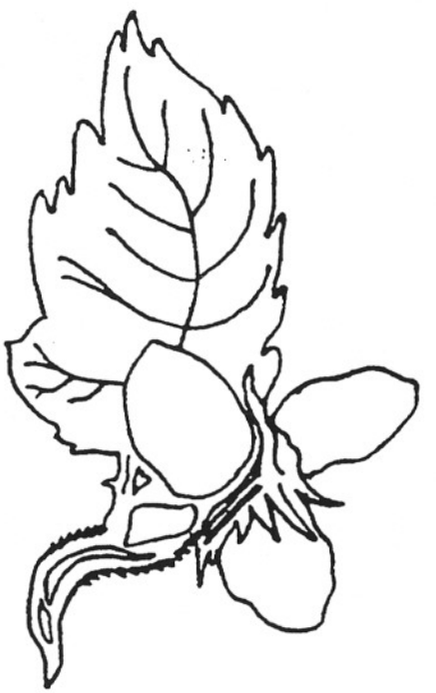
The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 79, AUTUMN 1995



CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Your attention is drawn to the new address for Brian Horne at the end of the Newsletter; this is effective from 18 December 1995.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following:

Donna Beales, 375 Aiken Ave #1, Lowell, MA 01850, USA;

Dave Davies, 3 Westford Road, Chelmsford, MA 01824, USA;

who are jointly responsible for the Charles Williams Home Page on the Internet (World Wide Web).

CW ON MASTERMIND

UK members may be aware that one of the contestants in the next series of the BBC quiz programme 'Mastermind' has chosen to answer questions on CW's life, plays and novels. The programme in which he will appear is likely to be broadcast on Easter Sunday; members are advised to keep an eye on the Radio Times as the date approaches in case of last-minute changes to the scheduling.

BY THE WEB MADE FREE

In the next issue it is intended to include a list of Arthurian and other locations on the Internet that might be of interest to members. If you have any such to suggest, please contact the editor. The curious can leave e-mail messages for him at arthsoc@sable.ox.ac.uk, if these are prefaced with the words PLEASE FORWARD TO GEOFF. Out of Oxford term-time, however, the Post Office remains the most efficent medium.

CHARLES WILLIAMS WORKSHOP AT ST ALBANS - SATURDAY 3 JUNE

About forty people, some Society members amongst them, attended this enjoyable and satisfying workshop which was organised by the St Albans Centre for Christian Studies.

In the morning Anne Ridler spoke on 'Charles Williams and T.S. Eliot: Christian Affirmation and the Quality of Disbelief'. In the afternoon Stephen Medcalf spoke on 'The Visions of Charles Williams'. Both lectures were

followed by interesting question and discussion sessions.

Before the lunch-break Ruth Spalding spoke about her friendship with Charles Williams and her work on the production of plays which he wrote for the Oxford Pilgrim Players. She then gave an introduction to a spirited dramatic reading of 'The House by the Stable' by the Festival Players.

After the workshop a small group of participants were shown over St Albans School by Mr Frank Kilvington, a former Headmaster. There was particular interest in the oldest parts of the school in the Abbey Gatehouse where CW spent his schooldays.

REPORT OF A COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 20 JULY 1995

Letters had been sent to all members whose subscriptions were unpaid informing them that their names would be removed from the Society's membership list unless payment was made. Ten names were removed.

Final arrangements were made for the all-day meeting of the Society to be held on Saturday, 30 September.

Council discussed the possibility of a short residential conference of the Society in 1997. It was agreed that a brief questionnaire should be sent to members to ascertain the amount of interest.

Charles Williams's name is included in the provisional list of names to be added to the Calendar when the Church of England's Alternative Service Book is revised for the year 2000. The Chairman will write to the Liturgical Commission in support of Charles Williams's inclusion.

CHARLES WILLIAMS AND THE ALTERNATIVE SERVICE BOOK

The Church of England plans to revise its Alternative Service Book for the year 2000.

Amongst proposals is one for the further names to be added to those already listed in the ASB under Lesser Festivals and Commemorations. Charles Williams's name is included in that new list. I have already written to the Secretary of the Liturgical Commission on behalf of the Society in support of Charles Williams's name being added to those already given a place under Lesser Festivals and

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

10 February 1996: The Festival Players, under the direction of Ruth Spalding, will present a reading of Charles Williams's unpublished play, FRONTIERS OF HELL, in the Church Room of St Matthew's Church, St Petersburgh Place, Bayswater (nearest Underground stations Queensway and Bayswater). Because this is a full-length play, the presentation will begin at 11:00 am, with an interval for lunch.

