

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 74, SUMMER 1994



MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

15 October 1994: Aidan Mackey will speak on the poetry of G.K. Chesterton. This meeting will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W1, starting at 2.30 pm.

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday, 6 November 1994: We will continue the reading of THE PLACE OF THE LION from Chapter 4. We will meet at St Matthews Church Vestry, 27 St Petersburg Place, London W2 (nearest Underground stations Queensway and Bayswater) at 1 pm.

OXFORD READING GROUP

Having just finished reading JUDGEMENT AT CHELMSFORD, we are now embarked upon DESCENT INTO HELL. For more information, please contact either Anne Scott (Oxford 53897) or Brenda Boughton (Oxford 515589).

CAMBRIDGE READING GROUP

For information, please contact Geraldine and Richard Pinch, 5 Oxford Road, Cambridge CB4 3PH (Cambridge 311465).

LAKE MICHIGAN AREA READING GROUP

For details, please contact Charles Huttar, 188 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.

C.W.S. A.G.M. 11 June 1994 (some main points)

The Society held its Annual General Meeting on Saturday 11 June 1994 in Pusey House, St Giles, Oxford. The meeting was chaired by Eileen Mable, and reports were presented by the

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

Gillian Lunn, Hon Secretary, thanked the Hon Chairman and members of the Committee and 1995 sub-committee for their work over the past year. She also referred to:

- the Society being unable to use Liddon House in London meetings after October 1994. Subsequent meetings would be held in St Matthews Church, Bayswater, London W2,

- new legislation extending copyright for 20 years, so that Charles Williams' works will stay in copyright until 2015,

- the possibility of the Society buying publishing rights from Oxford University Press.

Brian Horne, the Hon Librarian, reported that the Society reference and lending libraries were now housed in his office at Kings College London. Appointments to use them should be made with him. He also referred to:

- the publication in the USA in 1995 of a book of essays entitled THE RHETORIC OF VISION edited by Society member Charles Huttar,

- the 1995 sub-committee's proposal that a selection of talks given to the Society and printed in the Newsletter should be published in book form. Dr Horne appealed to members to let him know of anyone generally well-known who had been influenced by Williams' writings, who might be willing to write the foreword.

- An appeal was also made for any musical members who might be willing to help with the 1995 celebrations.

Brenda Boughton, Hon Treasurer, presented copies of the accounts up to 28 February 1994. Over the past year expenses (about £940) had slightly exceeded income from subscriptions and donations (about £910). Mrs Boughton drew attention to the following points:

- this year's accounts would be audited for the first time in line with the Charity Commissioners' recommendation,

- the Society had opened a new deposit account which gave a higher rate of interest,

- the increased level of subscriptions would provide useful income for the 1995 celebrations. About two-thirds of members had renewed their subscriptions, and Mrs Boughton appealed to the remainder to do so too. The use of banker's orders was useful to the Society.

Molly Switek, in her last report as Newsletter Editor, said that five Newsletters had been published since the last A.G.M., containing talks given to the Society, book reviews and other items of interest to members. She reminded members that back copies were available for 50p + postage, and paid tribute to the help and support received from the Chairman and other Committee members, past and present, during the fifteen years she had edited the Newsletter. This was now to be carried out by Andrew Smith, and Mrs Switek wished him well with the work.

A bouquet and a cheque were then presented to Mrs Switek in token of the Society's gratitude for her work as Editor.

Eileen Mable, Hon Chairman, thanked all the Committee members for the work achieved during the year. She felt it had been a useful year of consolidation and looked forward to the anniversary celebrations in 1995. Mrs Mable referred to the need to encourage others with an interest in Charles Williams to join the Society, and reported that a Working Party was to be set up to consider practical ideas of how to achieve this.

The following members were elected to the Council for the next year: - Eileen Mable (Chairman), Gillian Lunn (Hon Secretary), Brian Horne (Hon Librarian), Brenda Boughton (Hon Treasurer), Lepel Kornicka (Hon Membership Secretary), Andrew Smith (Newsletter Editor), and members John Heath-Stubbs, Joan Northam, Anne Scott and Adrian Thomas.

