

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 61, SPRING 1991



MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

19 October 1991: Brian Horne will talk on Charles Williams, Dorothy Sayers and Dante. This meeting will start at 2.30pm at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W.1.

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 11 August 1991: We will continue to read Region of the Summer Stars. We will meet at St Matthews Church Vestry, 27 St Petersburg Place, London W2 (nearest tube 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 Cambridge 311465).

LAKE MICHIGAN AREA READING GROUP

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

DALLAS CATHEDRAL READING GROUP

The establishment of this new Reading Group is welcomed.
For details please contact Canon Roma King, 9823 Twin Creek Drive, Dallas, Texas 75228, USA.

C.W.S. A.G.M. 11 May 1991 (some main points)

The Society held its AGM on Saturday 11 May 1991 at Pusey House, 61 St Giles, Oxford. Reports were presented by

the Hon Secretary, the Hon Lending Librarian, the Hon Treasurer and the Newsletter Editor.

Gillian Lunn, Hon Secretary, reported that the sale of books given to the Society in three bequests had allowed the Society to pay for the publication of Notes on the Taliessin Poems of Charles Williams (see enclosed leaflet). The Society had acquired letters from Charles Williams on G.K. Chesterton from Aidan Mackay who was establishing a GKN centre. The Society had also bought letters between Alice Meynell and Charles Williams from a bookshop with a CW interest - the Grimoire/Deja Vu Bookshop, 17 High Street, Glastonbury, BA6 9DP. There is another Deja Vu Bookshop at 31 Trafalgar Street, Brighton BN1 4ED, telephone 0273-600400. Mrs Lunn also reported that the UK distributors of Roma King's The Pattern in the Web were having problems but copies would soon be sent to those who had ordered them. Mrs Lunn felt that the "wanted books waiting list" should be scrapped and an exchange system between members set up (see separate notice in this Newsletter). Charles Hadfield had a few copies of Outlines of Romantic Theology left at £6.36 including postage. Please write to him at 13 Meadow Way, South Cerney, Cirencester, Glos, GL7 6HY.

Brian Horne, Hon Lending Librarian, reported that the Reference Library now had an almost complete set of first editions of all Charles Williams' works. Elizabeth Bell has kindly started the extensive job of cataloging all the books and manuscripts in the Reference Library. An interesting recent addition to the collection was a cantata by Purcell entitled The Moon with words by Charles Williams. It was also reported that amongst the papers bequeathed to the Society by Alice Mary Hadfield there had been a reference to a lecture on Byron given by Charles Williams at the Sorbonne in 1938. The Hon Chairman had obtained a copy from the Bodleian Library and, if considered suitable, it would be reproduced in the Newsletter.

Richard Wallis, Hon Treasurer, presented copies of the accounts. Over the past year there had been an excess of income over expenditure of £155. There was a total of £771 in the bank.

Molly Switek, Newsletter Editor, reminded members that back copies were available for 50p each and invited suggestions for improvement. She would shortly produce an Index of Newsletters 51-60.

Under "any other business" a number of suggestions were made:

- that a donation be made to Aidan Mackay for the proposed G K Chesterton Centre,
- that a concert of music linked to Charles Williams be organised (David Dodds drew attention to Robin Milford's setting of some of the Taliessin poems) perhaps in 1995 (the 50th anniversary of Charles Williams' death),
- that the Society should produce a leaflet about itself to publicise its existence and aims.

The existing Council were re-elected for a further year - Richard Wallis, Gillian Lunn, Brian Horne, Peter Couchman, Anne Scott, Adrian Thomas, Joan Northam and Molly Switek.

R.I.P: The Wanted-Books Waiting List

Gillian Lunn writes: "As announced at the AGM, I am scrapping the old waiting-list now. Some members have "waited" many years but have perhaps now got their "wants" and forgotten to tell me. For some titles it is not worth having a waiting-list as they almost never turn up for sale anywhere. So the old list no longer exists, it was too out-of-date. If members wish me to start afresh, and wish to send me their wanted-titles, I will do so (with apologies to those few members who have recently sent me their "wants"). But, please, no requests for early poetry, "Collected Plays" or the Masques - there really is no point.

We would like to establish an "Exchange and Mart" service via the Newsletter. Please send me suggestions of how to set this up. And if members have, or know of, available copies to give or sell - or information as to where they can be found - perhaps we could do that through the Newsletter too. "

NEWS ABOUT BOOKS

A Measure of English Poetry by Anne Ridler has recently been published by the Perpetua Press, 26 Norham Road, Oxford OX2 6SF at £4.95 net. The book consists of three essays - "Religious Poetry: a minor branch of the art?" (given as the Hussey Memorial Lecture in 1990), "Poetic process in Eliot's Four Quartets" and "On certain English verse rhythms". The book number is ISBN 1 870882 05 9.

