

# The Charles Williams Society

N E W S L E T T E R

No. 62, SUMMER 1991



## MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

19 October 1991: Brian Horne will talk on Charles Williams, Dorothy Sayers and Dante.

22 February 1992: Kerrylynne Henderson will talk on the early poetry of Charles Williams.

16 May 1992: The Society will meet from 11am to 5pm and hold its AGM.

## LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 10 November 1991: We will complete the reading of Region of the Summer Stars. We propose next to read The House of the Octopus. We will meet at St Matthew's 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

For details please contact Canon Roma King, 9823 Twin Creek Drive, Dallas, Texas 75228, USA.

## CORRECTION / CLARIFICATION

Newsletter 61 (Spring 1991) carries a report on the Society's AGM held on 11 May 1991. The Hon Secretary's report on p.2 lines 7-10 should read as follows: "The Society has acquired photocopies of letters from Charles Williams to G.K.Chesterton and Mrs G K Chesterton (given by Aidan Mackey of the G K Chesterton Study Centre). The Society has bought (original) letters to Charles Williams from Wilfred and Alice Meynell. These documents are now in the Society's Reference Library."

## APPEAL

As reported at the AGM we are in contact with the newly-established G K Chesterton Study Centre. They need practical help "... work on cataloguing, restoring, secretarial work etc., and would be glad to hear from anyone within reach of Bedford who can help." If you would like to help please contact:

Aidan Mackey ACP,  
Administrator  
The G K Chesterton Study Centre  
15 Shaftesbury Avenue  
Bedford  
MK40 3SA.

## THE J.R.R. TOLKIEN CENTENARY CONFERENCE 1992

For further details of this Conference please contact either Pat and Trevor Reynolds, 16 Gibsons Green, Heelands, Milton Keynes, Bedfordshire MK13 7NH, or Lyn Maudlin, PO Box 6707, Altadena, California 91001, USA.

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## NEWS ABOUT BOOKS

August 1991 sees the publication by Boydell & Brewer of Arthurian Poets - Charles Williams edited and introduced by Society member David Dodds. It contains Taliessin Through Logres and Region of the Summer Stars as well as the earlier unpublished Arthurian cycle The

Advent of Galahad and later fragments. It is published in hardback at £39.50/\$ 79 (ISBN 0 85991 327 9) and paperback at £14.95/\$ 29.95 ( ISBN 0 85115 291 0).

Professor John Hibbs of Birmingham Polytechnic, a long-standing member of the Society, has sent us a copy of his monograph entitled "Looking Upwards" which he describes as an essay on the origins of authority in Church, State and industry. He quotes from Charles Williams's The Figure of Beatrice and, as an endpiece to his monograph, John Hibbs offers a stanza from 'Bors to Elayne: on the King's Coins' in acknowledgement of the influence of Charles Williams on his thought and of the doctrine of exchange. Copies of the monograph can be obtained from The Congregational Centre, 4 Castle Gate, Nottingham.

#### NEW MEMBER

A warm welcome is extended to Mme Georgette Bersinger, 59 avenue du Maine, 75014 Paris, France.

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Newsletters 60 and 61 carried the first two sections 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 and concluded.

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

"In 'Bors to Elayne: The Fish of Broceliande' Bors also perceives clearly the double nature of events and the deep pull of instincts. He has a feeling for politics. He has worked to restore peace and rebuild the administration, living all activities by his knowledge of the exchanged life of love in marriage.



'I have seen the branches of Broceliande.  
Though Camelot is built, though the king sit on the  
throne,  
yet the wood in the wild west of the shapes and names  
probes everywhere through the frontier of head and  
hand;  
everywhere the light through the great leaves is  
blown  
on your substantial flesh, and everywhere your glory  
frames.'