Following the business of the A.G.M., most interesting reminiscences were given by those with a long-time and more recent interest in Charles Williams.

Council Meeting 11 June 1994 (brief report)

A short Council meeting was held immediately following the A.G.M. at Pusey House. Arrangements were made for Andrew Smith, who was welcomed as the new Newsletter Editor, to become a signatory on cheques drawn on the Society's account.

The Membership Secretary reported that this year's subscriptions are fairly well up-to-date though quite a number were still not paid. Council discussed ways of reminding members in future.

Details were reported from the 1995 sub-committee about meetings and arrangements therefor.

To be included in Council's next agenda, for fuller discussion: possible formation of a sub-committee to consider suitable ways to increase the Society's membership,

MOLLY SWITEK

How could adequate tribute possibly be paid to Molly? It seems presumptuous to try, so perhaps a simple, heartfelt 'Thank you' is the only way to begin. The Society has been fortunate indeed in such an excellent Editor.

Fifteen years as Newsletter Editor - the public face of the Society, so to speak - is a considerable service. Over the years many members have expressed appreciation of the great interest of its contents and of the opportunity to read the texts of talks, particularly for people unable to attend the meetings. The hope of publication of a selection of these in book form is a tribute to their first Editor. Technical difficulties involved in Newsletter production have been surmounted with cheerful efficiency, good sense and tact. Molly never seems flustered or too busy to pay careful attention to details and to other people's ideas, good or not-so-good.

In recent years her professional workload has increased and has required her to be out of England frequently. Newsletter requirements became hard to slot into her busy life and have only been fulfilled at considerable inconvenience and self-sacrifice. She has never let this show. She has been,

always, a delightful and charming colleague to whom, with good wishes for the future, tribute and thanks are justly due.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

We are delighted that Andrew Smith of Oxford has agreed to become Editor of the Newsletter in succession to Molly Switek. We are most grateful to Andrew and wish him all success in this new venture.

Eileen Mable.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Please note that the Membership Secretary has moved house. Her new address is listed on the back page.

St Cross Church, Oxford

The Society has received an appeal from the Rev. Alan Simmonds, at St Cross Church, Oxford, for contributions to the fund to repair the church roof. As we plan to hold a service at the church next year as part of the year's special events, the Council thought that members might value the opportunity to make their own contribution to the maintenance of the church where Charles Williams worshipped whilst in Oxford. Cheques should be made payable to 'St Cross Church Appeal' and sent to Mrs Joan Northam, 45 Reddown Road, Coulston, Surrey, CR5 1AP, whence they will be forwarded to Alan Simmonds.

The Marion E. Wade Center

Wheaton College, Illinois, has announced the appointment of Christopher W. Mitchell as director of the Marion E. Wade Center, which houses a large collection of books and manuscripts by Charles Williams and others, with effect from 1 July. Mr Mitchell teaches in Wheaton's Bible and Theology Department and is nearing completion of a Ph.D. in ecclesiastical history from the University of St Andrews. We congratulate him on his appointment and wish him every success.

Westminster Abbey Memorial Window

Gillian Lunn writes: There is no news about our hopes of seeing Charles Williams's name memorialised in Poets' Corner, but members may like to know that the first window was unveiled last month, beautiful bright deep-blue abstract swirls, sectioned for names. The first two names inscribed on it are those of Alexander Pope and Robert Herrick. The window is lovely but very high for reading. We had taken binoculars but still couldn't read the small print under the names - must be sure to take the ship's telescope next time!

* * * * *

BOOK REVIEW

CHARLES WILLIAMS: ESSENTIAL WRITINGS IN SPIRITUALITY AND THEOLOGY. Edited by Charles Hefling. Cowley Publications, 1993. Review by Dr Brian Horne.

