and explanation should take no more than 10 minutes. This will continue until lunchtime. We will then take a break and resume after lunch with an illustrated talk by Adrian Thomas on "The Image of the Body". The AGM's agenda is enclosed.

24 November 1990: Speaker to be announced. (See Stop Press, page 14).

These meetings will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W.1., starting at 2.30pm (except for the AGM which will start at 11am).

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 17 June 1990: We will continue to read Taliessin Through Logres. We will meet in St Matthews's Church Vestry, 27 St Petersburg Place, London W.2. (nearest stations Queensway and Bayswater) at 1pm. Tea and coffee will be provided but please bring sandwiches.

OXFORD READING GROUP

For information 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 3PH, telephone 311465.

LAKE MICHIGAN AREA READING GROUP

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

BEQUEST TO THE SOCIETY

The Chairman writes: "On behalf of the Council of the Society and its members, I wish to acknowledge with grateful thanks the bequest to the Society by the late Alice Mary Hadfield of her volumes of Charles Williams works and of other material about him.

These were delivered in six large chests to the Hon Librarian at King's College by Charles Hadfield at the end of February and we are greatly indebted to him for all he has done in getting the books together and arranging to transport them from South Cerney to the Strand.

As soon as term ends, the Hon Librarian, with some help, will take out the books and prepare a list and report for the Council and for members of this generous bequest which will enrich our lending and reference library."

THE TRIAL OF THOMAS CRANMER

Anne Scott has written the following report of the performances of The Trial of Thomas Canterbury performed in Oxford to mark the 500th anniversary of Cranmer's birth.

"In 1956, to mark the 400th anniversary of the death of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was burnt at the stake 'in the ditch over against Balliol College,' the clergy of St Mary's Church, Oxford asked Anne Ridler to write a play about him to be performed in the church.

The 500th anniversary of Cranmer's birth was in 1989 and the play was acted in the church again last November. The fact that the play was taking place in the very building where Cranmer was tried for heresy in 1555, and where the following year he recanted his previous submission before going to his death, made the experience of watching it particularly vivid and moving.

Cranmer himself was most sympathetically presented as a gentle, hesitant figure in that age of savage certainties, a man who longed for peace and reconciliation when battle lines were being drawn up.

Anne Ridler's verse, sober and colloquial yet flexible and articulate, gave convincing expression to his family affection, his tormented uncertainties, and the core of integrity which brought him to heroism at last. Cranmer himself is surrounded by characters whose varied reactions to him and to his fate give the story added realism and poignancy: his loving and despairing wife; his friend the Bishop of Ely, torn between his love for the man and his disagreement with his principles; his fellow-sufferers Latimer and Ridley; his implacable opponents Bishop Bonner of London and the two Spanish Dominicans Garcia and de Soto; and even his gaolers, not hostile but cheerfully determined to get every penny they can from their charge.

In order to emphasize the timelessness and continued relevance of Cranmer's story, Anne Ridler employs a character whom she calls the Witness, who comments on the action from, as it were, the sidelines until at the end he is swept into it, and leaves the audience with the thought that:

'You best, who lack conviction; you gentle, who are
put upon;
You lovers of peace, who see that in war
We are all of us losers, whom both sides abuse;
You to whom words are lances, and actions a blunt axe;
There is something of you all in Cranmer, our god-
father.'

The play The Trial of Thomas Cranmer is unfortunately out of print, but anyone who can find it in a secondhand bookshop or library will be sure of a moving and memorable experience."

BOOK REVIEW

Adrian Thomas has prepared the following reviews of Through Defeat to Joy. The Novels of Charles Williams in the light of Jungian thought pp84 and The Way of Women, Ancient and Modern, pp60. Both these books are by Helen M Luke and published by Apple Farm, Three Rivers, Michigan 49093, USA.