The simplest aspect of the concept of coinherence is exchange, and this produced two of Williams' most charming poems, one in the serious collection and one not. In Taliessin Through Logres, in 'The Star of Percivale', Taliessin is standing in the palace courtyard, touching the strings of a harp to the music that Percivale was making in the king's hall. A serving maid was smitten with adoration, for Taliessin she thought, but, as he showed her, rather for the power in the words he sang. The Archbishop saw her face radiant with adoration, but

'she answered: The light of another, if aught, I  
bear,  
as he the song of another.'

It was the situation which C.W.'s power was constantly provoking with the young, and which he as constantly turned away from himself to a passion for poetry, for goodness, with himself as fellow worker.

'More than the voice is the vision, the kingdom than  
the king.'

It is the saving doctrine of relationship, but bitter in the mouth at first. Williams rightly made it unacceptable in his poems to most knights and to the king.

In lighter vein, but quite as serious, he took the simple situation further in his 'Apologue on the Parable of the Wedding Garment', which was published in

December 1940, in a weekly newspaper (Time and Tide, reproduced in The Image of the City pp. 166-168). The Prince Immanuel gives a fancy dress ball; a guest, high in the administration and of good family, dislikes all forms of dressing-up and prefers his own simple worth. He arrives, and is not admitted. The footman allows him a glimpse of the gathering.

'He saw along  
the Great Hall and Heavenly Stair  
one blaze of glorious changes there.  
Cloaks, brooches, decorations, swords,  
jewels - every virtue that affords  
(by dispensation of the Throne)  
beauty to wearers not their own.  
This guest his brother's courage wore;  
that, his wife's zeal, while, just before,  
she in his steady patience shone;  
there a young lover, had put on  
the fine integrity of sense  
his mistress used; magnificence  
a father borrowed of his son,  
who was not there ashamed to don  
his father's wise economy.  
Nor he or she was he or she  
merely; no single being dared,  
except the Angels of the Guard,  
come without other kinds of dress  
than his poor life had to profess,  
and yet those very robes were shown,  
when from preservel as his own  
into another's glory given,  
bright ambiguities of heaven.

This is the style of verse Williams used for poetry that he did not see as his Collected Poems, of which he regarded Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars as the only components. He wrote this other rapidly with the upper surfaces of his mind. In his younger days it produced fairly easy, running verse, but as his mind achieved mastery of access to sources of his power his light verse flashed its own communication.

The result of Adam's choice in 'The Vision of the Empire' is explored in a long poem in Taliessin Through Logres, 'The Son of Lancelot'. This son is Galahad, who by expressing in himself the assent to coinherence in Christ, restores the union broken by Adam. The old stories tell of Lancelot's madness when he realized that he had lain with Helayne, tricked into unfaithfulness to his love. He ran, they say, as a wolf, savage and starved. In the poem he knows there will be a child, and he lives only to destroy it.

'All the winter the wolf haunted the environs of Carbonek;

now what was left of the man's contrarious mind  
was twinned and twined with the beast's bent to feed;  
now it crept to swallow the seed  
of love's ambiguity, love's taunt and truth.  
Man, he hated; beast, he hungered; both  
stretched his sabres and strained his throat; rumble  
of memories of love in the gaunt belly told  
his instinct only that something edible might come.  
Slavering he crouched by the dark arch of Carbonek,  
head-high howling, lusting for food, living  
for flesh, a child's flesh, his son's flesh.'

Hate and hunger devastated the world. Only a few strongholds held the witness of a better life, and they were encircled and menaced. The child Galahad was born. Merlin, as Time, that power which offers to every man his moment, came to the beast-man at the season of Quinquagesima, for which the collect of the church shows

'the manner of the second working'  
whereby man's self-sufficiency is caught up into 'that most excellent gift of charity, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee'. The forces of the second working move to the release of man from his own oppression and his own division. Lancelot's attack on his infant son is defeated; the capacity for Christ is saved in man.

'Gaudium multum annunciamus;  
nunc in saecula servi amamus;

civitas dulcis aedificatur;  
quia qui amat Amor amatur.

We proclaim great joy;  
now for ever we servants can love;  
the sweet city is being built;  
because Love who loves is loved.'