Last year, to mark the centenary of the birth of Dorothy L. Sayers, S.P.C.K. published an anthology of Sayers' theological and spiritual writings selected and edited by Dr Ann Loades of the University of Durham. It is a reflection on the sad state of English religion and English publishing that a similar volume of Charles Williams' writings has appeared, not from a publishing house in the United Kingdom, but from the United States of America in the shape of Charles Hefling's anthology. Acutely aware of the fact that most of Charles Williams' prose work, apart from the novels, is unobtainable and of the need to introduce the thinking of this most original and brilliant English theologian to the reading public, Hefling has carefully selected substantial pieces of Williams' writing and introduced them with an informed and illuminating essay of his own on Williams thought. This book in no way tries to emulate or replace the invaluable collection of essays introduced and edited by Anne Ridler in 1958, THE IMAGE OF THE CITY; its purpose is quite different and, deliberately, more limited in scope. Whereas Anne Ridler offered the reader the whole range of Williams interests, Hefling has concentrated on the specifically theological writings. In THE IMAGE OF THE CITY most of the pieces were discrete essays gathered from a wide variety of

sources; Hefling's choices are a combination of essays and extracts from a small number of books: THE DESCENT OF THE DOVE, HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. Every anthologer knows that he (or she) will be criticised for not including the favourite passages of some of his (or her) readers, but this editor knows what he is about and nicely anticipates such criticism towards the end of his introduction as he explains the intentions of his own essay and so, by implication, the principles that have guided him in his choice of Williams' writings: 'Love and reconciliation, romance and forgiveness, are the twin poles around which I have tried to arrange this introduction. Its aim has been to give first-time travelers a map of some though by no means all of the landmarks in the terrain of Williams' theology - co-inherence, the Ways of Affirmation and Rejection, the holiness of material things, romantic theology, substitution, sin and forgiveness, Christendom.' (p.28) It looks like a fairly detailed map to me; and the landmarks certainly appear in the extracts that follow. Those who already possess the volumes from which the passages are drawn will probably not feel the need of this book, but it will be an excellent introduction for those who, as yet, have little or no knowledge of Williams. And there is the editor's introduction: perceptive and knowledgeable not only about Charles Williams but also about the state of contemporary Christianity: '. . . the quality that I think commends Williams' thought to the attention of Christians today is its wholeness. He brings together what to the fractious temperament of our time are irreconcilable opposites - doctrine and experience, creed and spirituality, what has happened in history and what is happening in the individual.' (p.27)

* * * * *

The current issue of THEOLOGY (July/August 1994; Pub. S.P.C.K.: ISSN 0040-571X) contains the text of 'Dante, Poet of Joy: A Celebration' by Barbara Reynolds. This was the Dorothy L. Sayers Centenary Lecture given in Durham on 29 April 1993. There are many references to Charles Williams in this fascinating text.

* * * * *

Following the Annual General Meeting, Anne Ridler spoke on 'Charles Williams: The Intelligence of Love'. We are very pleased to be able to reprint her talk in this Newsletter.

The phrase 'the Intelligence of Love' is taken from a translation of Dante's VITA NUOVA which Charles Williams was fond of quoting, probably from Rossetti. It is not idiomatic English, but because of the ambiguity it has a satisfying inclusiveness: broadly speaking, Dante is addressing those who are adepts in all that pertains to Love, human and divine: those who have news of Love, are wise in both the lore and the laws of Love. And this can stand for a description of Charles Williams's own work.

There is such diversity of form in Williams's work - literary criticism, theology, drama, lyric poetry, philosophical poetry, fiction - that the unity of thought which it displays, and the consistent development of his major themes, are the more remarkable. I could choose any of half a dozen aspects of his writing as my starting point for a survey, but as the Newsletter has been reprinting some of his early poetry lately, I will start by saying something about that.

He began writing as a post-Victorian, with echoes of Tennyson and Rossetti, and ended as a visionary in a tradition that has more in common with PIERS PLOWMAN than with the IDYLLS OF THE KING.

To start with a comparison. Charles Williams and W.B. Yeats both wrote sonnets inspired by that of Ronsard, addressed to his lady in old age ('Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir, a la chandelle'). Yeats's begins, you remember, 'When you are old and grey and full of sleep, And nodding by the fire take down this book', and it is a much-anthologised piece; Williams's, though forgotten, is I think worthy to be set beside Yeats's.