"I was initially introduced to the writings of Charles Williams by reading the novels and I remember reading them with delight and excitement, knowing that something important was being said. The stories that are told by Charles Williams are concerned with the relationships of men and women to the archetypal powers behind human life and are about individual choices. Some of the characters in the novels may not seem like 'real' people, however if the individual reader uses the whole attention there may be sown seeds of major changes in a way of life. In the pamphlet Through Defeat to Joy, Helen Luke compares the writings of Charles Williams and those of Carl Jung. She sees Williams as speaking from within the Christian Church through the poetic imagination, whereas Jung speaks from outside the church through psychological thought and practice. Both writers were fully aware of the need for renewal and a rebirth of the Christian myth in this time of transition to a new age. The lack of a developing myth combined with repression of feminine values and of the flesh was the explanation by Jung for the sterility of much Christian teaching. Williams celebrates the holiness of the flesh, the beauty of matter and the essential value of feeling. Helen Luke sees Williams as opening a door to a vital recollection with the Christian Myth within.

In The Way of Women various women in modern mythopoeic literature are considered - Eowyn in The Lord of the Rings, Orual in Till We Have Faces and Dindrane in Taliessin Through logres and Region of the Summer Stars. These characters are observed from a Jungian stance, and Helen Luke is particularly concerned with the extremely rapid emergence of women in this century into the masculine world of thought and action and feels that women fall into a contempt for her own values. All those women who want to be the same as men cry out their sense of inferiority. A more vital understanding of the challenge of our time to individual men and women is needed. 'Only the images by which we live can bring transformation. The future hangs on this quest for the heart of love by both sexes.'

I am always interested to read what others have made of

the novels and I have been greatly interested in these two pamphlets. Helen Luke is involved with the Apple Farm Community at Three Rivers, Michigan. The community was not a planned institution but is a focal point for a group drawn together already by a community of interests and values. There are no external rules or formal conditions for membership, however each member is committed to the search for individual growth. A passage from An Introduction to Charles Williams by Alice Mary Hadfield describing the Company of Williams' friends is seen as expressing the spirit of Apple Farm: 'There was no pledge or initiation, no standard asked by others ... It is a spirit which will work within everything we do, and will reject nothing of our ordinary life ... It is the birth and life of love, of Christ, here and now ...'.

The pamphlets are available from Analytical Psychology Books, 122 Lupus Street, London SW1V 4AN, tel: 01.834.1708."

ST CROSS by Christopher Harvey

Following the reproduction of St Cross by Mary Wilson in Newsletter No. 55, Anne Ridler wrote to the Editor to say: "An undergraduate in his last year here (reading Psychology and Theology) asked to come and see me recently 'to talk about Charles Williams and poetry generally' and brought with him the enclosed poem. He wrote it after a rather strange experience he had. He had a dream one night about All Hallows Eve (which he had read as a teenager but hadn't thought of recently), and the next day wandered casually into St Cross churchyard. He had no idea that CW was buried there, but suddenly found himself looking at the gravestone, and the date, 15 May, which was the very date of his discovery.

I thought the poem so good that I suggested I should offer it to you for the Newsletter. Now I find that you have just published Mary Wilson's poem about St Cross; but I still hope that you may want to publish Chris Harvey's poem, both for its own sake, and because it

shows that CW's memory is very much alive for the young generation."

St Cross by Christopher Harvey

St Cross is still: Old mould enwraps old lives.
All Oxford's past is here and yet elsewhere.
Wednesday vestments whisper magic words.
Early morning women, only three -
but women cannot say the words.

Storm-tied yews.
Seeds blown to the waterline.
There is a secret and attended grave he led me to
His last breath to the day was there in stone.

Books live on - only minds grow silent.
At last the world will be
a great grey library, belonging to nobody,
And no-one there. The wind has custody.

St Cross, what nails you still
to a dusty patch of land that science should have
claimed?

The dream that Williams has found his grail,
between the broken yew
and the abandoned graveyard rail?

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please note that subscriptions are due to be renewed from 1 March 1990. A form for this purpose was enclosed with Newsletter No. 55.

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C.W.'s "LETTERS TO PETER"

Newsletter No. 55 contained the first two "Letters to Peter" printed in the 1936 editions of G.K.'s Weekly. Letters 3 and 4 are reproduced in this Newsletter.

G.K.'s Weekly 30 April 1936

Roughly Speaking

Letters to Peter - 3 by Charles Williams

My dear Peter,

When, at the proper time, you come to clear out my books, I will not suggest that you should spare any; if revolution did not have its way we could never rediscover actuality. And as we could not keep it anyhow, because identity never exists continuously in time - it is, I suppose, as much a Name of God as eternity - Peter, I must go and look; somewhere in my oddments I have the stitched proofs of the Rabbinic Names of God. You know the old story that there are a hundred, and men know ninety-nine, but the camel knows the hundredth, and that is why he looks at us as he does.