8 June 1996: The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held in St Matthew's Church Room at 11.00 am. After an interval for lunch, this will be followed by Grevel Lindop's addressing the Society on "Charles Williams and the Poetic Mind" at 2:30 pm.

9 November 1996: John Hibbs will give a presentation entitled "The Schizogenic Moment in 'Troilus and Cressida': 'This is and is not Cressid'" in St Matthew's Church Room.

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READING GROUP DETAILS ARE LISTED INSIDE THE BACK COVER.

Commemorations.

Members would, I know, be delighted if Charles Williams were given this recognition by the Church of which he was a life-long member. I must stress, however, that the list is provisional. Further, it is likely to be some considerable time before a final decision is made.

Eileen Mable.

THE SOCIETY'S AGM, 30 SEPTEMBER 1995 (some main points)

The Society held its Annual General Meeting on Saturday 30 September 1995 at St Silas's, Kentish Town. The meeting was chaired by Eileen Mable, and opened with a speech of welcome by the Parish Priest, Father Graeme Rowlands, who gave a brief account of the history of the church, and revealed that early volumes of the parish magazine contained a number of contributions from CW (it is hoped to reprint these in the Newsletter at some future date). Apologies for absence were received from David and Tilly Dodds, Lepel Kornicka, Martin Moynihan, Anne Ridler, Ruth Spalding, and Molly and Evek Switek. 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 for her hard work and help over the past year. She also regretfully reported the death in August of Simon Manley, who had been present at the Oxford celebrations and had been looking forward to taking a more active part in the Society after his recent retirement. Members wishing to write to his widow might do so at the address in the membership list.

She also referred to the new series of 'Mastermind' (see separate item) and to the C.S. Lewis Foundation in California, the Spring issue of whose catalogue of Inklings-related publications will for the first time include details of the Society and its publications.

In particular, she especially thanked two retiring members of the Council: Joan Northam, who convened the 1995 sub-committee and undertook so many jobs - publicity, negotiations and much else; and Adrian Thomas, who put in much hard work on the 1986 centenary celebrat-

ions, and was responsible for putting up the two commemorative blue plaques at CW's birthplace and in St Albans.

Brian Horne, Hon Librarian, reported that the Society's reference library had occasionally been used by visiting scholars in the past year. A lot of material (typescripts, copies of letters, &c.) remained uncatalogued - help with this would be welcome. Among new acquisitions, Barbara Reynolds had contributed T.S. Eliot's obituary of CW from the 'Times'.

Brenda Boughton, Hon Treasurer, presented copies of the accounts up to 28 February 1995. Over the past year, income from various sources (about £1405) had exceeded expenses (about £1195). Interest on the Building Society deposit account was responsible for some £60 of the income. Mrs Boughton hoped that it would be possible in the course of the current accounting period to pay back to deposit the £300 borrowed two years ago.

She also appealed for a volunteer to help with the job of Treasurer, which she had originally taken on as a temporary measure, and which, though not in itself arduous, was becoming more of a trial because of problems with her eyesight.

Andrew Smith, Newsletter Editor, reported that five issues had appeared since the last AGM. A number of innovations (coloured covers, competitions) had been made, and he invited comments and further suggestions.

A report from Lepel Kornicka, Membership Secretary, stressed the importance of ensuring that subscriptions were paid, since the Society cannot afford to carry passengers. Of UK members, 82 had paid their current subscriptions, 15 not; of overseas members, 48 had paid, 13 not. 28 had paid by banker's order, and one by covenant. Ten non-payers had been removed from the membership list, though one had since been reinstated.

Eileen Mable, Hon Chairman, reviewed the events of the year, including the 'Seeds of Faith' broadcasts on BBC Radio 4, tapes of which were sent by the BBC to Brian Horne and have been placed in the Society's lending library.

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 and Anne Scott.

Following the AGM, there was a reading, organised and introduced by Gillian Lunn, of the poems contributed by CW to his wife's two books of verse for the young.

During the lunch interval, Gillian Lunn led an expedition to gaze at the top-floor flat formerly occupied by the Williamses in Belsize Park.