AFTER RONSARD

When you are old, and I - if that should be -
Lying afar in undistinguished earth,
And you no more have all your will of me,
To teach me morals, idleness, and mirth,
But, curtained from the bleak December nights,
You sit beside the else-deserted fire
And 'neath the glow of double-polèd lights,
Till your alert eyes and quick judgement tire,
Turn some new poet's page, and to yourself
Praise his new satisfaction of new need,
Then pause and look a little toward the shelf
Where my books stand which none but you shall read:
And say: 'I too was not ungently sung
When I was happy, beautiful, and young.'

I want to make two points in this connexion. Both poems read like early work, in a style far removed from their authors' later poetry. But in fact, while Yeats's was published when he was still in his twenties, Williams's appeared when he was nearly forty. Secondly, whereas Yeats's poem is remembered because of the great poetry he went on to write, Williams's earlier poetry seems to be ignored even by those who know and admire his Taliessin cycle: no collected volume has ever appeared; the early books were never reprinted, and have long been unobtainable.

One reason for this is that whereas Yeats's poem appeared in 1893, fitting comfortably into the era of the Celtic twilight, Williams's appeared in 1924, some seven years after Eliot's 'Prufrock' had been published (not to mention the work of Pound and the Imagists), by which time its style, and especially its diction, seemed out of date.

Yet I think it possible that to the perspective of future generations, this time-lag will not seem so important. For this early poetry, although its style might be derivative, does convey his vigorous personality and the great variety and originality of his thought.

Williams's first book, *THE SILVER STAIR*, was published in 1912, when he was 26, a sonnet sequence about idealised erotic love. (It was paid for by Alice and Wilfred Meynell, and the appreciative review which appeared in the Tablet is likely to have been theirs.) The passion expressed is so etherealized that when Williams put it into the hands of his beloved, as she has recorded, seeing that it was about Renunciation she thought: 'Oh dear, is he going into a monastery?', and wondered about visiting times in such places.

Three books of lyric and discursive poetry followed, in 1917, 1920 and 1924, the first two with the forbidding (and totally undescriptive) titles of *POEMS OF CONFORMITY* and *DIVORCE*, and then the more promising-sounding *WINDOWS OF NIGHT*. In these early books, especially the last-named, there is, as I have said, a great deal of enjoyable verse which no-one else could have written.

He began to write, naturally enough, in the conventions of the nineteenth century in which he grew up, and even in his maturity his poems retained something of that diction. He had great facility, and with his capacious memory and extensive reading he could borrow at will from many traditions, although when he borrows from the seventeenth century, the verse still has a nineteenth-century air. His sonnets show the influence of Rossetti and Swinburne; there are Chestertonian Ballades, Morris-like refrains, Miltonic inversions. But though the style may be derivative, the ideas are never so (unless sometimes in the Chestertonian love of paradox), and in the fourth book, *WINDOWS OF NIGHT*, there are signs of change to a more effective style. And where in Chesterton one sometimes feels that his refusal to take anything for granted has become an affectation, in Williams it was quite unforced. When he wrote a poem 'On Arriving Anywhere in Time for Anything' beginning 'How good the Universe can be,' or protested against being prayed for by a friend:

'But thou being once set firmly on thy knees
Bringst God's will on me in how many shapes'

Hallo no more those hounds upon my track:

They know thy voice; halt, turn and call them back' -
he was expressing his natural reaction.

In the poems, Williams explored some of the themes which were always to preoccupy him - among them the problem of 'God Almighty and evils unlimited' - an omnipotent Creator and the manifest evils of his creation. He wrote of this in the poem called 'The Two Domes' - domes which he could see from the window of his office at Amen House near St Paul's, where he worked for the Oxford University Press.

'What are those domes?' you asked in Clerkenwell.
And I 'One is the Old Bailey and one St Paul's,
Sitting up there like the broken halves of the shell
Of the egg of life, whose overspilt yolk we are.

Justice is perched on one, with her sword and scales,
And over her shoulder the ancient commentary,
The cross, in huge silence that neither hopes nor rails,
Peeps, all judgement's ironical overthrow.