My proofs give 91. Most of them are normal enough. There are a few of importance: e.g. 'I' - which would be noble for 'There is no I but I' and is reminiscent of Donne's 'Blessed art Thou that Thou art only Thyself.' There is 'The Chosen One' which has no explanation but suggests the Necessity which is to be the final choice of free will. 'Confederate' is good, though it comes into a more ordinary region; so do 'Lord of Comforts', 'Lord of Prayer', 'Lord of Oaths'. 'The Secret of the World' we are told, can hardly be regarded as a name. Then there is the more famous 'Abode' or 'Place', which is intellectually useful, because we are not to suppose that He has place in the universes but the universes in Him. 'Countenance' is like it: it is to avoid anthropomorphism or the idea that 'all gods are alike'. 'The Name' you will know, and the simple 'Heaven'. I have sometimes wondered whether the 'Our Father which art in heaven' is not misleading for many minds. Doubtless in a sense His Fatherhood is included in His Beatitude, but the unconscious place-symbolism is perilous. I know - thank you very much - all about simple folk; it is not them that theology need worry

about, but the people who are looking after their simplicity. The best excuse for not thinking is that it will hurt other people if you do; negation masquerades as goodness too often. When you were very young I used to avoid telling you stories about killing and gore, until one day you told me a story through which blood absolutely streamed. Since when I have not tried to take care of anyone.

Which brings me back, though I leave the Divine Names with reluctance, to my beginning. I will try and remember to leave for you a brief list of references, which, for mere courtesy's sake - you are always very good in that way - you might look over before you cast out my books after me: a few pages that matter, and a few fantastic titles. In relation, for example, to that above-mentioned matter of x pretending to be y, there is a sentence in that noble little book, the Autobiography of John Stuart Mill which is of value, semper, ubique.

"What thus impressed me was the chapter in which Bentham passed judgement on the common modes of reasoning in morals and legislation, deduced from phrases like 'law of nature', 'right reason', 'the moral sense', 'natural rectitude', and the like, and characterised them as dogmatism in disguise, imposing its sentiments upon others under cover of sounding expressions which convey no reason for the sentiment, but set up the sentiment as its own reason."

Dogma has no need to be ashamed of itself, though in a general way it should carry itself modestly, for its vitality depends largely on this - indeed, without modesty it is no legitimate dogma, but only (i) ogreish pride, or (ii) monstrous assumption. In some sense, the Blessed Virgin may be regarded as dogma - 'figlia del tuo figlio', the mother and child of the Fact; the intellectual heart which conceives the Fact, and yet is subordinated to the Fact. In these things, however, too often, 'the base Must top the legitimate', and it is our humble duty and privilege to recognise dogma in disguise when we see it, like the witch Duessa in

Spenser. It is said that after the Fall the Eternal One (blessed be He), sitting in heaven among the wheels and the eyes and the 'feet-and-face-hidden seraphs', contemplated the earth and our 'grand parents' running along the edge of the Light. He (which if They) took comfort with Themselves and He said: 'In the time We will redeem'.

But the Angels, who exist not exactly in time and not exactly in eternity but in a thing called Age (and if you want to know all about that, which is very badly put, you can look up St Thomas, who thought it out very carefully, and let us hope the facts agree with him; but even of St Thomas it must be admitted that a mortal mind cannot know all the given facts, and its deductions are therefore bound, sooner or later, to be wrong. I suspect, in spite of his condemnation, that Siger of Brabant had the root of the matter in his curious theories: you will remember that Dante makes St Thomas praise in Paradise 'la luce eterna di Sigieri' - Peter, what a lot of parentheses there are in the world, and how easy they are to find!): well, the Angels saw the cloud that is Lilith, the mother of illusion, flowing over the Adam and receiving them, and adjured the Divine One, and said: 'Refuge of the fugitive, how shall these wretched exist till the time come if they are lost in Lilith? So They (who are He) answered: 'Which of you can divide the night of Lilith and make a place?' But none of the armies were so foolhardy as to offer to do what they knew they could not do, for not even Azrael himself can illuminate illusion in this world, and there was a long silence. Then suddenly, on the farther side of the Sea which is the Mirror of the Countenance, a very small angel threw out all his six wings and said: 'O Master, by the impulsion of your Spirit, I,' and at once it became the cynosure of heaven (as a place) and the centre of heaven (as a state). And the They and the He (who are indefeasibly the origin of One) said: 'Under the Mercy, utter the identifying of thyself with Us.' And it said: 'By the Permission, your Making is known as Why?' And the Exalted said, in the formula of goodwill which is the ritual of joy, 'Thou shalt go forth, and