BOOK REVIEW

The Magical World of the Inklings: JRR Tolkien, CS Lewis, Charles Williams and Owen Barfield by Gareth Knight. Published by Element Books in 1990, ISBN 1-85230-169-4 at £9.99.

Review by Adrian Thomas.

Gareth Knight is to be congratulated in producing a readable and informative appreciation from an occult and esoteric viewpoint of the group of writers known as the Inklings.

A certain mentality is attracted to esoteric religion. The involvement of Charles Williams in the esoteric Golden Dawn Society in his early life is well recorded. The Golden Dawn was founded in 1888 and is part of the Masonic and Rosicrucian tradition. Many people want to make the theology of CS Lewis and Charles Williams as conventional as possible and play down their interests in esoteric religion. The writer of The Greater Trumps and All Hallows Eve shows a profound knowledge of occult and esoteric practices. Gareth Knight in his analysis of CS Lewis and in particular the sections on That Hideous Strength and the Narnia novels produces a convincing argument that Lewis was writing in the Pattern of the esoteric tradition of the east and west. The figure of Ransom is "seen in no other guise than that of a high-grade initiate, an adept, a Master of the Wisdom, waging magical battle upon Earth against the physical manifestations of the cosmic forces of evil". I find That Hideous Strength stranger and more complex each time I read it and the message is certainly not one of conventional Christianity.

Charles Williams is able to describe the occult adept with deep knowledge and one gets the impression that in part this is based on personal experience. One has only to think of Simon the Clerk in All Hallows Eve. However the greatness to me of Charles Williams lies in his ability to portray the good character who shows no great interest in esoteric knowledge. The Archdeacon in War in Heaven desires no special powers or knowledge and desires only the grace that comes to any Christian by the sacraments and personal prayer. The service of Holy Communion is central to the novel and one feels that as far as the Archdeacon is concerned the nature of the vessel used is irrelevant before the central presence of Christ in the bread and wine. In The Greater Trumps, Sybil Coningsby is contrasted with the two adepts who both desire to manipulate the Tarot cards and the dancing images for their own ends. Because Sybil can see the figure of the fool moving she will be able with the Tarot cards to know exactly what the future will bring. However everything is complete for Sybil in the present moment and the adepts are astonished to realise that the only person who can tell the future is not interested since all is complete for her in the present moment.

A great many pages of Gareth Knight's book are devoted to mere repetition of the plots of novels and anything other than the novels of Lewis and Williams are largely ignored. There is a little about the poetry of Charles Williams and, as might be imagined, Witchcraft is discussed fairly fully. The theological and literary writings of Williams and Lewis are ignored, which I think is a pity. It is perhaps worth noting that both authors are considerably more orthodox in their theological than in their imaginative writings. Lewis in particular has a freedom of expression in the novels which he never allowed himself in his theology (excepting The Screwtape Letters and The Great Divorce which could be classified with his imaginative writings). It is difficult at times to believe that the author of That Hideous Strength is the same as that of Miracles or Mere Christianity.

Charles Williams seems to have retained his interest in occult religion throughout his life. CS Lewis appears to

have been alternately attracted and repelled by the occult. In neither of these authors can the subject be ignored in an attempt to render either less heterodox. The Magical World of the Inklings can be recommended at least as a balance to all those who try their best to make these authors appear as orthodox as possible. On this point CS Lewis has fared less well than Charles Williams.

Gareth Knight has written many books on the occult including The Occult: An Introduction and A Practical Guide to Qabalistic Symbolism. For many readers of Charles Williams the whole subject of the occult is unattractive, however the subject cannot be ignored since it represents one facet of human and Christian experience. Interest in the subject has considerably increased since Witchcraft was published in 1945. By the very nature of this book the interests of Charles Williams in the occult are considered on a fairly superficial level. A definitive study in depth of the occult and Charles Williams is still awaited.

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Martin Moynihan writes: "Since reviewing the Outlines of Romantic Theology by Charles Williams, edited and introduced by Alice Mary Hadfield, I have seen that, in The Liturgical Year, Gueranger writes of the Crucifixion as part of 'the marriage dowry' (because it re-allies justice and love). He also writes that Mary's taking Christ down from the Cross was redeemed humanity's 'first embrace' of 'the heavenly form' (see The Liturgical Year vol X, book 1, linking John 19 verse 34 with Genesis 2 verses 21 and 22. This means, I think, that without endorsing all the Outlines, we may still, quâ Jerusalem and Calvary, keep the topography, and anatomy, of the end-map in Taliessin Through Logres.

NEW MEMBER

A warm welcome is extended to Andrew Smith, 41 Essex Street, Oxford, OX4 3AW.