This anticipates his great essay on the Cross, which I shall speak of later. And in the poem called 'Domesticity' there first occurs in his poetry the image of the web for the interrelationship of men with each other. Every ordinary household task as the poet performs it recalls to him the pain inseparable from human history.

O Earth's body, what pain
Tightens the whole fine nervous web? what ache
In the torn bloody past twitches our brain?
Is it in the mind alone that memory lives?

When we set match to the fire, the small flames scorch
Something other than wood: what inaudible cry
Rends my dumb spirit! 'twas thus they put the torch
To Joan's fire or Du Moulay's - thus? no, with this.

By contrast, Williams was sometimes oppressed by a sense of separation from the rest of creation, expressed in a fine

poem 'At a Tube Station', and there are half a dozen nightmarish poems which explore a state of positively evil separation, to be more fully imagined later, in the novels and the Taliessin poems.

Then there is the favourite theme of intelligent scepticism, later to be exemplified in the Arthurian cycle by the sympathetic character of Dinadan. We find an 'Office Hymn for the feast of St Thomas Didymus', and a rather long-winded ode to the Protector, or Angel, of Intellectual Doubt.

After WINDOWS OF NIGHT, Williams turned to his major work, on the myths of King Arthur, planned since his early manhood. It was to develop the hints and implications present in Malory's telling of the tales, but not fully understood by Tennyson and others. Though Williams worked on these poems on and off throughout his life, he did not live to finish the cycle - if indeed he ever would have thought it complete. The poems are difficult to understand, partly because of the subtlety of Williams's mind and his recondite learning, but also because after long brooding on the myth, he tended to leave out some of the connecting links which existed in earlier versions. But the beauty and truth of the poetry rewards an effort.

One of the major themes of the cycle, and central to Williams's thought, is what he called substituted love, or co-inherence. He first defined it in the prose book HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, published in 1938. In all the common actions of men, he points out, in their very birth and procreation, they are dependent upon one another, under God. 'From childbirth everyone who is not a god or a beast lives by that; there is no other way to live'. And within the web of being 'everyone and everything is unique, none is afore or after another, none is greater or less than another.' For our interdependence considered in social terms, Williams used the image of the City, and here his thought derives from St Augustine, and in particular Augustine's words in the CITY OF GOD about the nature of the Trinity and its reflection in the created order.

A brilliant poem on this theme is of course the 'Parable of the Wedding Garment', written late in Williams's life and published then in Time and Tide. But to continue our consideration of 'Taliessin' -

I could choose passages from a number of the poems to show how this image of the City pervades the cycle. One, which is a parallel to the Wedding Garment poem, is 'The Death of Virgil', where Virgil is upheld in the hour of his death by the intervention of his pupils - all who had taken life from him. They address him:

Virgil, master and friend,
holy poet, priest, president of priests,
prince long since of all our energies' end,
deign to accept adoration, and what salvation
may reign here by us, deign of goodwill to endure,
in this net of obedient loves, doves of your cote and wings,
Virgil, friend, lover, and lord.

Virgil was fathered of his friends.
He lived in their ends.
He was set on the marble of exchange.

Then there is 'Bors to Elayne: On the King's Coins' - and I remember that when W.H. Auden was Professor of Poetry here, he put down his script and recited a long passage from this poem by heart at the end of one of his lectures. Bors has had a vision of disaster, when the City's trade should be carried on for its own sake rather than for mutual good. Kay, the king's steward, does not see the danger - does not see that money may become man's master rather than his servant; but Taliessin sees the same danger in his own profession of word-wielding - how words can be valued just for their own sake (slogans, cliches etc) and become divorced from reality. (This was especially apparent in the 1930s when the poem was written.) Then the Archbishop expresses the doctrine of exchange in the true City.

We must live in the habitations of our lovers,
my friend's shelter for me, mine for him. . .

What saith Heracleitus, and what is the City's breath?
Dying each other's life, living each other's death.
Money is a medium of exchange.

(Note, a medium not the medium.)