prevail. Be as We have impelled.'

So it went, and Lilith has never been quite the same since. She is always aware of a something going on which she cannot quite localise or quite identify; as indeed she cannot, for she is the mist that arose when the Adam worshipped themselves, and neither you, Peter, nor the Adam, nor the Beatitudes can identify anything during the ritual of that worship. But it is said in the heavens that it was of the small angel Why? that Christ was thinking when he talked of becoming as little children.

'Except ye are as little children, none shall find salvation', said He. Through the sky, humanity, transmuted into one, flashed in a thrill of laughter: 'Why, Lord, why?'

And all these apologues have distracted me from my business, Peter, which was to recommend you to read the Biography of Mr William Hayley, written by himself in the third person, and containing, among other immortal things, this phrase from a letter (of a poetess taken ill): 'Our tender sister of Parnassus had been seized with spasms in her stomach, which had obliged her to quit her horse, and creep, like a poor wounded bird, through the garden,' That was written on 29 September, 1784. Well!

Always yours,

C.W.

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G.K.'s Weekly 28 May 1936

Roughly Speaking

Letters to Peter - 4 by Charles Williams

Trent's Own Case. By E.C. Bentley and H. Warner Allen. Constable. 7s 6d.

My Dear Peter,

If I send you Trent's Own Case it will only be on

condition that you tell me where all the quotations come from. This demand is not mere cruelty, as you may think. Nor is it the pedantry of the old, as you will be more likely to think, and as indeed is more likely to be true, for the old are dreadfully apt to make of accuracy a private fad rather than a public enjoyment. Portia, in the Merchant of Venice was ideal in that way: 'O wise young judge'. She certainly made accuracy into a public enjoyment, but so few of our more aged Dons are like her. They continue to distinguish while they cease to savour, and they distinguish austere. Better that, no doubt, than an indecorous universality. 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.

To tell you the truth, I am not very easy about Mr Trent himself. A phrase from the earlier book, from Trent's Last Case, has sung immortally to me ever since. Trent was about to write a letter, and he looked up and said: 'What shall I say? Shall I compare him to a summer's day?' That is the full perfection of casual quotation: (i) it does not make use of a great and terrible line. There are people alive who use the greatest phrase of the greatest poets in their greatest moments as titles for their own works: let us forget: (ii) it slides easily into the quotation: (iii) it enjoys or savours it as a quotation. But in this last book I wonder anxiously if Mr Trent is becoming a little reckless. He seems to treat words more lightly than he does wines - or at least than Mr Warner Allen does wines. I may be fussy. It may be that this is a graver book than the earlier one was. There is no-one quite like our adorable Mr Cupples. The earlier high sound is, as it were, muted. On the other hand, there is a curious sense of there being 'someone or something behind the arras.' There is an interlude in Dieppe, which has very little to do with necessities of the plot, but enters almost on a town of fantasy; as if between France and England there lay a whole country of the mind, and the roads of Abelard and Racine (and Calvin) ran through the forest of Arden and between the

hills of Cumberland, into the distant places of our scepticism and our belief and our poetry. The Hotel of the Little Universe and of the Chimaera - O Peter, I thought Mr Bentley was going to become all marvellously allegorical and ambiguous, with the Comte D'Astalys, who was descended from the Comte Balthazar the alchemist, by whom the Chimaera was first added to the coat-of-arms, and lines of the odyssey quoted in English and in Provencal. But these things do but tail off into 'private vice and folly', drugs and madness, and so we come back to England and honest murder.

