The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

NO. 19, AUTUMN 1980

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

22 November 1980: Brian Horne will talk about The Descent of the Dove.

21 February 1981: The Lighter Side of Charles Williams - readings and discussions from his contributions to periodicals.

6 June 1981: AGM

5 September 1981: CWS one day London conference.

Society meetings are held at 2.30 at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W.1. (North Audley Street is the second turning to the right, south, off Oxford Street, going from Marble Arch towards Oxford Circus; after Grosvenor Square it becomes South Audley Street. Another convenient access is from Park Lane.)

Each meeting is followed by discussion and tea. Please bring copies of any books which might be referred to at a meeting. There is no fee for members, but 50p must be paid for a guest (each member may bring one guest) and this should be handed to the person in charge of the meeting.

The Society's Lending Librarian brings a selection of library books which may be borrowed by members.

MEETINGS OF THE S.W. LONDON GROUP OF THE SOCIETY

For information please contact Martin Moynihan, 5 The Green, Wimbledon, London SW19. Telephone: 946 7964.

LONDON READING GROUP

29 March 1981: This meeting will be held at Alice Mary and Charles Hadfield's house, 21 Randolph Road, London W9, starting at 1pm. Please bring sandwiches. We will continue reading The Descent of the Dove.

C.W.S. SUMMER CONFERENCE 6 SEPTEMBER 1980: C.W. AND THE CITY

The Society held a most succesful and enjoyable conference in the church of St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe in central London. Charles Hadfield set the scene of CW at Amen House and Anne Ridler followed with a talk on the idea of the City in CW's thoughts and writings. Both talks are reproduced in this Newsletter. At lunchtime, Charles Hadfield led a group out in the bright sunshine down St Andrew's Hill, past the site of Edward III's storehouse (the Wardrobe from which the church is named), through Dean's Court and past St Paul's Cathedral. Then we went across Ludgate Hill and down Ave Maria Lane to see Stationers Hall where the publishers used to meet and to look at Amen Corner, the site of Amen House in Warwick Square and the remnants of London Wall. We then walked down Newgate Street, past the Old Bailey and the entrance to the courtyard, back to Ludgate Hill and St Andrew's. We returned after lunch to a very pleasurable reading of Judgement at Chelmsford. A few parts had been allocated beforehand but the remainder were read in turn by the members present. We were very pleased to welcome Mr de Mello Moser, a Society member from Portugal who was able to attend.

All the arrangements went according to plan, particular thanks go to Brian Horne for arranging the meeting place and the refreshments, Charles Hadfield and Anne Ridler for their talks and the lunchtime walk, and Hilda Pallan for overseeing the playreading, and of course to the many members who attended.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

Richard and Geraldine Pinch, Summertown House 56, 369 Banbury Road, Oxford.

Judith Kollman, 609 Chandler Street, Flint, Mi 48503, U.S.A.

Leslie Howard, IO Craiglee Drive, Coromandel Valley, South Australia 505I.

Dr Rhona Beare, Classics Department, Arts Building, University of Newcastle,
New South Wales 2308, Australia.

OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

Chairman:	Richard Wallis, 6 Matlock Court, Kensington Park Road, London WII 3BS. (22I 0057)
Secretary:	Mrs Gillian Lunn, 26 Village Road, Finchley, London N3 ITL. (346 6025)
Treasurer:	Philip Bovey, I02 Cleveland Gardens, Barnes, London SWI3. (876 37I0)
Membership Secretaries:	Jenet and Philip Bovey, address as above.
Lending Librarian:	Rev Dr Brian Horne, IIb Roland Gardens, London SW7 (373 5579)
Editor:	Mrs Molly Switek, 8 Crossley Street, London N7 8PD (607 79I9)

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CW AT AMEN HOUSE - Charles Hadfield

Stand with your back to Ludgate Circus, and look up Ludgate Hill. Behind you is the line of the old Fleet River, now New Bridge Street and Farringdon Street. On your left is a pub, 'The Old King Lud' - which may introduce us to the myth of the City, for from 'Lud' the name London is hopefully said to be derived. Half of the pub is under the railway bridge built in I865 by the London, Chatham & Dover Railway. Across from 'The Old King Lud', on your right and also under the bridge, is the site of Sherriff's Wine Bar and Restaurant where CW went when he could afford it. First came the long bar, where I remember sitting on high stools with Alice Mary and CW drinking hock and soda - a favourite of CW's in summertime. Behind was the restaurant where once - so CW's story went - a waiter had pleased him immensely by saying he had seen his beloved dropping light as she walked.

As we climb the hill, and just before St Martin's church on the left, we pass the site of Ludgate itself - it was pulled down in I760 - and through the City Wall enter Roman London, capital of Britannia that was once a province of Byzantium, capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. Ahead is Wren's St Paul's, upon the site of old St Paul's, upon the site of a pottery works the Romans built on one of the two hills of Londinium - the other is Cornhill - upon the site of a British village. All our work in the Oxford Press was done to the striking of Paul's clock and, once a week, bell-ringing practice.