In the afternoon, Canon Eric James spoke on 'Another's Glory: A Testimony to the Influence of Charles Williams'. The text of this and a report of the ensuing discussion will appear in the next newsletter.

The Society then adjourned to St Silas's Church, where a special sung Evensong was celebrated. This was followed by drinks in the parish room, after which the company dispersed to its homes.

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REVIEW: CHARLES WILLIAMS: A CELEBRATION, ed. Brian Horne, Gracewing 1995, 297pp. £9.99.

Telling the members of the Charles Williams Society who Brian Horne is, and who the eighteen contributors are, would be carrying coals to Newcastle. The Society saw and heard them and read the first printing of the papers in the Newsletter. The papers were collected in a book and published on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Charles Williams's death with the intention of bringing his works to a wider audience. Although Charles Williams considered himself to be primarily a poet, his poetry remains the least accessible part of his work. Whilst his novels and essays still have their readers, very few are apt and willing to undergo the toil of trying to comprehend his obscure Arthurian poems. Elisabeth Brewer is right in saying that TALIESSIN THROUGH LOGRES and THE REGION OF THE SUMMER STARS are

"the most distinguished and important rehandling of the Arthurian myths in the twentieth century" (p.112). As these Arthurian cycles are Williams's most important masterpiece, it might have been suitable to assign them more pages than only 38 out of 275. Elisabeth Brewer deals with 'Women in the Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams' (pp.98-115), quoting C.S. Lewis's commentary in ARTHURIAN TORSO eight times. Special attention is given to Williams's introduction of slaves, all of them female, who have no traditional place in the story of the Grail and do not appear in Malory's MORTE D'ARTHUR; they are 'sheer invention on Williams's part' (p.109), 'presented to us with so much sympathy, understanding and psychological realism' (p.112). Brenda Boughton takes up the theme of 'The Role of the Slaves in Charles Williams's Poetry' (pp.116-130). Her assertion that the Christian Church never condemned slavery is not true. Pope Paul III condemned it in 1537, Urban VIII in 1639, Benedict XIV in 1741, Leo XIII in 1888.

Williams's first book, THE SILVER STAIR (1912), a sonnet sequence on the subject of love, is analysed by Kerryl Lynne Henderson, whose doctoral thesis includes a critical edition of Williams's first four volumes of poetry; she hopes to publish a new edition of Williams's early poems in the near future. Williams's essays are dealt with by three papers, his drama, his novels and his biography JAMES I by one paper each.

I think the most valuable contribution in this volume is Stephen Medcalf's brilliant essay 'Objections to Charles Williams' (pp.206-217). Dr Medcalf puts the question: 'Why do people like or dislike Williams?' He begins by looking at four hostile critics: Kenneth Allott, F.R. Leavis, Robert Conquest and David Jones. The last adverse critic of Williams is also a great admirer of his, but he thinks his poetry is lacking in something: a sense of the contemporary, now-ness, actual-ness. In a digression of four pages (perhaps the most interesting part of this essay) Dr Medcalf shows 'that more harm has been done to Williams's reputation by the advocacy of two of his personal friends than by any

attack. I mean here Dorothy Sayers and, alas, C.S. Lewis. In spite of Lewis's marvellous gift for persuading one to read any poet whom he likes, this is no advantage when he distorts the meaning and tone as much as he does Williams's', viz. in his commentary on the Arthurian poems. C.S. Lewis's and Dorothy Sayers's misunderstanding by mistaken systematisation deters people from reading Williams. It is true, Williams is 'prone to being misconstrued'; he is 'at times so obscure as to ask for it' (p.213). But Lewis 's misinterpretation of Williams is primarily due to the difference of their minds: 'Lewis's genius for clarity, classification, dichotomy, Williams's for complexity, ambiguity, balance' (p.210).

The addition of 'one or two notes at the end' and the formulating of Dr Medcalf's 'own difficulties', promised at the beginning of his paper (pp.206-7), are absent. This might perplex those readers who are not members of the Charles Williams Society. The insiders, of course, know that of Dr Medcalf's paper 'Objections to Charles Williams', delivered in February 1978, only the first part was printed in the Charles Williams Society Newsletter, No. 33, 1984, pp.8-14, whereas the second part was never available and never published. This is regrettable, but it seems that after the lapse of six years (to say nothing of the lapse of seventeen years) the author reconsidered his case. But even the fragmentary paper as it now stands is worth reading and highly recommended.