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Following the Society's Annual General Meeting on 11 May 1991, Brenda Boughton spoke on "The Role of the Slaves in Charles Williams Poetry". We are pleased to be able to reproduce the talk in this Newsletter.

"I think it is worthwhile to begin by asking a rhetorical question - 'What images are thrown up in the minds of most of us in the latter part of the twentieth century by the word "slave"?' Blessedly we have no direct experience of such a person in this society, and we have even come to use the word loosely, not to say misleadingly, in such terms as 'wage-slaves'. Probably we have ideas that coalesce round such images as Spartacus and his uprising, very harsh punishments being lawful and without redress, extremes of luxury being fuelled by slave labour, unremitting toil and sexual subjugation for both sexes. There may be as well a touch of the exotic from the East: Turkish hareems of bygone centuries, and unknown horrid practices from the further Orient. Dominating all these in shaping our imaginations, though, is the example nearest to us in the New World barely two centuries ago and most notable in the rigour of its regime.

The essential feature of slaves through all the centuries and in all societies was that they were outsiders. If freedom ever came for slaves it was not until a sufficiency of years had more or less made them insiders. They were procured initially by conquest in war, piracy, kidnapping, punishment for crime or debt, or they were the offspring of slaves or sold into slavery by parents or spouses. Like other parts of the economy, the Christian church was deeply embroiled in slavery and never condemned it. The trade in slaves was everywhere profitable and highly specific. Money could buy you anyone you wanted, of any age, with any skill. There was always some hope that freedom might be gained. However, the rules of manumission varied widely when they applied to all, and were widely disregarded. Christian observance compares unfavourably with that of Islam, which much more meticulously observed the six-year rule laid down in the Koran. A freed slave of more or less the same colour as his owner's countrymen was able to

melt into the population quite quickly, but cross-colour ownership gave rise to the ongoing hardship of this being impossible. One's slave origin was betrayed by one's skin, as in North America's southern states. The oft-told tale of Wilberforce and his struggle to outlaw the Slave Trade leaves a warm glow in every Englishman's heart, but tends to obscure the sad reality of widespread slavery in other parts of the world, even today.

When I first began looking into the general subject of slavery, preparatory to thinking afresh about the slaves in Charles Williams' poetry, I was really suprised to discover the extent of it in both ancient and modern times. Perhaps I should not have been. It is another instance of not seeing what we have not looked for.

There are plenty of disputes in modern scholarship about the detail of conditions in different societies at different times but clear agreement that the word 'slave' must be reserved to describe only that category of person who has been sold or is born into the absolute ownership of another. This condition had virtually no essential variation throughout history but must be kept distant from serfdom. For example 'the slaves of Anglo-Saxon times, as of others, were regarded as the stock of their owner - their offences against a third person he must answer for as for the mischief done by his cattle.' In stock inventories that have come down to us slaves and animals are listed together: '13 men capable of work, 5 women and 16 oxen.' (Meltzer). They had no credibility and no legal rights; their labour and their persons were disposed of at the will of their owner. A slave was a slave. What seems to us today one of the worst aspects of this was the absolute right of owners to disregard family ties when it suited them between slave parents and their children or between slave spouses. If a slave achieved manumission only his or her children born after freedom was attained were themselves free; the earlier children remained the property of the owner.

Doubtless individual owners varied in the rigour with which their slaves were treated, but 'one cannot escape recognition of the fact that the failure of any

individual slaveowner to exercise all his rights over his slave property was always a unilateral act on his part, never binding, always revocable'. (Finlay: Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology). It is proper to emphasise all this because the term 'slave' must always include what Demosthenes defined as the greatest difference between the slave and the free man, which is 'that the former is answerable with his body for all offences' - which usually meant a flogging or other torturous abuse. But being answerable also meant being 'at the disposal of' for purposes of sex: 'Horace was not being satirical when he recommended his own preference for household slaves, male or female - "I like my sex easy and ready to hand"' (Finlay).

Turning to the period in England from the Dark Ages to medieval times we find that the Anglo-Saxons, like their Saxon cousins, were accustomed to slave-ownership. Curiously enough, the invasion of the Normans into Britain accelerated the decline of slavery here. While they certainly subjugated the Saxons, they were more disposed to free the slaves they acquired than their former owners. About 10% of the population of England is recorded in Domesday Book as 'slave'. In the course of the next few centuries they declined in numbers and eventually disappeared as varied forms of serfdom and villeinage absorbed them (Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England).