How thankful we were in those days that after the great fire of London, the town planning of the time had come to nothing, and higgeldy-piggeldy London had been rebuilt with its lanes and corners and courts. When I joined the Press in 1936, our bit of it was London's book-publishing centre, though new fangled firms like Faber and Cape had set up in the West End. On the left going up Ludgate Hill, for instance, was Cassells in Belle Sauvage Yard. Beyond, Ave Maria Lane turns off to the left. A little way down it, again on the left, is Stationer's Hall, and beyond it, a turning to the left, Amen Corner. The old corner building here before the war - it is gone now - was the older office of the Press, where CW came to work in 1908, and where he remained until Amen House opened in 1924. I myself remember Amen Corner, later on, as then the headquarters of the book wholesaling firm of Simpkin Marshall. Working as I did in a bookshop before joining O.U.P., I used to go there with my list of orders and a sack over my shoulder to collect the books we wanted from Simpkin's trade counter.

Opposite Amen Corner, to the right, was the beginning of Old Paternoster Row running through to Cheapside, narrow, huddled with publishers, bookshops and all manner of firms that depended upon print and paper for a living. No.34 was the address, for instance, of the ramshackle kingdom over which presided the erratic Walter Hutchinson. He called his firm the 'biggest publishers in the world', but we in the Oxford University Press knew better. Ave Maria Lane now becomes Warwick Lane. Further along on the right was narrow White Hart Street leading into Old Paternoster Square, where was a pub, the 'Red Cross', where, when I could afford it, I stood Alice Mary a half pint of beer. Further still along Warwick Lane, on the left, was a sharp turning into Warwick Square. On the left, the offices of Hodder & Stoughton, the publishers; on the right a carpet warehouse, and in the centre usually a welter of vans loading or unloading carpets.

At the far end was eighteenth century, brick-built Amen House, its windows a little out of true, to which the Press had moved in 1924, and which, except during the War, remained its London headquarters until 1965. It had been two adjacent houses, and still had two front doors, that on the left was the entrance, that on the right led to the music department. The site was historic, for half way down the basement stairs, visible behind glass, was a piece of Roman Wall. Behind Amen House, a modern seven-storey building had been put up adjoining the Old Bailey, part offices, part warehouse for the Press's stock of three-quarters of a million books. CW would have known its mysteries well, but by my time a great new warehouse had been opened miles away at Neasden, and the building's floors had become additional offices. When I became head of Juvenile Department in 1939, my room had an excellent view of prisoners being escorted into the Old Bailey in black marias - so had CW's below mine. To the left of the Amen House front door a passage ran to the trade counter where booksellers could go with their sacks and get the king of Oxford book that Simpkin Marshall didnot stock.

Up the three front steps and through the double entrance doors. On the left are the brightly-polished handles of the showroom door. The showroom is presided over by Mr Jo Mash and Miss Poppy Cattell of the ever-golden hair. There customers can inspect Bibles large and small and medium in every kind of plain or fancy leather binding, pra yer books ditto, or leather bound editions of the World's Classics or Oxford Standard Authors. An Oxford India paper Bible is kept hung from a clip by a single leaf, to show the strength of the paper. There also is a range of the rather incongrous juvenile books produced by a learned Press - Biggles, Dimsies, Annuals, Rewards and the rest. On the right of the hall, opposite the showroom doors, is a beautiful waiting room with fine furniture, a decorated plaster ceiling and Adam fireplace and, leading off it, the social - as differentiated from the administrative - centre of the Press, the Library.

Before we leave the Hall, however, we must meet two Press characters: 'Sergeant', elderly, scarred of face from the First World War, and dignified of demeanour, who receives vivitors and, if necessary, transports them upwards in the small, hydraulically-powered lift which he works by pulling on a vertical cable running through roof and floor; and Miss Winnie Cox in the telephone cubby-hole next to the showroom, knitting interminable garments between calls. Miss Cox - happily she is still alive - made an internal telephone system almost unnecessary. If one wanted to know anything, one talked to Miss Cox.

The Library, long, low, beautifully furnished, book-lined throughout except where its front windows look out over Warwick Square, is in theory maintained for the reference use of the staff and so that members of the public can look at and, if they wish, buy Press publications. Before my time it had been presided over by pretty, vivacious, fair-haired Phyllis Jones. She had, however, left to get married, and I discovered a tall girl with piled red hair who doubled the job of librarian with that of Editor of the Oxford Dictionary of Familiar Quotations then being assembled - Alice Mary Smyth. Round these two - and on the front stairs leading up from or down to the Library - used to gather, on any excuse or none, the personalities of the Press, and the sound of their voices would penetrate to my first little room hidden behind the lift.