More wary than the medievals, more faltering than the Romantics, we ponder how to love, how to coinhere. On a few occasions in our lives it needs no asking, for we are swept along. But all day and every day? And especially on bad days? In 'The Coming of Galahad' when the High Prince came to Arthur's court it was one of those times when we are in no doubt, for our love and our capacity run before our intrusion and our duty. For that occasion Galahad superseded the King and his power, and was ceremonially laid in the King's bed. The palace staff watched astonished. Word flew round to the kitchens and stables. Taliessin went down through the lower corridors, out to the stable yards and

'saw

through the unshuttered openings of stairs and rooms  
the red flares of processional torches and candles  
winding to the king's bed.'

Gareth, prince and menial, doing turn as night-soil man, asks him what the coming of the High Prince means for him in the jakes. Taliessin answers by asking, What builds the City? Choice, always and everywhere choice and will.

'Question and digestion, rejection and election,  
winged shapes of the Grail's officers, double  
grand equality of the State, common of all lives,  
common of all experience, sense and more;  
adore and repent, reject and elect.'

A serving maid says she has heard that at the appearing of the Grail everyone found on his plate the food he loved best, and asks what food Taliessin chose. 'The good that was there', he answered. She queried the sense of this.

'Has all food one taste?  
felicity does not alter?'

He answers that felicity alters from its centre, and joy comes from what the Grail offers, not what man dreams of. It is always hidden in the life of the moment. 'Where I find you', says the old apocryphal word, 'there will I judge you'. All approaches but this are doubtful: desire, which is symbolised by the planet Mercury, weakening or strengthening, urging to dodge or snatch instead of coinhering; preference, symbolised by Venus, always defining one's own choice and lessening one's ability to love where one would not choose; irony of detachment which is Jupiter, where one reserves always the final committal and imagines a security thereby. Beyond is the state of Galahad, symbolised by Saturn, 'circled, girdled by turned space', free to all points and moments.

But as Kierkegaard said, there are times when to know that it is a loving God who is offering you this pain only makes it harder, not easier, to bear; and Charles Williams knew it well. Much of his own life was painful and restricted, and his powers made poverty, obscurity, and emotional isolation more intensely grievous. To believe that the whole system was operated by love and joy only made it worse. In 'Percivale at Carbonek' he wrote from the centre of his own heart:

'Joy remembered joylessness; joy kneeled  
under the arch where Lancelot ran in frenzy.  
the astonished angels of the spirit heard him moan:  
"Pardon, lord; pardon and bless me, father."

Doubtfully stood the celestial myrmidons, scions  
of unremitted beauty; bright feet paused.  
Aching with the fibrous infelicity of time,  
pierced his implacability, Galahad kneeled.

. . . . .



the subdued glory implored the kingdom  
to pardon its power and the double misery of  
Logres.

Under the arch the Merciful Child  
wept for the grief of his father in reconciliation;  
who was betrayed there by Merlin and Brisen  
to truth; he saw not; he was false to Guinevere.

. . . . .

The High Prince shivered in the cold of bleak  
conjunction.

His head shook, pale were his cheeks;  
his head the head of a skull, flesh  
cleaving to bone; his dry voice rattled;  
"Pardon, Lord Lancelot; pardon and blessing,  
father."

Galahad asks pardon for his world of ideas and creeds  
of love (Carbonek) from the world of daily life and  
common experience of sin (Camelot).

"Forgive Us," the High Prince said, "for Our  
existence;  
forgive the means of grace and the hope of glory.  
In the name of Our Father forgive Our mother for  
Our birth."

This is the dry season, the grey afternoon when he  
would saunter slowly in to the library where I worked,  
which gave a longer stretch in which to pace up and  
down, and there he would sigh and smoke and walk and  
turn, and look out of the tall windows at the court  
full of vans and horses and cars, seeing none of them  
through the thin line of cigarette smoke, and talk a  
little, maybe repeat,

'This she? no, this is Diomed's Cressida.  
If beauty have a soul, this is not she.