This brings us to the knotty question of how to regard the 'time' of Williams' poems. Written in the twentieth century for modern ears they meditate upon events in Arthur's time. But what was that? It certainly will not help much to project our thoughts towards what we know of sixth century England, but to live imaginatively in the myth we need to place them somewhere. I think we have to say that Arthur's time is inside the poet's head and inside ours. There resides the historical Arthur, but there also resides all that has come to us from medieval times 'about' Arthur, notable from Malory. The great names of Arthur, Galahad, Lancelot and the rest cannot be spoken without bringing with them reverberations of their medieval incarnations. Williams' own description of the development of the legend of Arthur and the legend of the Grail (published in Arthurian Torso) make it very plain

that the story as projected by Malory is, for Englishmen, the important poetic source. There is no mention of slaves in Malory (and I suppose they did not feature in his French sources either) but that need not detain us. Slaves were endemic in the period to which the story of Arthur is assigned and for many centuries to follow, and we may certainly feel that Williams was entitled to introduce them should his purposes demand it. What unifies the two disparate periods is the nature of this poetry - not epic, or primarily narrative, though narrative appears, but sometimes lyric, most often meditative. As he himself wrote: 'The poems do not so much tell a story or describe a process as express states or principles of experience.' It is in the life of the imagination that the real Arthur and the medieval Arthur co-exist.

So what were the poetic purposes that required the introduction of slaves? It would be cheating a bit to tell you what I think they were without first looking at the relevant poems. For this afternoon's talk there are six which cry out for attention, three from each of the two latest books of the Arthurian cycle. In Taliessin Through Logres there is only one which positively introduces us to a slave but the two others which precede it present us with a girl whom Lewis has no doubts about referring to as 'a barbarian slave girl' and who, on this authority, I think must be included. Certainly her position is lowly enough to fit the picture, and she refers to having 'escaped the stripping and whipping' - a very likely punishment for a slave. We will not stop to consider the fascinating question why, if Williams thought of her as a slave, and originally referred to her as such to Lewis, did he obliterate this in the poems as we have them?

The first of these poems, 'The Star of Percivale' opens tranquilly with Percivale playing his harp 'by the magical western door of the king's hall', and Taliessin defining the music with his voice. The attention then moves to the ardent young soul of a maid, at service in the hall, who runs to fall at Taliessin's feet in a passion of obedience. She has had a Beatrician moment. Taliessin very properly warns her to re-direct her

devotion away from him ('I too am a man') and goes on to proclaim: 'More than the voice is the vision, the kingdom than the king'. The second half of that line reminds us of what we have already begun to see in 'The Crowning of Arthur' and will see later in the cycle - Arthur's self-absorption in his role and final inability to put the claims of the kingdom above his own. We then see her bright adoration acknowledged by the Archbishop, Dubric, and joy exchanged with him as she shows the depth of her understanding of what is taking place: 'The light of another, if aught, I bear, as he the song of another.' The remainder of the poem falls away from that high moment to take in the general scene and comment on it. It focusses finally on three separate failures, the 'causeless vigil of anger' of Lord Balin the Savage, the nascent hubris of the king, and Lancelot's gaze at the Host which is found to be actually intent on an image of the Queen.

The next poem opens on the same girl sitting in the stocks. Her bright steps towards Christ's glory have faltered, as Dubric feared they might. She is in the stocks for a fault she freely but very angrily admits. Her sense of worth is outraged; she will not even look at Taliessin as she answers his question:

'Fortunate, for a brawl in the hall, to escape
They dare tell me, the post, the stripping and
whipping;

Should I care, if the hazel rods cut flesh from bone,' This is defiance. Taliessin meets it by pointing to the sin 'worse than rage', pride of guilt or no guilt' - a sin either way. 'Did we not together adore?' He treats her throughout with high courtesy, but goes to the heart of her obduracy in not deigning even to throw back the missiles with which she has been pelted by the onlookers. He leads her to acknowledge her fault and deny pride, and her reward is 'her heart flowed to the crowd', what he calls 'her own poor kin'.

There follows an elegant coda to this. A 'demure' chamberlain comes from Sir Kay, the High Steward, to give Taliessin the option of deciding whether the girl should be released or not. He waives the right and refers it to the girl's choosing. She hesitates, thinking of what may

be said of her choice either way, and Taliessin encourages her to 'treat the world's will but as and at the world's will'. His final gesture is to insist that the guard unlock the stocks: it is not for the king's poet to respond 'to the chamberlain's sly smile'.

Now let us turn to the slave, who is named as such in the poem called 'The Sister of Percivale', she who 'was named Blanchfleur in religion'. Lewis finds this to be the most difficult in the cycle and goes on to provide a wonderful exposition of many of the difficulties. Roma King's recent book makes no addition I want to refer to but is useful in providing a further consideration of the complexities. He makes a true comment when he remarks, à propos of this slave, 'No poet is more securely anchored in the material creation. The scarred body represents all Caucasia, flesh, fallen but subject to redemption.'