In a high-backed chair, grey-suited, grey-haired, bright-eyed, remote, watchful, might be the Publisher himself - Sir Humphrey Milford, the head of the Press, whom we called H,S.M. Walking briskly up and down, quick words pouring out, arms waving, would be Charles Williams from Editorial - often the active centre of the group, but never dominating it - a man who drew people in and then drew them out. Gathered round, arguing, questioning, fencing, might be long-haired Hubert Foss, Head of Music Publishing, a real musician; Lynton Lamb, chief Art Editor; Gerry Hopkins, big and burly, nephew of the poet, head of Publicity; strict-looking Fred Page, also from Editorial, who shared CW's room, short with curly grey hair; Helen Peacock, head of Production, tall, plain, honest-looking, blunt of speech, with piled untidy greying hair pulled back in a bun, always dressed in blouse and skirt, the battleaxe of the Press. She was the Press's German expert as Gerry was its French. CW's assistant, Ralph Binfield, might come in with a message, or one of Miss Peacock's assistants, Peter Burney or Jo Harris (on loan from Printing Office) might arrive to fetch her back to her office. On the outskirts could be found those who, strangely, often needed to use the library shelves - the aspirants, one of whom was me. Any of these might suddenly be called into the group to give an opinion, answer a question, in an offered moment of intellectual equality. Listening to the talk, we shall soon realise that some of the names flying about are unlikely to be real: 'Dorinda' for Miss Peacock, 'Alexis' for Gerry Hopkins, 'Colin' for Fred Page, 'Phillida' for Phyllis Jones and above all, 'Caesar' for Sir Humphrey. They date from two Masques that were written by CW for acting by his colleagues of the Press, and which were concerned with their common life and work in Amen House. We shall return to them.

Before we leave the library, let us note some revealing bits of the Press's presentation of itself to the public. There was a working table for the Librarian, and a carved one used by no-one but Caesar and special visitors. On it were a visitor's book, a clean blotting pad, a copper ink tray, a cabinet for stationery, a pen (quill at one time), twin goblets, and the current Times Literary Supplement, New Statesman, Nation and Athenaeum and Notes and Queries. The circumambient bookshelves contained most of the

books currently in print (except those held in the showroom) plus some special originals such as Clerendon's History of the Rebellion, upon the profits of which the Press had been founded. Beside the library, on the ground floor of the right-hand building, dwelt the Department presided over by Hubert Foss. In 1923 Foss had persuaded Sir Humphrey to start a Music Department. He did, and it flourished exceedingly. Foss did CW many good turns. Being a director of the printing firm of Henderson and Spalding, the Sylvan Press, he used his influence with them to print CW's An Urbanity, Carol of Amen House (for which Foss wrote the music), the two Masques that were acted, and also Heroes and Kings, which carries the Sylvan Press imprint.

Let us now walk up the broad, shallow staircase - or take the lift with Sergeant - to the first floor, that of authority. Over the library was a magnificent room with an Adam ceiling where dwelt the Publisher - Sir Humphrey Milford. I myself only entered it once - some two years after I had joined the firm. I had come in on the sales side, and had then gone onto dogsbody publicity work - until not long ago some of my jacket blurbs still survived on World's Classics volumes - but knew nothing of editorial of the processes of publishing. Sent for, I entered trembling, reviewing my past sins. H.S.M. waved me to a chair. 'Oh, Hadfield, yes', said he, putting his fingertips together. 'Do you know Mr L'Estrange'? - Mr L'Estrange was head of the large Juvenile Department, and with his friend Mr Ely, head of Educational, also wrote profitably and prolifically under the penname of Herbert Strang. 'No,sir', said I. 'Well', said he, 'He's retiring on 31 March, and you'll be taking his place. You'd better go along and meet him'. No question of whether I wanted the job or thought I could do it or of training for it or even mention of salary. Those were the days, and that was Sir Humphrey. In a room of his own sat H.S.M.'s male secretary, Mr Budgen, and across the way the staff manager, Mr Cannon. Both were Plymouth Brethren, with close-cropped hair. Cannon - aptly named - was the man we battled with to get a rise, and a battle it was. He defended the Press's funds with a zeal that was just occasionally mistaken - I'm thinking of Tommy Sycamore from Miss Peacock's team who, asking Mr Cannon for a modest increase, was given one shilling and sixpence a week. He resigned, and went on in later years to become Managing Director of the Oxo combine.