Williams imagined also, in contrast to the divine exchanges of the City, their complete opposite - in the poems, this is the region of P'o l'u and the Antipodes; in the novels, the hell of entire self-absorption into which the character Wentworth falls, in DESCENT INTO HELL. And the final novel, ALL HALLOWS EVE, starts with a chilling evocation of the loneliness of a city without companionship. If you have read the novel, you will remember that striking opening. Lester Furnivall is standing on Westminster Bridge at night, just after the ending of the Second World War, looking down at a crashed plane in the river, and aware of a frightening silence.

All the lulls she had ever known were not as deep as this . . . She was alone with this night in the City - a night of peace and lights and stars, and of bridges and streets she knew, but all in a silence she did not know, so that if she yielded to the silence she would not know those other things, and the whole place would be different and dreadful.

Lester is in fact dead, and the reader guesses this before she does. When she does realise it, she goes through an experience of utter solitude, before learning companionship again through being yoked to a particularly unpleasant school-friend who had also been killed in the same plane crash.

But the whole novel, one might say, is about the restoration of the City, the restoration of co-inherence between human beings.

In the year following the publication of HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN (and, unfortunately, coinciding with the outbreak of the Second World War in the autumn of 1939) appeared

Williams's longest theological work, THE DESCENT OF THE DOVE. Its subtitle, A HISTORY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH, is typical of Williams's ironic style, mocking his own attempt at the impossible - that is, using finite terms to write of the Infinite. (The terms of theology, as he said, ought to carry meanings at once inside and outside time: but it cannot be done.)

This then is a history of Christendom, in which the narrative proceeds by examining developments in the Church's understanding of the nature of God, or Love. Thus, writing of the medieval discovery of courtly love, he says:

It began to be asserted that 'passion' precisely excited and illuminated the intellect, that it delivered from accidia, excited to caritas, and even (strangest reversal of all!) that such a passion could exist as or in marriage . . . In certain states of romantic love the Holy Spirit has deigned to reveal, as it were, the Christ-hood of two individuals each to other. He is himself the conciliator . . . but this is possible only because of the Incarnation . . .

The book proceeds to summarise the revelation of Beatrician love in Dante, which Williams was to examine in much greater detail in THE FIGURE OF BEATRICE, published four years later. In this, Williams traces the development of Dante's understanding, from the VITA NUOVA, through the CONVIVIO and the DE MONARCHIA, to the Divine Comedy itself. As he sums up the importance of the vision in his introduction:

The image of the woman was not new in (Dante), nor even the mode in which he treated it. What was new was the intensity of his treatment and the extreme to which he carried it. In his master's great poem - in Virgil's Aeneid - the image of the woman and the image of the City had both existed, but opposed. Dido had been the enemy of Rome, and morality had carried the hero away from Dido to Rome. But in Dante they are reconciled. . . . Since Dante the corrupt following of his way has spoiled the repute of the vision. But the vision has

remained. People still fall in love, and fall in love as Dante did. It is not unusual to find them doing it.

And, Williams goes on to say, the vision does not necessarily involve marriage. 'Adoration, and it is adoration of its own proper kind which is involved, may exist between all kinds of people;' and where it exists, 'there the proper intellectual investigation ought to exist.'

Outside the scope of my talk are the other insights shown in THE DESCENT OF THE DOVE - notably Williams's brief account of 'the quality of disbelief' which deals with Montaigne. As T.S. Eliot wrote, in reviewing the book for the New Statesman, 'the author's standpoint' (or, I should say, his imaginative sympathy with every kind of religious vision) 'enables him to consider without prejudice the contributions of heretics and schismatics, as well as those of saints and popes.' But ideas expressed in his last theological book, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, published in 1942, do fall within our scope.

This was another short book commissioned as part of a series (to which C.S. Lewis contributed THE PROBLEM OF PAIN), and it is concerned with love as active in divine justice. The central thesis is expressed even more effectively, I think, in an essay on the meaning of the Cross, so I shall quote from that in illustration. (The essay is included in a posthumous volume, THE IMAGE OF THE CITY.)

This thesis is perhaps the most daring of all Williams's theological statements: that God accepted crucifixion as atonement not only for the guilt of humankind, but for the suffering made possible, if not inevitable, by His own act in creating the world.