. . . . .

... O madness of discourse,  
That cause sets up with and against itself;  
Bi-fold authority! where reason can revolt  
Without perdition, and loss assume all reason  
Without revolt.'

(Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, V.ii.137-146.)

All the voices and trampings of a big office building seemed to fall away, and stillness would settle round the tall slim figure pacing up and down, hands in his pockets, shapely head with thick grey hair and gold-rimmed spectacles tilted back to keep the smoke out of his eyes. In a little while he would say, 'Well, I must catch the post with that Ring and the Book commentary for Oxford', and be off up the step and through the swing door in a long stride. The dry season was never allowed to deny the spring of joy. 'Percivale at Carbonek' goes on to Bors' answer to Galahad

"Sir", Bors said, "only God forgives.

My lord Sir Lancelot my cousin is a lover and kind.

I assent to all, as I pray that my children assent  
and through God join with me in bidding their  
birth."

The last long poem in Taliessin, 'The Last Voyage', gathers all the poems' knowledge of substitution and exchange into the ship where

'the necessity of being was communicated to the son of  
Lancelot'

as the three knights sped towards Sarras. Here too is gathered the sense of time that moves so powerfully in Williams' verse. It needs a special study of its own, for it is used in the poetry more as a sacrament than a symbol, an aesthetic expression of an interior purpose. It appears in stanza 'e' of 'The Vision of the Empire' -

'The mist rolled down the edge of an old sun;

mammoth the bear prowled on the broad ledge of the  
shoulders'

- and in 'Mount Badon' where Taliessin commanded the King's cavalry reserve in the decisive battle with the



barbarians, and drew on the interior decisions with which Virgil built the hexameters of the Aeneid. The battle went against the King. Motionless on their horses Taliessin's company waited the word to charge.

'In the silence of a distance, clear to the king's poet's sight,  
Virgil was standing on a trellised path by the sea.  
Taliessin saw him negligently leaning; he felt  
the deep breath dragging the depth of all dimension,  
as the Roman sought for the word, sought for his thought,  
sought for the invention of the City by the phrase.  
.....

Civilised centuries away, the Roman moved.  
Taliessin saw the flash of his style  
dash at the wax; he saw the hexameter spring  
and the king's sword swing; he saw, in the long field,  
the point where the pirate chaos might suddenly yield.  
.....

The Aeneid's beaked lines swooped on Actium;  
the stooped horse charged; backward blown,  
the flame of song streaked the spread spurs  
and the strung faces of words on a strong tongue.  
The household of Taliessin swung on the battle;  
.....

The tor of Badon heard the analytical word;  
the grand art mastered the thudding hammer of Thor,  
and the heart of our lord Taliessin determined the war.'

Again, in the battles ravaging Europe in the war of 1939, the hates and cruelties of the past are conscripted as units into the forces of the war - in 'The Prayers of the Pope' in The Region of the Summer Stars.

Time is only one of the phenomena, subject to change,  
in need of redemption. 'The Departure of Merlin' shows  
a different knowledge of process. The method of  
phenomena is indrawn to Broceliande and sequence is  
translated into simultaneity.

'Moons and suns that rose in rites and runes  
are come away from sequence, from rules of magic;  
here all is cause and all effect; the laws  
of Merlin's boyhood are unknown in Numue's wood.'

Now grace

          'through each membraned and tissued  
          experience  
smites in simultaneity to times variously veined.'

Time itself must be redeemed. In 'Taliessin at  
Lancelot's Mass' the process of the Grail and the  
effort of Arthur are over. The Table is broken, most  
of the knights are dead. All had been twisted and  
lost, and yet was found restored in the heart of man.

'In Blanchefleur's cell at Almesbury the queen  
Guinevere  
felt the past exposed; and the detail, sharp and  
dear,  
drew at the pang in the breast till, rich and  
reconciled,  
the mystical milk rose in the mother of Logres'  
child.