On the first floor was Gerry Hopkins in Publicity, and also Dorinda - Miss Peacock - presiding over Production, the Department that received manuscripts from the Editors and got them estimated, designed and prepared for the printing office. In a corner Caesar's letters were press-copied. We lesser mortals used carbon-paper, but Caesar's were put into a press between sheets of a sort of flannel and so facsimile-copied in the way James Watt had invented about 1800. No need to modernise if you are Caesar. Charles Williams, coming up from the library, would have gone straight to the second floor. On coming out of the lift, he would have passed the binding office on his left, gone at high speed through a swing door, turned right along a corridor, and passed the printing office before reaching his own room, which was immediately above Gerry Hopkins, and looked out on the Old Bailey courtyard. He shared it with Fred Page. CW, in his swivelling and tippable chair, sat on the right, Page on the left. Beside CW was a hatstand upon which he would hang his coat and hat - he always wore a homburg - and slap his gloves, as soon as he entered. Page - the 'Colin' of the Masques, and cleverly named, because when young with a mop of hair he'd been known to contemporaries as 'Curly' - was the biographer of Coventry Patmore. He was a Roman Catholic, and also a great reader of Swedenborg. Between the two desks was a chair for visitors, and above that file copies of all the Oxford Poets, containing every reported correction, ready for the next reprint. A similar set of nearly 500 World's Classics were on the shelves behind Fred Page, together with his favourite books - Alice Meynell, Chesterton, Swedenborg. Behing CW was a miscellaneous collection, including Middleton Murrey, Malory and, later, T.S.Eliot. Along the south wall were all the Oxford Standard Authors, Oxford Books of Verse, and a portrait of Henry James; and down behind CW's chair was a litter of his own manuscripts in wooden boxes. There wasn't a spare inch anywhere - the overflow of books from the room was guarded by Ralph Binfield next door. Although Ralph was CW's assistant, his and Page's room had no space for a third so Ralph was accommodated in two square yards of the printing office. Earlier, at Amen Corner, CW and Fred Page had themselves had to work in a corner of the printing office - there's a reference in a poem in Divorce to 'Seven spiders each spinning its separate web in the same corner', the corner being Amen Corner.

Two people on this second floor played a special part in CW's life. Jo - Jocelyn -

Harris was a typist in printing office. One day she asked CW for 'a book to read', and he disinterred the manuscript of The Corpse from his wooden box where it had lain since Jonathan Cape had rejected it. Jo liked it and rekindled CW's enthusiasm. So he sent it to Victor Gollancz, who sat up all night reading it. However, Gollancz thought the title too conventional, so CW, his mind full of Paradise Lost, changed it to War in Heaven. Thus began the publication of the novels.
The other was Norman Collins, who filled a tiny office - it had once been a broom cupboard - off a stone staircase near CW's room. Collins - the 'Menalcas' of An Urbanity - was a great friend of CW's when he left the Press - like Tommy Sycamore later, after a difference of opinion with Mr Cannon about his salary - he went to join Robert Lynd on the old News-Chronicle's literary page, whence he would send CW batches of detective novels to review. Later still he went to Gollancz while the firm were publishing CW's novels, and thence to a career as a novelist, to be a founder of commercial television, and to be awarded a knighthood.

So much for background. I'd like now to try to assess what working for O.U.P. did for CW, and what CW did for the Press, and then seek a synthesis. We've seen the help CW's literary work received from Hubert Foss, Jo Harris and Norman Collins. There was also Fred Page and of course Milford himself. Page it was who introduced CW to his friends Alice and Wilfred Meynell and gave them the manuscript to read of what was to become The Silver Stair. As we know, they agreed to finance that first of CW's published books. That was in 1912. Thereafter, Milford thought enough of his employee to publish his next four books, Poems of Conformity, Divorce, Windows of Night and A Myth of Shakespeare, between 1917 and 1929. Not until 1930, when CW was 44, did he first have a book published commercially - when, thanks to Jo Harris, Gollancz accepted War in Heaven. Thereafter, CW received the accolade of the learned Clarendon Press imprint (part, of course, of the same firm) for Poetry at Present(1930), The English Poetic Mind (1932), and Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind (1933), while Milford between 1931 and 1939 published four more of his works, and a last one as an epitaph, Arthurian Torso. Twelve altogether, therefore, bore Oxford imprints. CW is, of course, only one of many authors who would probably have got fewer books published had they not worked in a publisher's office. I can perhaps appreciate the help CW had from his position in the firm, for it was the same with me: three out of the five books I wrote while working for the Press were published by them, including the first. I can never be sufficiently grateful - though I fear Sir Humphrey never appreciated the genius he was rearing.

What, in turn, did CW contribute? Let us take his work first. He and Fred Page were what a publishing firm would now call Book Editors. On the executive side, they had to work through every manuscript to correct mistypings and wrong spellings, pick up inconsistencies and words used in their wrong meaning - like 'intriguing' for 'interesting' - and make sure it was house-styled - that is, words were spelled not only in a uniform way throughout the book, but in conformity with the standard for all Oxford books. When proofs came in - three lots sometimes in those expensive days - first unpaged galleys, then paged proofs, then final queries on any point on which the head printer's reader (who was also checking on his own account) was not satisfied - CW or Page read them too. Ralph Binfield says that before he joined the Press, CW and Page had between the proof-read the whole of Dickens, Scott and Thackeray. Later, with him, they added the whole of Trollope, Tolstoy, Constance Holme and Peacock's English Verse in five volumes.
CW's job was also to advise on any manuscript sent to him from H.S.M.'s office - such titles as Flora Thompson's Lark Rise books and Mrs Hughes' London Child of the Seventies came to Oxford this way. When a manuscript was clearly one for a specialist, one was

chosen, and the work sent on for a report. Were the manuscript accepted, CW then compiled the preliminaries or 'prelims' - the pages that come before the start of the text - wrote blurbs - publicity copy - for book jackets, and in early days compiled indexes, until later he shed that job on to Ralph Binfield. Indeed, CW's responsibility began with the manuscript or the previous edition of the book, and ended when the bound and jacketed copy was placed on his desk, and he waited apprehensively lest H.S.M. should find a misprint in it.