We are invited in the poem to contemplate a scene as Taliessin, lying on a wall, watches it unfold. A slave, again a woman, is drawing water from the well in the courtyard. As the bucket reaches the surface the trumpet at the gate announces the arrival of the princess Blanchfleur and her two brothers. The poem is dense with meanings that flicker round images involving measurement words such as circle, horizon, hemisphere, axis, plane, diameter, radii, circumference, asymptote, decimal ... Williams' great statement about Hell being 'inaccurate' is supported here by the attempt to glory in the exact relationship of significance between the meaning of the scars of the slave's back and the view Taliessin has of the face of Blanchfleur. In one sense it would be proper to say, as Lewis does, that he is enamoured of both. For his perceptions both are required. What is being made actual before us is 'the organic body singing together ' the Empire in fact.

The slave, (and her treatment, the scars) show us, not so much the hurt and shame of discipline but what remains after it has been transformed. The scars are healed and shine white as she labours at the well. At another level of the functional hierarchy Blanchfleur appears. She is a princess, and her 'rare' face is 'the grace at the Back of the Mount'. A description of her dress is calculated

to support the overall impression of 'a front of glory', and our last glimpse of her as she smiles and greets Taliessin is of one who can sing 'in one note the infinite decimal'.

It is impossible to consider the slave in this poem without the princess hovering in one's consciousness. The scar of the one and the star of Percivale's emblem (and consequently his sister's) are each perceived to be symbolic of their owners and are linked in glory. The slave as well as the princess is necessary to Williams' invention because his view of the beauty of Order, or as he usually called it, the City, requires those in the various social categories of function, willingly to embrace their duty. As he sees it, only thus can the individual be liberated into the republic of exchange. 'As willed necessity is freedom, so willed hierarchy becomes equality'. (Lewis).

Before moving on to The Region of the Summer Stars, this might be a good moment to pause and say something about the Empire, as projected by Williams in the cycle. He uses the image to bring before us his concept of the City, the provinces of this material world laid out in right relationship with one another. He chooses Byzantium rather than Rome to be the centre. Either would have served most of his poetic requirement but he says he chose Byzantium partly due to 'a romantic love of the (then) strange' and partly because the Byzantine Emperor was a more complex poetic image than the Roman.' In some earlier poems the Emperor was 'a kind of sacerdotal royalty'. Gradually he became 'God as known in Church and State, God as ruling men'. He claims that the identification of the Empire with the human organism just 'happened' and was not the result of curious ingenuity on his part. The drawing on the endpapers of Taliessin Through Logres illustrates his thinking here; Byzantium is represented by the navel, the centre, and Logres by the head. 'The Empire is the pattern, Logres the experiment.' Several commentators have written eloquently about this. What has perhaps not been so much remarked is the difficulty of penetrating the mind-set of contemporary readers to the point of convincing them of the value of the fundamental principles of this Empire. It may actually be hard for

them to believe in the desirability of an individual embracing necessity when so much political experience cries out for the need of collective refusal of necessities which are unjust. Here it is not inappropriate to remember that Williams was 13 when the 19th century gave way to the 20th. His most formative years were lived in Edwardian times before the First World War and his stance vis-à-vis society was, and remained, largely acquiescent. Being fundamentally concerned with spiritual life and the life of the imagination he has little interest or energy for the never-ending struggle to transform society by direct action. A very revealing incident is referred to in one of his letters to Phyllis Jones. The time is Christmas 1927, barely a year after the General Strike. He writes from St Albans that while young Michael is being put to bed he will go and talk to his father-in-law, because Mr Conway wants to talk about the Budget. 'What a lot of people', he writes, 'understand the Budget'! His father-in-law does the talking, while doing some paper-hanging. Charles is amazed at such a hobby. 'As if I should ever want to hang paper on the walls! Or discuss the Budget - which I find my own father is yearning to do! Bless them.' It seems that both Mr Conway and Mr Williams the elder had a grasp of the polity and an interest in the process of its conduct quite absent in Charles. (Hadfield: Charles Williams - An Exploration of his life and work.)

There are three more poems that bear directly on this whole subject. Two concern themselves with aspects of manumission, the 'Departure of Dindrane' and 'The Queen's Servant'. In the first we are told that Logres kept the old Levitical law, which freed a slave automatically after seven years and gave him or her some choice of destiny. One of these choices was

'To compact again with a fresh heart's love

In what household was sweet alike to past and future.'
This framework was very apt for Williams' purposes. He then shows us a girl who, approaching this moment of choice, is brooding on the alternatives but watchful of the scene before her. The princess is preparing to leave after a year's sojourn to take her vows at the convent at Almesbury. The slave is struck by 'the chrism of

dedication Shining already there in Dindrane's brow'. She misses nothing. She acknowledges the high courtesy of the love between Taliessin and Dindrane, who must now part. She knows the willing servitude to which Dindrane now goes

'the shell of her body

Yearned along the road to the cell of vocation'.