There are some misprints and misspellings: p.4, read Haushofer instead of Houshofer; p.22, Huizinga instead of Huizinsa; p.30, Gerhardt instead of Gerhargt; p.34, evangelicalism instead of evengelicalism; p.44, us instead of use; p.50, Broceliande instead of Broceliande; p.50, Patroclus instead of Petrochles; pp. 57 and 279, Kepler instead of Keppler; p.174, Ransom instead of Hansom; p.277, Brecht, Bertolt instead of Bertholdt.

Gisbert Kranz, Aachen.

Laura H. Diviney writes, à propos of David Dodds' review of LOATHSOME JEWS AND ENGULFING WOMEN: METAPHORS OF PROJECTION IN THE WORKS OF WYNDHAM LEWIS, CHARLES WILLIAMS AND GRAHAM GREENE by Andrea Freud Loewenstein in Newsletter No.75:

"Williams, at the war's outbreak, urged friends 'to know co-inherence, including the enemy, including Hitler and he with us, and all in Christ,' Dr Loewenstein says (p.206), 'No mention was made of co-inherence with the Jews of Europe, or of Jews as anything but historical and religious symbols of the Antichrist.'" This quotation from David Dodds' review captured me and brought into tight focus both the meaning and the misunderstanding of Williams' powerful concept of co-inherence. It is an idea that may or may not be hard to grasp, but is extremely difficult to live - rather like learning and applying the teachings of Christ Himself.

Williams' definition of co-inherence is that "Christ gave his life for us, and his risen life is in each one if we will to accept it. Simply as men and women, without being self-conscious or portentous, we can share in this life within the divine co-inherence of the Trinity, and in so doing live as members one of another. In our degrees of power, intelligence, love or suffering, we are not divided from God or each other, for Christ's nature is not divided." This sublime concept runs smack into the divisions we humans build up between and against one another. To overcome our flawed and un-Christlike barriers is the hard work of faith, love and mercy being the hammers we use to tear down the false walls. Charles Williams, through his writing and speaking, also made himself a tool in the dismantling of humanity's coils of spiritual barbed wire. To be such a tool meant that he more often, like a good pastor or teacher, illumined the need for improvement rather than pointing out the obvious mastery. he was not a scolding fault-finder, but rather he encouraged where encouragement was necessary. The urging to know co-inherence with Nazis was such because they were the enemy. They behaved so as to be loathed and were so. To see ourselves as undivided from Nazis

because Christ's nature is not divided takes a huge soul full of compassionate love. Few of us have it.

But Williams' urging was true and good for us. He repeated, in terms just as stark but more current, the story of the Good Samaritan, of the Forgiveness of the Woman Taken in Adultery and Messias' mercy moaned out from the cross toward his tormentors. Through Luke, Jesus tells us "What father among you, if his son asks for bread will give him a stone, if he asks for a fish will give him a serpent? If you then, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit...?" What Dr Loewenstein misunderstands is that Jews were not seen as the enemy by the Allies. Though anti-Semitism scars the history of Europe like a pox with no nation exempt; in the conflict Williams and his friends faced, Nazis were the foes, not the Jews Nazis so horribly tormented. The natural response of his listeners in the Allied camp was to cut off Nazis from co-inherence and to, like the evil parent, give good gifts only to family members. This "family" included many nationalities and religions, too many to list here. It did not, however, include Nazis or their ilk.

For our spiritual health, Charles Williams championed that hardest of all tasks: the loving of our enemies and the doing of prayerful good to them who persecute us. He did not see Jewry as Europe's persecutor. This is why he didn't urge the co-inherence Dr Loewenstein expects.

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At the Society meeting in May, Canon A.M. Allchin spoke on 'Charles Williams and the Arthurian Legend'. We reprinted a first instalment in the last Newsletter; we are pleased to be able to reprint the remainder of his talk below.