I myself sat for a time on two committees with CW - one for selecting new titles for the World's Classics - CW was more or less in charge of the series, including choosing authors to write the introductions - the other for deciding which of the many books coming in from the American University Presses were worthy of being published - as against merely distributed - over here. On the first, wet behind the ears as I was, still I knew enough to be astonished at the range of his reading. On the American committee he could pick up a fat book, concentrate upon it for sixty seconds, and give an opinion. Those of us who heard Dr Routley talk at the Society's A.G.M. will remember his distinction between two methods of communication - pencil-passing and ball-tossing. I'm a pencil-passer and I know it, but CW was a ball-tosser - ideas, comments, warnings, hopes, would be tossed on to the table to be picked up - or not. A decision made, he accepted it good-humouredly, and on we went to the next item. He was a good committee man. Alice Mary remembers CW on the committee choosing entries for the first Dictionary of Familiar Quotations. She writes: 'CW generally tilted his chair back horribly dangerously, and smoked, took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes ... and was always perfectly clear and accurate about every quotation. Sometimes he would exclaim: 'But the best bit has been left out', or 'Flared', not 'stared' - 'Good God in Heaven, "Flared forth in the dark"'. 'CW', she goes on, 'knew everything, particularly on Shakespeare (all of him), Milton and Wordsworth, Malory, Marlowe and the Elizabethans, Donne and the Metaphysicals, Pope, Keats, Tennyson, Bridges, Kipling, Chesterton - and, of course the Bible, Hymns, and the Book of Common Prayer'.

It would be tedious to list his contributions to Oxford publishing, but a few should be mentioned - his decisive support for the proposal to publish Kierkegaard in English, his suggestion of W.B.Yeats as Editor for the original Oxford Book of Modern Verse, his considerable contribution towards the creation of Harvey's Companion to English Literature - the first of the Oxford companions - and his supervision of the centenary edition of Tolstoy, the whole series being edited by the difficult Aylmer Maude, and each volume with a different, famous and often temperamental introducer. They included Bernard Shaw, H.G.Wells and Rebecca West.

But CW's contribution was not just through his work. There are men and women who are granted a special gift - that of being able to unite their fellows in the living of a common life and the doing of a common work. One finds them in commerce and industry, in the Civil Service, in voluntary organisations - but not nearly enough of them. They are the natural leaders. CW was one. He would not have wanted - and probably would not have been able to cope with - formal leadership, say as Head of a publishing Department, still less in Milford's place. Nevertheless, I think myself that in the late twenties and thirties the Press was fortunate to have two natural leaders - one Sir Humphrey, the other CW. The efficient cause, as the philosophers say, of CW's flowering was probably the move from Amen Corner to Amen House in 1924. The old building had not sparked him off - the new one did. Its architectural beauty, maybe the fragment of Roman Wall on the basement stairs, the library - there hadn't been one at Amen Corner - and the intellectual excitement that grew within it along with his feeling for Phyllis Jones the new librarian, the liveliness of the Press's publishing policy abd its growing reputation under Milford's leadership - they must all have contributed.

So, in 1926, the dance began when An Urbanity was written, a lament by himself as 'Tityrus' to Phyllis as 'Phillida' upon the absence on holiday of five of their colleagues from 'The Court' - 'The Court' - the first projection of a world of the imagination permeating the world of publishing:

The entrance hall is blank and bare;
Unfriendly lies the central stair.
The first floor - O the first floor - dead!
There were but three, and all are fled!
And in my little niche aloft
Who enters, enters once too oft, ...

The first floor. Dorinda had gone from it, and Alexis, and Caesar:

He has left the accustomed seat;
If through the corridors we move
That flickering sweet and dangerous love
No more allures us; he puts by
The crown that is the o'erarching sky
Of all our lesser lives; he flies,
And leaves us finally to sighs.