Out of the queen's substitution the wounded and dead  
king  
entered into salvation to serve the holy Thing;  
singly seen in the Mass, owning the double Crown,  
going to the altar Pelles, and Arthur moving down.

Lancelot and Arthur wove the web; the sky  
opened on moon and sun; between them, light-traced  
on high,  
the unseen knight of terror stood as a friend;  
invisible things and visible waited the end.'

At the Epiclesis, all time before it and after it is recalled back into the moment of substitution when Christ's body was broken for man. Probably this operation underwrote all Williams' use of time in his poetry.

The last slim volume of verse, The Region of the Summer Stars (1944), has not the feeling of struggling to birth that Taliessin often has, and which has proved sympathetic in many younger writers. Summer Stars is written from achievement, from a stage struggled to and reached, even if unconsciously, a stage not for resting at but for launching out into the ether. The same is true of The Figure of Arthur, the prose work written in the same period, which he had not time to finish. I could envy a later generation which will read these advanced poems simply as poems, without stumbling over contemporary detail and personal words like 'shy'. Williams himself heavily deprecated the searching of biographies of poets, and efforts to enter a man's poetry by way of his life's events. To him a poet lived in the printed word. Even a chronological table of English poetry should almost be built up from that alone.

His own life would be hard to deduce. The argument from absence might say that so fixed a use of exteriorized myth and symbol spells an interior lack or block, but I think his power and his belief dissolved any such block, and carried any such lack through all his work to deepen its richness, as he did deliberately in 'The Prayers of the Pope'. I do not know if there was such a lack, but I am sure that if there had not been, the needs of his thought would have presented it to him. By the time of Summer Stars, the convention of the Arthurian myth, which was a real world throughout Taliessin Through Logres, has become a setting, a thin historical veil for the poet's experience. He wrote a few direct poems at this late stage, to Sir Humphrey Milford the head of the Oxford University Press, and to occasional friends. He continued to drop sonnets as he

had always done, like flakes of light, on office events, a performance by the firm's dramatic society, for which he was always an active advisor, a birthday, a publication, a joke. I wish he had written more of the longer non-myth poems. Certainly Summer Stars could never have been written outside the myth altogether, or it would have been a different poetic experience. It is very much of its age, however singular the handling, for the formality of it has a relationship with the world of Hemingway, and the Arthurian experience of a world disintegrating and having to be continually and personally rescued and remade is perfectly contemporary.

Coinherence and substitution and exchange are operative throughout. In 'Prelude' they are specifically Christian, since the Incarnation is named in the fixed stars: Theotokos, Anthopotokos - God-bearer, Man-bearer. No doubt the opponents of unchurched Christianity rightly observe how near Williams came in his novel Descent into Hell to saying that coinherence and exchange could operate with no Christian basis of fact, though he never reached the point of saying so. At the time of writing the novel he was leading a busy literate life in London, and was much exposed to intellectual nonbelievers. He used to say that educated ignorance of Christian dogma was so great that they would be hard put to say what it was they did not believe in. Except for the title, he could not have ranged much wider from an explicit Christian position than in Descent into Hell.

In 'Prelude' we are firmly based on the 'twyfold Nature' and 'physiological glory'. We are secure from the wiles of 'professing only a moral union' of flesh and spirit, where flesh and matter only get a small allowance of glory. On the other hand, of course, flesh is involved in both glory and spirit and cannot discard either from laziness or pride. C.W. often found himself at odds with modernists of the 1930s and '40s over this, as Christians did with Nestorius in the

430s and '40s. 'Flesh' includes in its meaning all matter, and the world of nature on this earth. In the third stanza of 'Prelude', 'the zone of visionary powers' refers to Wordsworth's poetic insight into nature. So, in that stanza, coinherence of flesh and spirit includes under the concept of flesh the 'Roman polity' or man's organisation of society in the world, nature and poetry, and the almost materialised glimpse of the divine Person in beauty or in the form of the beloved. The images persist, hazel of all man's measurement and control, corn of the body's physical well-being, vine of inspiration and expansion of power.