II

I want to turn now to one or two aspects of Charles Williams' presentation of the story, in which in a

strange, but for Charles not altogether unpredictable way, he seems to show a knowledge of the historical situation of the original story which in fact he can scarcely have had. I am reminded, when I think of these things, of a remark made to me by a friend, many years ago, about Charles Williams' biography of James I. 'The remarkable thing about the book is' he said, 'that he seems to have known some facts about James' life which were only established some time after his book had been written.' By his curious capacity of intuition Charles seems at times to be able to see into the future. It was true of him, as it was true of Virgil, in Keble's words as quoted by C.S. Lewis, 'Thoughts beyond their thoughts, to those high bards were given'.(10)

To explain what I mean I want to look in more detail at what seems to me one of the finest and most satisfactory of all the Arthurian poems, 'Mount Badon'. I leave aside for the present the anachronism involved in making Arthur and Taliesin contemporaries, when they were probably separated in time by some fifty or sixty years. I accept the situation as it is posited in the poem. Arthur is Commander in Chief, Taliesin is a Captain of the Horse.

(Here Canon Allchin quoted 'Mount Badon' in its entirety; it is assumed that members have the text of this at their disposal.)

The diction is very typical of the later poems. 'Here and there snarled and gaudy,' as Anne Ridler dared to say in a letter to Charles Williams, and had been roundly rebuked.(12) I should be tempted to say 'chunky and jewelled'. But it is not so much the form of the poem that I want to speak about, as its content. The poem turns on a very typical Charles conviction, that present and past may be distinct but are not really separate. We have access to the past, just as what they did in the past certainly influences us. Here the poet, who is also a military commander, sees his Roman predecessor five centuries earlier. The insight of the one into his poetic art liberates the insight of the other into his

military art. The pen and the spear are transmuted into one.

Now we may well ask ourselves, would a sixth-century British poet, defending his country from the Anglo-Saxon invader, have that kind of insight, that kind of sense of identification with the Roman poet? Here is the answer of Saunders Lewis, one of the greatest Welsh writers of our century, poet, critic, literary historian, dramatist, politician, founder of Plaid Cymru. Saunders Lewis, of course, assumes that the historical Taliesin dates from the end and not the beginning of the sixth century, and that he is writing in what would now be southern Scotland, in the kingdom of Rheged. He is court poet to a British king Urien who, like Arthur seventy years before, is involved in constant warfare with the Anglo-Saxons. To understand his poetry, Saunders Lewis argues, you need to see his Welsh verses in the context of the Latin prose of Gildas, the only major Latin writer of the century in Britain, whose 'Ruin of Britain', 'De Excidio Britanniae', is a highly rhetorical denunciation of the sins and shortcomings of the British people, as the cause of their downfall. Saunders Lewis says 'We know nothing of Taliesin except through such poems as are with confidence attributed to him. But when one reads the poems and Gildas' 'Ruin of Britain' together, one notices more than one simile and many a phrase where the Latin and the Welsh are strikingly akin, and where the Latin is certainly a reminiscence of Virgil or of later Latin historians borrowing from classical Latin.' There are echoes, in particular of the Aeneid 'This book with its tale of the fall of Troy is constantly in Gildas' mind throughout his account of the Ruin of Britain.'

Saunders Lewis does not want to push his argument too far. 'But the evidence is there that Gildas and Taliesin were in touch. Hitherto Gildas has been left entirely to the historians. Welsh literary criticism has taken scant notice of him. I submit that Taliesin cannot be read apart from Gildas; the 'Ruin of Britain' provides not only a key to the understanding of Taliesin's panegyric, but reveals the mental climate, the cultural background

and body of traditional imagery in which the earliest Welsh poetry that we know had its formation.'

Taliesin is not of course Virgil. His verses can scarcely be concerned with his. And yet there is something there, in the exaltation of the ruler, the warrior, the leader of his people which corresponds with his thought. Taliesin established the idealised model of the Welsh Christian ruler. 'Panegyric ... is not merely or mainly fulsome flattery. It is also idealisation; it establishes an ideal, a standard of behaviour. So it is essentially creative.'(13)

Now, not all Welsh scholars are as daring or as visionary as Saunders Lewis, there are those who would deny that we can know anything significant about the historical Arthur and who would be much less adventurous in their interpretation of the work of the historical Taliesin. But we are not obliged to take the advice of the most cautious, and even those who would disagree with him would have to recognise that Saunders Lewis was a man who combined great scholarship with great poetic intuition, and could therefore be, at times, an inspired exponent of the Welsh tradition.