Yet perhaps Mr Bentley enjoyed those chapters when he read them over, as I did, and I hope you will, Peter, as well as all the rest of the book, including the admirably invented episode of the cork of the bottle of Felix Poubelle 1884, and the speech upon corks delivered by Mr William Clerihew, wine-merchant, of Fountain Court, and the debt we all owe to the Benedictine Dom Perignon, of Hautvillers in Champagne, who rediscovered Corks at the end of the seventeenth century ('the century of genius', as it has - obviously with accuracy - been called). So what with one thing and another, you will see it is altogether a book of high invention and continual savour of good and bad, and wit and poetry, and intricacy and simplicity.

But I stick to my demand about the quotations. I think I withdraw concerning Trent; he does savour them. All I want you to do is to make yourself sure that there is, in each instance, a vintage to know. Or, to vary the metaphor, that you should feel the full counterpointing. When Trent says, 'There's never been anything frightening about me, has there, Mrs McOmish? The beasts that roam over the plain my form with indifference see; let alone the private secretaries of Congregationalist millionaires', one ought to feel rather more that the mere sense of verse imposed on colloquial prose; faintly perhaps, but certainly, one should feel Cowper imposed on Bentley, and if you tell me that no-one reads Cowper now, I shall not believe you. I don't much care for the Task, but read some of the Olney Hymns:

O make this heart rejoice or ache!
Decide this doubt for me!
And if it be not broken, break,
And heal it, if it be.

The third line has a marvellous combination of the active and passive will; it is, in a sense, a little harsh with its own intention. Its poetry grates on the fact. Serious conflict was never yet resolved (whatever they tell you, my Peter) by writing poetry round it, unless indeed the effort of writing poetry made visible to the soul new states of possible experience. Even then, the vision of new states and their achievement are not altogether the same thing. It is, I suppose, probable that the more exactly a poet analyses a state of experience, the more he is capable of being it. But do not let us be psycho-analytic, but let you and I be careful and attend not to poets' souls and their beliefs, nor even very much to their biographies, but to their words only. Then we shall know, for example, that, though men may discuss whether Milton was an Arian, yet certainly in Paradise Lost, the whole sublime conclusion is the poetic sense of the union of utter Love and Reason with that which is to be born of Eve, and we shall not make such lesser mistakes as did a gentleman writing some months ago in this very paper, who was not only very stern with the Divine Wordsworth for not having been a number of things which he was not, but was also a little harsh with him for having looked at Tintern Abbey and not having had certain emotions about deserted altars or what not, whereas the poor poet had mentioned in the title to his Lines (about which the pother arose) that they were written 'a few miles above Tintern Abbey' and therefore he may reasonably have been excused. Unless we are all expected, not only to have the right emotions at the right places, but also all the right emotions within a certain geographical radius. It will be very difficult if i am not allowed to write a poem about meeting my love 'a few miles above' Glastonbury, without commenting on Henry VIII, the Puritans, and the Council of Trent. The authority of any poem is absolute within its own bounds. (Third Canon of the Council held in

Camelot by Taliessin the King's poet in the fourth year of the reign of Arthur King of Logres under the Divine Emperor at Byzantium.)

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STOP PRESS

i. At the Society meeting on 24 November 1990, Mrs Vernon Watkins will speak on "Two Notions of Hell" with particular reference to Charles Williams and George MacDonald. Members of the George MacDonald Society will be invited to this meeting.

ii. Letters to Lalage. The letters of Charles Williams to Lois Lang-Sims with an introduction by Glen Cavaliero, published by Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio 44242, USA. Copies can be ordered from International Book Distributors, 66 Wood Land End, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP2 4RG. Price £15.50 plus £2 postage and packing.

This book will be reviewed for the Newsletter by Dr Brian Horne.

iii. Alteration to London telephone numbers. After 6 May 1990 all London telephone numbers will have the prefix 071 or 081 instead of the present 01. The prefix for the telephone numbers for the Chairman, Lending Librarian and Newsletter Editor will be 071 and for the Secretary 081.

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OFFICERS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

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

Treasurer: Richard Wallis, address as above.

Membership Secretary: Peter Couchman, 85 Hangleton Way, Hove, East Sussex BN13 8AF (tel: 0273 419251).

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 N7 8PD (tel: 01 607 7919).

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