Williams' verse is nearly all narrative. Invocation, lyric exclamation and lament are woven in so finely that they are easily missed. Like most poets of his time he uses conversation in his poetry, but the main style is narrative. At a literary meeting recently where his poetry was being read, a young man said that he found C.W. too didactic, and that this alienated him. Certainly C.W. did not intend to teach or found a school - more than once he had to fight for his freedom with a band of devotees who were insisting on his founding one - and to the very end continued to present his ideas and thoughts, even meditations, as events and processes of his Arthurian medium. Perhaps a didactic flavour is given by his observation of principles in operation through events. 'The Calling of Taliessin', which is a poem on his process of becoming a poet, is a closely coinhering substance of event and reaction and meditation, at once Taliessin's and Charles Williams'. Stanza five begins,

'Dangerous to men is the wood of Broceliande.'

This is the region of primal forces, in the mind, and the sub-conscious, in the body, and in history. Here man feels after God and poetry, in which all art is to be understood.

'Many a mile of distance goes to the making.'



Did he not know it? Not only the inflexible discipline of art and morals and experience, but the drag of time - four unsuccessful little books of verse published by the time he was forty, and the first outward recognition - the invitation to write Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury - when he was fifty.

The title of Summer Stars is taken from this poem. A line recurs,

'The stones of the waste glimmered like summer stars'

We were the stones of the waste. We, the clerks, secretaries, junior editors, electricians, mechanics, nurses, mostly young, a few older, who came to his lectures at first because we felt the lack of education, culture, or opportunity, or meaning, in our lives. We felt ourselves stones of the waste, even if few of us had heard of The Waste Land. Later on, when the world widened for him, he spoke chiefly to university students, who had been given all these things that his early students lacked, and to older people who were conscious of wastes far wider than we had pined in.

But in the 1930s the stones lay in the less well-off suburbs, in the semidetached villas, in wastes of long monotonous streets and long monotonous years with a small pension at the end. They lacked the robustness and importance of the 'working class', and poverty was always at hand to disable hopes.

To Charles Williams they were his friends, his household. They accepted his ideas without having the general knowledge to judge them or find them difficult. They were the food on their plate when enlightenment appeared. Scattered at the desks in the chilly classrooms after a day's work, they ate, and lived and grew. In their varying degrees they grew into the life Williams showed them, the life of poetry, of coinherence and exchange. Often he declared that they taught him, and that they did what he only showed and

spoke of.

He offered no comfort, cure, or change, no personal magic. He offered the way to find a new life in our old conditions. The stones were not brought in from the waste, the waste was not illumined or cultivated. He showed us poetry and theology, and the life within them, and we accepted that we could take it and be taken by it seriously. He pressed no religious faith or practice, but presented dogmas just as he presented Wordsworth's poetic concept of imagination or Keat's of beauty. He took them seriously and taught us to do so. We were ready to try out a dogma which we had truly grasped, but would not have been ready to accept a faith. Yet looking back, I think that coinherence presumed a faith and created the faith it presumed. The stones grew to coinhere with the life of substitution and exchange, and a new life grew up in the old, so that conditions pressed less heavily, abilities developed and prospects held new emphases, incurable conditions like the coming of old age found that the life inhered also in them. At moments the stones began to glimmer, and at those moments the waste could be seen as the vault of sky in which the stars move. Lack and deprivation were met, and

'Taliessin

began then to share in the doctrine of largesse.'

('The Calling of Taliessin', stanza 11)

Williams knew that throughout cities and countries everywhere, in people of all seasons of life, there existed this 'wide waste'. But he saw the wide waste now lit

'by the clear assuaging fires; in the shadow  
the stones of the waste glimmered like summer stars.'  
(stanza 11)

As life grew among them it was known more and more in its nature of exchange and coinherence, with each other, with C.W., with Christ in the nature of the world; and though a few could not accept a creed of



Christ, they did accept the fact.