Meanwhile we can turn to other fields for corroboration of this sixth-century Welsh sense of solidarity with Roman predecessors. In all the surviving Welsh Christian inscriptions from this period - the great majority of them on tombstones - there are just two which express themselves in Latin verse. The first, which comes from near Carmarthen, is reliably dated to between 520 and 540; the period in which Arthur would have been fighting the last of his battles. It is a remarkable testimony to the survival of a sense of civic pride and civic order, more than a century after the Roman armies had been evacuated from this island. The inscription reads:

Servatur Fidaei, Patriaeque Semper Amator,
Hic Paulinus Iacit Cultur Pientissimus Aequi.

'A guardian of the faith, of his homeland always a lover, here Paulinus lies; a most conscientious observer of all that is right.'(14) It is not great poetry. There are in its phrases slight reminiscences of Ovid and Lucan.

Some of its terms can be paralleled in continental inscriptions from Gaul in the preceding century. Surely, in giving the impression of such an ordered and established society in sixth-century Britain it was either very old-fashioned or excessively optimistic. Yet it is there. Virgil is not all that distant. That is the Roman side of the coin. The other side of the coin is represented by the other Latin verse inscription still extant. This comes from much further inland, not far from Brecon. Its date is about a century and a half later, towards 670 or 680. You will see at once that we have entered another world. The inscription reads:

In Sindone Muti Iorwerth Ruallanque Sepulchris
Iudicii Adventum Spectant in Pace Trememdum.

'Silent in the shroud, Iorwerth and Ruallan await in peace the awesome coming of judgement.'(15)

The securities of this world have passed away. We find a world where the eternity of judgement faces us starkly. Yet the capacity to write verse and Latin verse has not altogether disappeared. The lines have an imaginative strength to them which their predecessors lacked, and though the prospect of judgement inspires awe, in the faith of Christ the two princes can rest in peace.

III

I do not know of any other place in the Arthurian poems where Charles Williams shows the same astonishing insight into the particular situation of early Britain. In general the picture of society given in his Arthurian poems is that of a more or less undifferentiated middle ages. He was clearly not at all concerned with historical accuracy of detail in his depiction of Arthur's Logres. In fact the name itself reveals a kind of incoherence in his design. Logres is the mediaeval French for 'Lloegr', the ordinary Welsh name for England, the island of the pirates and marauders whom Taliesin is resisting. The name for the island as a whole, which we marauders have shared for so long with our old opponents is 'Prydain', Britain, a name which we have taken from them.

But there are a number of other places where Charles Williams shows a remarkable sensitivity to that world of Celtic Britain, so much more of which had been explored and discovered during the last two generations. I would mention first two features of his understanding of the religious situation of that early period. First, it has a double reference point outside itself, both in Rome and in Byzantium, both in western Christianity and eastern. It seems to me increasingly clear that the Churches of the Celtic world, of Wales and Ireland, of Scotland and Brittany, in the years of their comparative isolation from the rest of Christendom, nevertheless looked both to Rome and to the East for inspiration and guidance. To make Celtic Christianity essentially anti-Roman, is to read back into the first millennium conflicts which arose only at the time of the Reformation and is of no help in understanding the situation in the early centuries. Rome, in the first millennium, was known in western Christendom as the city of the apostles Peter and Paul, a place of pilgrimage, and it is very clear that many longed to make that journey to Rome. It is true that the Churches of the Celtic world did not feel the direct and immediate dependence on Rome which was experienced in Anglo-Saxon England, the natural consequence of the foundation of the Sees of Canterbury and York, by a mission sent by Pope Gregory the Great. But that difference, though significant, was neither deeply divisive, nor overwhelmingly important.

On the other hand it is also clear that the Celtic Churches felt very close ties with the Christian east, not so much with the empire in Byzantium, as in Charles Williams' vision, as with the monks of Egypt and the holy places in Jerusalem. As the evidence accumulates it becomes much more clear that it is not merely romantic to see a particular affinity between central elements of Celtic Christianity and central elements of eastern Christianity. The figures of the two founding fathers of Egyptian monasticism, Paul of Thebes and Anthony of Egypt, on the high crosses of Ireland and in the praise poems of early mediaeval Wales point us in this direction

and mark out lines of connection.

Secondly, for Williams it is clear, not only in his Arthurian poems, but throughout his work in prose and in verse, that there are two great commanding doctrines in Christianity, doctrines which shape and colour our understanding of the whole of life and creation. They are the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, received, not as abstract intellectual formulas, but as patterns of life and understanding by which and through which we are to find our way in this world. The doctrine of the Trinity, interpreted in terms of perichoresis and co-inherence; the doctrine of the two natures in Christ interpreted in the same way. These are, for Charles Williams, central and all-commanding doctrines. So, in 'The Founding of the Company' he writes of its life:

> 'Therefore its cult was the Trinity and Flesh-taking,
> and its rule as the making of man in the doctrine of
> Largesse,
> and its vow as the telling, the singular and mutual
> confession
> of the indwelling, of the mansion and session of each
> in each.'