Dorinda, Alexis and Caesar - Helen Peacock, Gerry Hopkins, Sir Humphrey Milford. And on his own floor above, Colin - Fred Page - and Menalcas - whom CW calls 'the sudden comet of the Court' - Norman Collins, who if he had stayed with the Press would probably have been in the Masques and become one of the personalities.
An Urbanity is a poem of much delight, which also shows that CW never for a moment confused within Amen House the Caesar of imagination with the real Sir Humphrey Milford in the days before redundancy payments and employment legislation.
He is addressing Phillida:

But on whose world should we intrude
Since none at least could think you rude?
Not Caesar's - naturally not;
Not he whose word could bid us rot
In slums and gutters, if he broke
The use that binds us of his folk;
My childhood knew too well the fate
That hangs o'er servants, and the strait
Wherethrough the large unneeded go,
Ever thereafter not to know,
Ever thereafter to forget
Within all courtesy the threat
Of the unused thunderbolt; 'tis there,
For all that Caesar is so fair!
For all the veiling of his throne,
Know that our lord is God alone.

The key line here is 'The use that binds us of his folk' - pure feudalism and deep humanity - we served Caesar, and he, as CW goes on to say, 'Bears the private weight of public cares, Being the root of our affairs And their condition'.
As in the feudal manor, as in the Victorian home, we knew our places, for there was always 'the threat of the unused thunderbolt'. On the other hand, neither Alice Mary nor I can in fact remember anyone actually being fired, and indeed the Press looked after its staff as well as it paid them badly. During the War my Fire Service pay was made up to my Press salary until, after three years, I got enough promotion to earn it for myself.

A stream of light verse followed An Urbanity - little of it, of course, printed. More importantly, there followed also, on 27 April 1927, Sir Humphrey's birthday, and three years after the move to Amen House, the production in the library of The Masque of the Manuscript. In it A Carol of Amen House was sung, to Herbert Foss' music:

Over this house a star
Shines in the heavens high,
Beauty remote and afar,
Beauty that shall not die;

Beauty desired and dreamed,
Followed in storm and sun,
Beauty the gods have schemed
And mortals at last have won.

Beauty arose of old
And dreamed of a perfect thing,
Where none shall be angry or cold
Or armed with an evil sting;

Where the world shall be made anew,
For the gods shall breathe its air,
And Phoebus Apollo there-through
Shall move on a golden stair.

The star that all lives shall seek,
That makers of books desire;
All that in anywise speak
Look to this silver fire:

Shakespeare in utmost night
Moved on no other quest
Than waits him who reads aright
Edition and Palimpsest.

O'er the toil that is giv'n to do,
O'er the search and the grinding pain
Seen by the holy few,
Perfection glimmers again.

O dreamed in an eager youth,
O known between friend and friend,
Seen by the seekers of truth,
Lo, peace and the perfect end!

The Carol, and the whole Masque of which it is a part, powered by his feeling for Sir Humphrey, his colleagues, and the work that bound them together, fuelled by his love for Phillida, was perhaps CW's most confident assertion of the union of imagination and reality, of the Heavenly and the Earthly City, of Amen House in London and Byzantium.

As Alice Mary says in her book on Charles: 'The effect of the Masque on CW's position in the Press and with Sir Humphrey was incalculable. The atmosphere was changed from that of an office to a Court, with Caesar on the throne and CW among the Paladins. He was never afterwards one of the ... staff'.
A second Masque, that of Perusal, was performed two years later, but no more, although a third was written. The efflorescence had subsided, but the life went on.

It ended in September 1939, when War came and the Press moved to Southfield House, Oxford. There CW began a new life, but lost the old one. He was never again to work in Amen House, or live in his beloved London, or hear Paul's bells at work. In H.S.M., and at Amen House, CW found his home. In his talk at our last Society meeting, Dr Routley detected in CW the basic quality of the puritan - the ability to see through make-believe. In all he said and did, CW knew reality and followed it. Imagination - rich and burgeoning, imagination, yes, but never any confusion between worlds. The affinity between H.S.M. and CW was so strong because H.S.M. was like-minded, a man of unconfused imagination and reality. And both of them worked in a business that, above all, demanded of its workers two gifts: of extreme accuracy (Clarendon Press used then to offer a guinea to anyone who could find a misprint in an Oxford Bible) -of extreme accuracy and yet of imagination, the power to make living books out of dead words:

Shakespeare in utmost night
Moved on no other quest
Than waits him who reads aright
Edition and Palimpsest.

Let us sum it all up in a sentence from an obituary of CW written by Gerry Hopkins: 'The City of God in which he never ceased to dwell, contained Amen House as its noblest human monument, and all who lived and worked in it were citizens with him.'

Amen House is gone now; CW is gone, Alexis and Dorinda and Colin. Only a few of us are still alive who once served at Caesar's court. Yet, when the last of us is gone, a Heavenly Amen House will live still, with Caesar on the first floor and CW on the second, to strengthen and encourage all those who try to live as they lived, in imagination and reality without confusing the two, recognising fact, requiring accuracy, seeing through make-believe, seeking always the truth ...... and yet ..... and yet .....

When our translated cities
   Are joyous and divine,
And through the streets of London
   The streets of Sarras shine,
When what is hid in London
   Doth then in Sarras show,
And we in that new township
   The ancient highways know,
Though the bricks sing together
   In those celestial walls,
Shall we not long, o'er Ludgate,
   To see the dome of Paul's?