The poem hovers over great definitions of the two Ways: the Affirmation and the Rejection of Images, summed in the persons of Taliessin and Dindrane. Each acknowledges the other, and in the heart of the slave

'Servitude and freedom are one and interchangeable'.

On the one hand we are invited to contemplate the ever-changing hierarchy of merit, which reflects our acknowledgement of our masters in particular areas of life - 'we needs must love the highest when we see it' - and on the other hand the stable hierarchy of function. Writing in the person of Eugenio, one of the characters in his 'Dialogue on Hierarchy' in Time and Tide (1943), Charles Williams says quite explicitly that he is content to have it so for the sake of the organisation of society. He comments 'It is often easing to the mind to recognise this distinction for one may generously yield to function the respect which one would reasonably deny to incapacity'. Hence the general picture of authority from the top and the slave's relationship to it. The given order is not just to be endured; she has an opportunity to embrace it.

The view of society we are invited to acquiesce in is put neatly though crudely in a quatrain from 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'

'The rich man in his castle
The poor man at his gate
God made them high or lowly
And ordered their estate.'

This is the literal reality which is used to substantiate the spiritual realities. Frankly, it may be hard to hold on to the subtle distinctions that Williams' poetry gives expression to, when ringing in the ears of many is that other tradition of gradual emancipation from oppression achieved painfully over the centuries, which is summed up in the stalwart cry of such as the Tolpuddle Martyrs:

'We raise the watchword Liberty
We will, we will, we will be free.'

Williams had a profound awareness that true freedom resides in the exercise of choice, and he shows us in 'The Ascent of the Spear' a slave choosing her redemption. But the deliberate selection of a temporal environment for these poems so rife with oppression as must be conveyed by the very words 'Empire' and 'Slavery' may in the end be the stumbling block which excludes readers who would otherwise be receptive of his ideas. It demands from the reader more than an exercise of historical imagination. One has to put in abeyance the whold question of how do we live in a just society and at the same time acknowledge the undoubted truths of will and faith that are so important for a right relation of the individual to God and the world. The slave in this poem is able to perceive a kind of glory not just in the persons and the manner of the princess and Taliessin but in the beauty of dedication. The final lines retreat from the high ground of meditation and drama and give us a matter-of-fact statement as the slave makes what is by now for the reader her inevitable choice:

'They only can do it with my lord who can do it
without him,
And I know he will have about him only those.'

'The Queen's Servant' we meet in the process of preparation for that role. She also is a slave of the king's poet's household, this time a highly accomplished one, and she has just been chosen by Taliessin to fulfill a request from the Queen. It is needful to free her, since

'The royalties of Logres are not slavishly served.'
What follows is a wonderfully imagined scene of transformation. The slave was bought in Caucasia, standing here not only for the province but as a trope for the flesh. The girl denies memory of the place as described by Taliessin and he tells her she should read 'the maps of Merlin's book, or Ours or the one small title we brought from Byzantium.' Better, because quicker for understanding, is to undergo a rite. He tells her to unclothe, and then proceeds to furnish her with a glorious and magical succession of coverings

derived from roses and lambswool. The significances shimmer through the images, and all is carried off with the lightness and charm of courtesy:

'The roses climbed round her; shoulder to knee
they clung and twined and changed to a crimson kirtle
The wool rose gently on no wind,
and was flung to her shoulders; behind her, woven
of itself,

it fell in full folds to a gold-creamed cloak.'

'He fastened the cloak with his own brooch'; but also with her old leathern girdle. That, and the shoes from the household's best store will help her to keep 'the recollection of her peers'. Finally he strikes her lightly on the face as the Roman masters used to do and her manumission is complete.

In between these two poems lies 'The Founding of the Company' which is highly germane to this discussion, because it sums up a picture of the true co-inherence of 'the commons and the whole manner of love'. We are led to consider three degrees of dedication. At the bottom are those who:

'lived by a frankness of honourable exchange,
Labour in the kingdom, devotion in the Church
Be the exchange dutiful or debonair.'

'The Company's second mode bore farther
The labour and fruition; it exchanged the proper self
and wherever need was drew breathe daily
in another's place, according to the grace of the
Spirit

dying each other's life, living each other's death.'

Finally we come to those

'Few - and that hardly - entered on the third
station, where the full salvation of all souls
is seen, and their co-inhering'.

The poem proposes, in effect, an index of redemption which runs through the whole company and brings

'God's new grace in the street of Camelot.'

It spread from the household of the King's poet and

'was first nobly spoken as a token of love
Between themselves and between themselves and their
lord.'