Later in the same poem he speaks of the vision of the end:

> 'In the land of the Trinity, the land of perichoresis,
> of separateness without separation, reality without
> rift,
> where the Basis is in the Image and the Image in the
> Gift
> the Gift is in the Image and the Image in the Basis,
> and Basis and Gift alike in Gift and Basis.'(16)

I think it will not be difficult to show that this was also the case for the Celtic Christian world, certainly in Wales. It so happens that much the earliest religious poem which we have in Welsh dates from the ninth century and is a poem that praises the Trinity both through and

for the wonders of creation and redemption. It is a poem which both in form and content demonstrates how short-sighted we should be if we supposed that the material limitations and the military disasters of that period implied any lack of vision on the part of its people into the deep things of God. It is not I think a poem of which Charles Williams was aware; it was scarcely available in English before the 1960s.

But to demonstrate the Trinitarian quality of this early Welsh poetry one is not dependent on any single poem. It is a constantly recurring theme. To praise the Trinity in and through the whole creation, and thus to follow the way of affirmation, is the prime function of early Welsh religious verse and it is set in motion through an interaction between the way of renunciation and the way of affirmation, for much of this writing comes from a monastic milieu. There is, as Oliver Davies remarks, 'A deep intuition of the unity of Trinitarian doctrine with the fertile multiplicity of the natural order ...' A living and functioning doctrine of the Trinity which expresses the multiplicity as well as the unity in the divine nature tends to carry with it a strong sense of the diversity, the richness and the dynamic character of the created order. 'Monism which conceives of God strictly in terms of unicity, obscures the vitality of the created order with all its diversity, while a living Trinitarian theology which stresses the place of otherness within the Godhead itself celebrates the abundance of things.'(17) Oliver Davies cites Maximus the Confessor, Hildegard of Bingen, Bonaventure and Father Sergei Bulgarkov as theologians of this type. He might well have added the name of Charles Williams.

IV

The Arthurian poems contain a remarkably varied and rich statement of Charles Williams' vision of God, humanity and of the whole of creation in which humanity is placed. A prime place within them is taken by the figure of the king's poet Taliesin himself, the poet who is both seer and theologian, the poet whose very art is an expression

of the human vocation, to be at once prophet, priest and king.

That vocation is established in the multiplicity of things carefully and lovingly observed and recorded. it rises up to the very heights of Godhead, into the land of the Trinity. In his description of the poet's calling and craft, a description which at many points reflects his own lived experience, Charles Williams again comes closer to the original early Welsh sources than he can possibly have known. There too that calling, consciously accepted and affirmed, is understood as a sacred office and a sacred task. There too, in poems which often come from a monastic setting, one can observe, as in Charles Williams, an intimate and fruitful interaction between the way of affirmation and the way of renunciation, the doctrines of creation and the doctrines of redemption, the pre-Christian and the explicitly Christian elements.

The historical Taliesin was a court poet of the sixth century, singing the praises of the ruler, but in the course of the following centuries a whole body of visionary poems, of very varying quality, some clearly pre-Christian, became attached to his name. How that pre-Christian vision was baptised and developed in the poetry of the early centuries in Wales is something which will be illuminated by work at present in progress on this early period. It is a story from the remote past which, I believe, will throw light onto the particular character of the poetry of Charles Williams in the twentieth century. It is also a story which can receive illumination from the achievements of a poet such as Charles Williams as he struggles to carry forward this calling in times which have been in many ways unpropitious.

We can illustrate these points by some lines from the poem called 'The Calling of Taliesin'. They are lines which come quite early in the poem, Taliesin is still a youth at home in the Wye Valley. He has not yet set out on the journey to Byzantium. Yet already he is practising the art of natural contemplation, delighted and accurate celebration of the world in all its multiplicity; and already he has heard the call of the desert

a rumour of another possibility of liberation from the circle of birth and death and rebirth. It is a rumour which has come from the deserts of Egypt to the valley of the Wye, and it is historically true that part of south-east Wales was already, in the late fifth century, a centre of monastic life inspired from the Christian east.