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CW's BYZANTIUM - Anne Ridler

In order to explore CW's conception of Byzantium, it is necessary first to explore his conception of the City - with a capital C. I like that word conception for this purpose, better than the word idea, because of its root meaning, connected with birth and creation. For with these ideas Williams did indeed create a new thing. Indeed, of all the powerful thoughts which he bequeathed to his heirs (heirs of poetry and doctrine), this of the City, and its embodiment in Byzantium, is possibly the most potentially fruitful.

The image of the City pervades his work like a refrain, yet there is (I think) no one place where he gives it an extended definition. Not even in Beatrice. I suppose that the best way to approach it is to quote St Augustine, whose exploration of the nature of the divine City was the starting point for Williams' thought about it. In The City of God Augustine says that the Holy Trinity is exemplified in its creation both in our individual natures and in our relationships with each other we reproduce that tripartite order. 'Then is all the whole Trinity intimate to us in every creature: and hence is the original, form, and perfection of that holy city whereof the angels are inhabitants. Ask whence is it? God made it. How has it wisdom? God enlightened it. How is it happy? God whom it enjoys has framed the exisrence, and illustrated the contemplation, and sweetened the inheritance thereof in Himself, that is, it sees, loves, rejoices in God's eternity, shines in His truth, and joys in His goodness.' In all the common actions of men, in their very birth and procreation, they are dependent upon one another, under God. ('No man has quickened his own soul', as the Psalm says of our dependence on God.) The web of being was a favourite simile of Williams' for this interconnection of men; in it (as he said in He Came Down From Heaven) 'everything and everyone is unique and is the subject of due adoration so, and yet all being unique, "none is afore or after another, none is greater or less than another."'

The image of this true city is to be found in any organization of mankind that attains its own proper perfection; but because of the Fall it can in practice only be known transiently -in flashes, - those flashes of perception that recur in Taliessin poems: flashes of sickle, or stars, or reflection in a slave girl's eyes. In that connection also, one remembers Wordsworth, in The Prelude: 'There are in our existence spots of time That with distinct pre-eminence retain A renovation virtue'. What CW's particular, personal location of the City was, we are exploring today, and you remember that Taliessin Through Logres is dedicated to the head of O.U.P. in London, H.S.M., 'under whom we observed an aspect of Byzantium'. To make the City vivid to the imagination we have recourse to myth, and the finest myth, the supreme image on earth of the holy city, Williams conceived to be the city of Byzantium and its empire When, quite early in his life, Williams began to meditate on the Grail myths, it seems that he found his image of the holy city in Rome, and certainly the order, discipline and grandeur of the Roman Empire had always a strong appeal to his imagination. In the notebook which he used for writing down every thought and reference which might be relevant to the great poem he planned, the name of Byzantium does not occur, though there are many references to Rome, to the Pope (he was then specified as Leo the Great who saw the sack of Rome in 455 A.D.) and to Dubric Archbishop of Canterbury. But by the time of the early cycle of Grail poems - some of which were published in Heroes and Kings and elsewhere - Byzantium has entered the myth. It enters, as in the mature cycle, as the place of Providence, from which the Grail came, and from which Taliessin is returning to Logres. But in the early poem, Taliessin has gone there for a specific purpose, to ask the Emperor's help against the invading pirates in Logres. (Incidentally, in these early poems the name is Byzantion, I do not know why. True, it rhymes with gone, and is made to do do, but then the usual spelling rhymes with an equally useful word, come.) There is a good deal more of detail out of Gibbon in this early cycly - we have not only the logothetes, (used not quite as Gibbon described them, concerned with accounts, but as messengers of the Emperor), but protonotaries, and 'hte wharves of the Ptopontis, where the heavy galleys bring the tribute of the exarchates' and the mosaics in Saint Sophia, also the singing birds (?

which appear in Yeats' poem. Most of the picturesque detail disappears in the later poems, but it all went to make the great City vivid to the poet's imagination - it is distilled into the perfected myth.

In the early poems too there is a character, a Princess of Byzantium, who disappears from the later cycle. I do not know why she could not be accomodated: perhaps she would have been too near in function to the High Prince Galahad; certainly the slave girls who are Taliessin's confidantes in the later poems provide, dramatically speaking, a better contrast. But why did Williams turn to Byzantium for his supreme image of the City of God upon earth? It was not a question of history, even though the centre of the Roman Empire would have been at Byzantium in the usually-accepted time of Arthur. For as Williams himself said (in The Figure of Arthur, p.80): 'In the myth we need ask for nothing but interior consistency'; to consider it as history requires a different kind of judgement. He did also give some reasons for his choice, in an essay called 'The Making of Taliessin': 'It was due, perhaps, to a romantic love of the (then) strange, but it was a little due to the sense that the Byzantine Emperor was a much more complex poetic image than the Roman ... In one or two earlier poems of my own, the Emperor was a kind of sacerdotal royalty. But gradually he became - I would not simply say God but at least God as active, God as known in Church and State, God as ruling men.' (Incidentally, he says that he had not at that time read Yeats' poems on Byzantium, where also the Emperor stands for Deity. The first of these, 'Sailing to Byzantium', was published in 1928, so the two poets were developing this conception in those same years - a fascinating thought.)