'All that stood  
at the height of the brain faded into the space  
again of a starry night; through the reach of Logres  
the stones of the waste glimmered like summer stars,  
as if the king's poet's household of stars  
shone, in a visible glory, on the dreaming Taliessin.'

(Stanza 13)

The very word 'suburb' can be part of that restoration.

'They who shall be called and thrall'd  
by Taliessin's purchase and their own will  
from many a suburb, many a waste; say  
that they are a wonder whose origin is not known,  
they are strown with a high habit, with the doctrine  
of largesse,  
who in his house shall be more than the king's poet  
because of the vows they take.'

(Stanza 13)

Vows not to him, he never would allow them, but to the  
life he showed.

'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 Departure of Dindrane', last lines)

Once more he deliberately drew suburbia into verse. In  
'The Departure of Dindrane' Taliessin says to Dindrane  
'I will ride through the suburbs beside you. Advance  
companions.'

(Stanza 6)

And they ride together until 'the last villas of  
Camelot lay behind' along the city road,  
'on the high road of the hazel  
between city and convent, the two great vocations.'

Williams spent no time looking for an ideal reader or  
an intelligent circle. His knights do not ride the  
streets of university towns, and spend very little time

in Carbonek. He lived and worked directly through each day and night and the people and jobs it brought. But instead of the details becoming less and less alive to him, and more and more stones in a waste, he caused them by his attention and work to live more fully, until in him the life of love might open naturally at any moment through any of them, writing a note for Production, sitting in a World's Classics committee, a joke on the stairs, signing a cheque, turning the key in the flat door, going to lecture once again.

As his writings made their way, other people began to get in touch with him, famous men like Lewis and Eliot, writers like David Jones and Dorothy Sayers, and the ordinary men and women who make up the public. All came sooner or later to talk or write about coinherence. The Anglican Church made its own approaches. I remember him strolling in to say that he had crossed the Atlantic, an American had written to him. All ages, interests, and problems came. There was no difference between old friends and new; everyone exchanged talk and friendship as was needed, with equal genuineness.

Perhaps the poetic dispersal of the household developed from the discovery that there were no bounds. Coinherence and exchange will not live a selected life between one pair or group of lovers, nor between members of one sect or one church only. That is an image of it only, which can be for good, often is for bad. Coinherence comes from and moves through the web that holds us all. Emotional domination and emotional dependence alike have no hold there, nor intellectual or spiritual seniority. Only the fact of coinherent union stands, and the will toward it. Thus, in The Region of the Summer Stars, in 'The Prayers of the Pope', Taliessin dispersed his household before they were inevitably scattered by war, and in the act of dispersal the members recognised that, outwardly sealed or loosed, the coinherence endured for ever. Taliessin said

'We dissolve  
the outer bonds; We declare the Company still  
fixed in the will of all who serve the Company,  
but the ends are on Us, peers and friends;  
We restore  
again to God the once-permitted lieutenancy;  
. . . . .

We restore it to God in each singly and in all.  
Receive it in God.'

Time has gone by, and some have died, and the rest grow old, but new names come freshly on. There are theses being written on detailed aspects of Williams' work at the present time in England, the United States, France and Germany. Indeed, a strange new growth appears everywhere, for while coinherence, substitution, and exchange sustain our inward hearts, the outward world increasingly demands that politics, economics, religion, and life in society should be slanted toward that life. It is no easier way than any other, no more certain of general success. What will the world make of it?

'If skill be of work or of will  
in the dispersed homes of the household, let the  
Company  
pray for it still.'  
('Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass', last lines.)"

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The following book review was written by Charles Williams and published on 9 August 1933 in The Listener.

The Tragedy of Tolstoy by countess Alexandra Tolstoy, published by Allen and Unwin at 15s.