But let us leave the history and see how it is transposed into myth:

In Elphin's house he grew and practised verse;
striving in his young body with the double living
of the breath in the lung and the sung breath in the
brain,
the growing and the knowing and the union of both in
the showing,
the triune union in each line of verse,
but lacking the formulae and the grand backing of the
Empire.
Yet then his heart, ears, and eyes were wise
from Druid secrets in the twilight and the sun-dawn;
his hearing caught each smallest singular cry
of bird and beast; almost he talked their talk;
his sight followed each farthest flight, each small
insect-dance-pattern in the air; he knew
correspondence and the law of similitudes; he had seen
the cauldron
of poetry and plenty; he heard now dimly
of the food that freed from the cycle, of the butteries
of the monks
and the baps and beans of hermits in Thule and the
Thebaid.
When Elphin asked him his lineage, he sang riddling:
'My heritage is all men's; only my age is my own.
I am a wonder whose origin is not known.
I carried in battle a banner before Lleon of Lochlin,
and held in the sleeping-chamber a mirror for his
queen.
I am more than the visions of all men and my own
vision,
and my true region is the summer stars.'(19)

NOTES

10. ARTHURIAN TORSO, p.121.

11. ARTHURIAN POETS: CHARLES WILLIAMS, ed. D. Llewellyn Dodds (Cambridge 1991), pp.33-4.

12. IMAGE OF THE CITY, p.lvii.

13. SAUNDERS LEWIS: A PRESENTATION OF HIS WORK, ed. Harri Pritchard Jones (Illinois 1990), p.224.

14. Charles Thomas, AND SHALL THESE MUTE STONES SPEAK? POST-ROMAN INSCRIPTIONS IN WESTERN BRITAIN (Cardiff 1994), p.104.

15. Ibid. p.322.

16. Ibid. p.211.

17. Oliver Davies, RELIGION, LITERATURE AND SOCIETY IN MEDIEVAL WALES (forthcoming). I am grateful to my friend Dr Davies for permission to quote from this work to be published towards the end of 1995.

18. ARTHURIAN POETS, pp.102-3.

19. 'The Calling of Taliesin', ll.32-54.

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COMPETITION

Although Charles Williams briefly reviewed a great many detective novels and thrillers in the News Chronicle from 1930 onwards, apparently it never fell to his lot to deal with Dashiell Hammett's THE DAIN CURSE (1st UK pub.

Cassell 1931), with its sham Temple of the Holy Grail. Members are invited to remedy the deficiency by writing a CWesque review of the book in about 100 words and sending them to the editor by 1 February 1996. If no copy of the Hammett is available, any other modern crime novel involving the Grail will serve. A copy of THE FIGURE OF BEATRICE (only the 1958 reprint, alas!) will be awarded to the contributor of the best review. (Competition suggested by David Dodds, to whom be both the glory and the blame.)

The last competition elicited four entries (one from a non-member), which covered a wide variety of topics. They included a meditative sonnet entitled 'Nightfall on Anglesey', an unabashed demand for the prize ('Give me the books!') and a piece of (let us hope) unprovoked vituperation, concluding:

Whatever fates attended at thy birth
Cannot too speedily attend thy death.

However, the prize was won by Richard Jeffery with the following:

To past and present saints the Church gives praise,
Known and unknown; but God has yet more saints
Hid in the stores of time; one who now faints
And flounders in the slough, in future days
May walk untroubled these same dangerous ways
Lightly threading the maze, untouched by taints
And filths, needing no guides and no constraints,
Showing the freedom Love Himself displays.

We, still mired, glimpse Love in each other's acts,
Fitfully Love shows here in flesh on earth,
The Word is incarnated through our breath;
Repented sins redeemed as glorious facts,
Lives being shaped to new life in new birth,
What leads toward death to what leads beyond death.

READING GROUP DETAILS:

LONDON

For information please contact Richard Wallis, 6 Matlock Court, Kensington Park Road, London W11 3BS (0171-221-1416).

OXFORD

We celebrate our fifteenth anniversary on 12 December. Our current reading at large in THE IMAGE OF THE CITY has now left us only the Arthurian section to deal with. For more information, please contact either Anne Scott (Oxford 53897) or Brenda Boughton (Oxford 515589).

CAMBRIDGE

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

DALLAS CATHEDRAL

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

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