The daily newspaper The Independent recently published a series of articles discussing this problem of human suffering, which ended with a Jewish rabbi saying that the best we can settle for, since we cannot absolve God from responsibility, is to say that the case against Him is 'not

proven'. The Christian answer, of course, goes further, and is explored by Williams in this essay, entitled 'The Cross'.

Williams characteristically finds an unexpected source from which to open his argument - Joseph Conrad, who wrote in a letter that Love is 'the sole manifestation of the Almighty which may in some manner justify the act of creation.'

Williams comments: 'The last phrase is not perhaps one which would be used by the normal Christian. But the need for some such credible justification . . . is one of which even the normal Christian may . . . be very conscious . . . The original act of creation can be believed to be good and charitable; it is credible that Almighty God should deign to create beings to share His joy. It is credible that He should deign to increase their joy by creating them with the power of free will so that their joy should be voluntary . . . But it is not credible that a finite choice ought to result in an infinite distress; or rather let it be said that, though credible, it is not tolerable (to us) that the Creator should deliberately maintain and sustain His created universe in a state of infinite distress as a result of that choice.'

'This then is the creation that "needs" (let the word be permitted) justifying. The Cross justifies it to this extent at least - that just as He submitted us to His inexorable will, so He submitted Himself to our wills (and therefore to His). He made us; He maintained us in our pain . . . If, obscurely, He would not cease to preserve us in the full horror of existence, at least He shared it . . . This is the first approach to a sense of justice in the whole situation.'

And Williams adds: 'This is, I think, unique in the theistic religions of the world.'

And I should add, in parenthesis, that if Williams's language about our common agony should seem to some to be extreme, he did not exaggerate his own personal feeling: it was paradoxical, because he was a life-enhancing companion, as many have testified, yet he could never say the General Thanksgiving

for our creation and preservation without a sense of the irony implicit in the words.

But the essay does not leave the matter there, and what follows links the argument to the central theme of substituted Love with which we have been concerned. I quote again, and with the lines I will end my survey, inadequate as it inevitably is, of Williams's thought and his 'intelligence of love'.

By that central substitution, which was the thing added by the Cross to the Incarnation, He became everywhere the centre of, and everywhere He energized and reaffirmed, all our substitutions and exchanges. He took what remained, after the Fall, of the torn web of humanity in all times and places, and not so much by a miracle of healing as by a growth within it, made it whole.

(c) Anne Ridler 1994.

* * * * *

He teaches the Love of Love

Let not the man that hath a little gazed
On Love's good works be glad too easily.
Surely Love will not with lip-service be
In any wise accredited or praised.
Nor his interpretation may be raised
Beyond her office: his august decree
Is but to letter forth his dignity
Which they who reckon not, fear and are amazed.

No voice nor hand nor eyes that men's eyes saw
Shall in their hearts eternalize Love's law.
But they who serve their ladies, and adore
In them the visibility of Love,
Shall lose their wills from change, from them no more
Shall his invisibility remove.

(c) Michael Williams.

(The foregoing sonnet is No. XXXIII in Charles Williams's sequence THE SILVER STAIR, published by Herbert & Daniel in 1912. The 'He' of the title is the Lover whose progress we follow through the sequence.)

* * * * *
OFFICERS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

Chairman: Mrs Eileen Mable, 28 Wroxham Way, Harpenden, Herts AL5 4PP (tel: 0582-713641)

Secretary: Mrs Gillian Lunn, 26 Village Road, Finchley, London N3 1TL (tel: 081-346-6025)

Treasurer: Mrs Brenda Boughton, 44 Plantation Road, Oxford OX2 6JE (tel: 0865-515589)

Membership Secretary: Mrs Lepel Kornicka, 15 Kings Avenue, Ealing, London W5 2SJ (tel: 081-991-0321)

Lending Librarian: Dr Brian Horne, 11b Roland Gardens, London SW7 3PE (tel; 071-373-5579)

Newsletter Editor: Andrew Smith, 41 Essex Street, Oxford OX4 3AW (tel: 0865-727470)

* * * * *

COPYRIGHT

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

(c) Charles Williams Society 1994