Dinadan appears, and meets Taliessin's reluctance to assume this lieutenancy by assuring him

'any buyer of souls

Is bought himself by his purchases; take the lieutenancy

for the sake of the shyness the excellent absurdity holds.'

In that Dialogue on Hierarchy already referred to, Williams declared 'We are not to suppose that the hierarchy of one moment is likely to be that of the next. The ranked degrees of intelligence are continually reordered ... Equality is the name we give to the whole sum of such changes.' His thinking on this subject was of long gestation. In Heroes and Kings, published in 1930, there is a marvellous sonnet dedicated to Humphrey Milford which already encapsulates all the essentials. It is called 'On Kingship'

'That in the neighbourhood of mighty kings
Lives true delight for ever, this I knew
And tasted all the joy that order brings,
headship, and ritual, when I looked on you,
Caesar, amid your officers last night;
and more than you - the worth of majesty,
Distinction, place, and courts in motion right
around the Presence, so the king's head be
by the crown's self o'ershadowed; for the crown
not to be too much merited, lest man
suppose desert deserves it, shows his town
not less, but more, O more republican
when great equalities in order fall
and freedom's self grows hierarchical.

He could so often find an acceptable counterpoint between these two hierarchies - of merit and of function; but it was his willingness to use the Byzantine Empire to carry so much meaning for his Arthurian cycle that I think does constitute a barrier that takes some overcoming.

What richness is here, though. Anne Ridler writes in her Preface to The Image of the City about the 'ambivalence of Williams' own habit of mind - between belief and scepticism. It came from his freedom from prejudice where ideas were concerned, whatever their source.' We could add to that his scrupulous vigilance to go back to the text of what is being considered and not attend too

much to the commentators - a trait encouraged apparently by his father who first drew his attention to:

'What slanders still the pious talk
Of Voltaire and Tom Paine'.

I suppose we cannot leave this subject without a reference to the recent publication of Charles Williams' letters to Lois Lang-Sims and her commentary. The somewhat disquieting view it gives of the extent to which by this time he was living inside his myth is bound to arouse defensive explanations there is no need for me to particularise here. The insistence on Lois becoming 'Lalage' is quite in tune with Florence being 'Michal' and Phyllis becoming 'Phyllida' and 'Celia'. It seems to me that Lois Lang-Sims has been remarkably clear and honest in her exposition and is probably right to think that he found it difficult to allow the individuality of another person to be independent of his myth when once they had assumed a place in it. They found themselves dismissed from his thoughts. Glen Cavaliero comments in his very insightful introduction that 'in this instance the real trouble may be that Williams did not know enough of his pupil as she really was. Their relationship was not based on an equality; and "Lalage" was more a figment of his own mind than she was Lois in the fullness of her being.' Nevertheless, she paints a welcome and glowing picture of the effect he had on her while she knew him, and defines very accurately several of the remarkable qualities others have also been struck by.

That he was aware of the difficulties of relationship up and down the ranks of the hierarchies comes out often in his writings. Here is a telling quote from a paragraph about Hadrian VII by Baron Corvo. 'One cannot love downwards, de haut en bas. That is reserved for God. One cannot love when one thinks oneself superior - even if one is superior. Human love is always between equals, and the most sheikh-like of heroes submits to that eventually however often he abducts heroines on camels.'

So what purpose do we think was served by the introduction of these slaves into the Arthurian myth? They are a most notable addition; only the shift to the

perspective of Taliessin in the collection as a whole is a more radical alteration. It seems as though it cannot be other than to enhance the paradox he faces us with; that however lowly, however subjected to extremes of treatment, it is always open to the individual to 'choose necessity' and thereby escape the sense of being compelled and come into that harmony of relationships that makes exchanges of love possible. A slave is so absolutely at the disposal of her master that she makes this paradox clearer than had she been a free servant, however down-trodden. And being female of course emphasises this further. And he needs to be able to present us with images at the top and the bottom of this society in order to flesh out the concept of 'the organic body sang together'. It should perhaps be noted, however, that none of Williams' slaves are shown to us in the stress of suffering. (One can hardly regard the stocks in that light, however repugnant and the scars on the slave's back in 'The Sister of Percivale' are, precisely, healed). All have positive outcomes, even (one or two) glorious ones. This looks a bit like skewing the picture if one considers at all the evidence of the realities."

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Newsletter 60 carried the first section of an article written by Alice Mary Hadfield which was amongst the papers she bequeathed to the Charles Williams Society. This article is now continued.

Coinherence, Substitution and Exchange in Charles Williams' Poetry and Poetry-Making by Alice Mary Hadfield

After Windows of Night in 1925 came the long break in published poetry, while he wrote and published continuously but kept his new style in verse a secret growth. When Taliessin Through Logres appeared in 1938, he had become aware of the range of coinherence and substitution, and how deep the concept penetrated into poetry, history, religion, social studies and love.