'The Countess Alexandra Tolstoy's book will, it may be hoped, serve for a final presentation of that agonised household which contained the private life of Tolstoy. By a chance as terrible as it is grotesque, the

infernal symphony of pain which was played on the souls and bodies of Tolstoy and his wife has been prolonged over the whole world; the piercing music of his spiritual demands, the exquisite harmonies of Anna Karenina and War and Peace, have been mingled with strains so detestable that only a complete sadist could hear them without distress. Yet, absurdly, the extreme suffering of that household offers to us but a lit shadow-show of what is going on everywhere; the houses of our own acquaintances and friends, even of our own lives, are there exposed to our senses. Our own interior violence is there in action.

The intense realism of the Countess' writing conveys a double quality; first, it gives us moment surcharged on moment, every moment extreme, so that life seems to be existing in a fierceness of direct apprehension by the senses, of which our less alert nerves are incapable; second, it is, in those moments, often grotesque, at least to us. Things which for us are but dreams and nightmares are, in this book, this country, this household, actual facts. A not unamusing example of this is in the Countess' story of her father. "Sometimes, as I came into his room, he looked at me with a melancholy air, and said, 'My Lord, how homely you are, how homely'. I did not like to hear that and laughed artificially. He went on to explain that it was not important". (But St Francis - it is just worth noting - would have seen her as beautiful.)

Not so amusing is the story of the Countess shooting with an air pistol at the portraits of Alexandra and Chertkov in her husband's study; or, later, striking at herself with hammers and knives while Tolstoy at eighty fled towards the railway station which was to be, in the language of the creed he rejected, the last Station of the Cross in his own life.

Humanly speaking, it was impossible that these things should not be. Two ways of life, two ways of religion (let us admit it), come into violent conflict, and that within the difficult circle of marriage. The small troubles, disputes, reconciliations, and devotions of



every ordinary marriage were magnified here by the nature of the intense spirits who fought, and the greatness of the prizes which were at stake. To Tolstoy it was the Will of God and the peace of his soul for which he strove; to the Countess the natural rights of her family, of reasonable life, of her own reputation, and, intimately, of herself. They loved, pathetic and terrible creatures that they were, and each of them agonised over the manner of love. "Father started to leave the room. 'Kill me, give me opium', mother screamed. Father stopped. 'Sonia', he said, his voice trembling, 'I try in every way to be good to you. I have written in my diary that I want to combat you with love only, and yet you see something bad in those words, you condemn everyone and everything, and we two live altogether different lives'. 'But I suffer; I am in torment!' 'I am ready to beg you on my knees, and with tears, that you should calm yourself.' A sob cut his voice short. 'I shall say nothing more to you; I shall not make you a single reproach', he added, and went to his rooms."

It is normal and abnormal at once. It is the voices of our own souls and desires crying out in that Russian house. But it would not be surprising that we should speak so; what is a little surprising is that so great a man as Tolstoy could say so much and no more. 'I am ready to beg you ... to calm yourself.' I have written that I desire to combat you with love, and yet you see something bad in those words.' They were written in a diary which the whole world would, she thought, one day read; and if they had been in the most private page of the most obscure clerk, still they are astounding in their greatness and their blindness. Any wife who was not revolted would have been nearer to the sanctity of Francis of Assisi than Tolstoy himself. He quoted a saying of the saint's in his Cycle of Reading, how when "the doorkeeper [turns us away], if we think with humility and love that he is right, that God must have directed him to act toward us as he did ...". That acceptance of things, that embracing of every kind of fact with humility and love, that utter closing with the immediate conditions of existence, was the secret of St Francis. It was a secret which the imagination of Tolstoy realised, and his moral sense drove him to desire. But his humanity failed beneath him, and he could not see why the Countess should become hysterical

at the prospect of the world learning that he wished to combat her with love. He was only too anxious for the Tsar to persecute him, but the Tsar dared not. An ironical Providence gave him all the persecution he needed by the hands of the woman who loved and hated him.

It is perhaps enough. In his life Tolstoy was a blinded giant, but in his imagination he was more like a god. Serenity is there and joy; and sufficient matter for happy decades of critical quarrels. "A man's actions may belie him; his words never." Let us go back to his words.'

Charles Williams

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