'Prelude' in Taliessin establishes it. The poem opens on the coinherent life. The physical body of man and of the universe are intended in the image of Caucasia; the

activities, government, and commerce of man in Camelot; visions, dedications and ecstasies in Carbonek - all points of the Empire coinhering in each other and in the Emperor by the operation of holy wisdom expressing the Logos. Man's life is quick with glory and light. But men began to teach that coinherence need not be, that man could live by his own effort, cultivating his own rational virtue, subduing the flesh which made him less than himself and visions which showed him something greater. Christ had lived and shown the way of union, but the longing of man to be subject to no one, grateful to no one, which longing Mahomet illumined and uplifted, led man into the struggles and processes which the poems in this book go on to explore. In man and in events union of being was breached.

The third poem, 'The Vision of the Empire', closely develops the idea. In the first eleven lines it is made clear that the Emperor is coinherent with the world by his choice to be known only through men's lives. Stanzas 'b' 'c' and 'd' develop this knowledge through the body, the actions and the thoughts and creeds of man. Stanza 'e' unites all ways - but only in some moments and conditions. Union everywhere and at all times is breached, by the desire of man to 'grow to the height of God and the Emperor' (stanza 'g'), not through the union of man-hood exchanged with Christ, but denying the union, independent, doing it himself.

Many and many a conversation did C.W. hold on what happened next, walking up and down his little office in the narrow space between the desk and the wall of bookshelves, or sitting with his feet on the desk, smoking. He believed that only good had reality, but he was met and torn everywhere by the experience of pain or deadly absence of meaning. Through years of experience, poetry, thought, and conversation he came suddenly to his clarification, and went walking round the passages of Amen House with the page from his little writing pad in his hand, looking for a friend, and meeting one, said 'Look, I've just settled the problem of Adam. He was a

modern fellow, bored, as he thought, with what he called good. He wanted something different. There wasn't anything different for him to know, as there isn't now, though you might not think it, but since he had chosen it he had it, a projection, you see, not a reality, but enough for Adam or you, of existence and each situation as potentially evil, if he wanted it, instead of, or as well as, actually good. See?' In his hand was stanza 'g' of 'The Vision of the Empire':

The Adam in the hollow of Jerusalem respired:

softly their thought twined to its end,

crying: O parent, O forkèd friend,

am I not too long meanly retired

in the poor space of joy's single dimension?

Does not God vision the principles at war?

Let us grow to the height of God and the Emperor:

Let us gaze, son of man, on the Acts in contention.

'Don't you like "the poor space of joy's single dimension"?' he said cheerfully. The reply, after reading, was 'Who the devil is his forkèd friend?' C.W. chuckled. 'Certainly not, you've got it wrong. Not the devil; he shouldn't be in this poem, but Adam's other half. All the old stories carry the idea of Adam and Eve being one form divided. I must say that I personally am entirely willing to be 'meanly retired in the poor space of joy's single dimension'."

Stanza 'h' pursues the deadly horror of life known in separation - actions pointless, body dreary, events hostile, and over all a sense of fate without intelligence or will. The last stanza recovers the vision in a rapture of identity and detail of glory.

Detail is indeed one of Charles Williams' glories. He knew the doctrine of the whole Christ, whole in every broken particle of bread or nerve or myth - and absent so also. In 'The Calling of Arthur' King Cradlemass in the bitter cold weather 'polishes his emerald, misty with tears for the poor'. We need no more information about him. 'The Crowning of Arthur' shows us the detail of the whole condition as it might have been, coinherence restored - or so it seemed to Arthur, but it was not securely so. 'Taliessin beheld a god lie in his tomb'. In the myth, representing all human process, the restoration must be continuous, must reckon to start again as soon as breath is drawn after an effort. In

other words, it must be a life. This lacks drama, is not popular. The people who plug on, are they not bourgeois, does not every newspaper ignore them while the cultural weeklies sneer? What about Bors, explaining economic policy to Elayne ('Bors to Elayne: on the King's Coins')? He would be a disaster - if he did not pursue the coinherence of organisation with ideas and nerves and with the organisation of heaven.

'Cleared the branched jungles
where the unthumbed shapes of apes swung and hung.
Now when the thumbs are muscled with the power of good-
corn comes to the mill and the flour to the house, [will
bread of love for your women and my men;
at the turn of the day, and none only to earn;
in the day of the turn, and none only to pay;
for the hall is raised to the power of exchange of all
by the small spread organisms of your hands; O Fair,
there are the altars of Christ the City extended.
I have ridden all night from organization in London,
ration and rule, and the fault in ration and rule,
law and the flaw in law, to reach to you,
the sole figure of the organic salvation of our good.

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