But there are other reasons why the Byzantium Empire suited Williams' purpose better than the Roman one. First, there was no distinction there between the ecclesiastical and the temporal power: to quote from George Every's The Byzantine Patriarchate: 'In the Byzantine world there was no rigid distinction between two societies: the monks and the married clergy on the one hand, and the laity on the other. All had their office in the church, and all were equally interested in theology ... The Byzantine people, and those peoples who inherit their tradition, stubbornly remain responsible for the maintenance of dogma, of a mystery which they understand through the order of the liturgy and the pattern of the icons on their church walls. Dogma with them is not only an intellectual system apprehended by the clergy and expounded to the laity, but a field of vision wherein all things on earth are seen in their relation to things in heaven, first and foremost through liturgical celebration.'

Then there is the point that the Byzantine civilisation included more elements than the Roman within its complex organisation; to quote George Every again: 'Byzantine civilisation was the result of a development in Greek culture within the carapace of Roman administration, assimilating many oriental elements, pagan, Persian, Jewish and Christian, until this syncretism affected not only the culture, but the framework of administration and government.' And, he says, in theory at any rate if not in practice, the power of the Emperor was uncircumscribed.

Clearly, for an institution that is to be an ideal image of the heavenly city, the richer and more all-inclusive its nature, the better. And Williams was keenly aware of the power of other religions besides Christianity - did not the muezzin 'crying Alla ill Alla destroy the old dualisms of Persia'? Moreover, I think that Byzantine civilisation, as expressed in its art, had a natural appeal for him - symbolical not naturalistic, iconographic and stylized.

We have now to approach the central definitions of our subject. Byzantium was Williams' choice, but exactly what is its place in his imagined universe? In any exposition of his ideas, one has to remember that in some sense to explain a symbol is to kill it: the living experience of Williams' Byzantium exists only in his poems. And just as Williams himself said (Image, p.183) that 'the Images have continually to be re-imagined; everything is given and yet nothing is permantly given. The poet who mistakes his own word for the thing imagined is lost', so with the reader: we too have

to make a fresh effort of imagination at the reappearance of the image. However, with this caution in mind I quote Williams' own definition. Byzantium is, he says, 'the place of the centre, the providence of the actual world, as the Emperor is God-in-operation, God-as-known-by-man. And the Empire is in different aspects all Creation, Unfallen Man, a proper social order, and the true physical body.' In the world map printed with Taliessin Through Logres, Byzantium itself is, he says, 'the whole concentration of body and soul rather than any special member.' Byzantium as physically evoked by the poetry of the later cycle is, as always in Williams, visually elusive and yet somehow vivid to our senses. I think C.S.Lewis put it admirably when he wrote: 'He is in one way full of images' - meaning visual images - 'but where he is most himself each image is no sooner suggested than it fades - or, dare I say? brightens - into something invisible and intangible' and he instances a girl's eyes 'breaking with distant Byzantium.' But we do see the logothetes (messenger angels) running down the porphyry stair (porphyry, the gate of birth), and the mountain Elburz in the Caucasus, somehow reflected in the Golden Horn, which you will remember is an arm of the sea which partly encircles Byzantium/Istanbul and makes its harbour. Elburz, Williams had read, was Prometheus' mountain, from whence fire came.

Earlier in the sequence we have seen the Emperor go aloft in a train of golden cars, and the seven flung stars, flashes of perception, through magic (the seven stars of the Plough etc) and religion (the flashing sickle of the Druids). A mental effort is needed, to keep several interlocking images in mind - which signify the City: the human body, and society in both its local and its world-aspect. Williams had planned to include another image of a divine order, that of the Zodiac, and although he had not got far with it, I think it is worth reading to you the fragment of a poem in which he began to explore it:

Taliessin Fragments

In the throne of the Emperor are the twelve zodiacal images,
each the generation of creation and each its consummation,
twelvefold to the world beyond Byzantium
the affliction of benediction, since the Adam yearned
to share the knowledge and learned what they could bear
in that creation, of what was also salvation
in flesh and intellect and soul, the twelve mysteries
that walked also with the shining Logos in Galilee.

The lord Taliessin saw the divine Emperor
set above peace and war; he saw the City
gathering itself in the twelve images in the throne
as later in Logres scattering itself in stars,
hints of perfection, falling flashes of beatitude
when he heard the thunder of the Emperor riding above him.
He saw in Logres the form of a man twelve-based,
the form of a woman, the empire reflecting the zodiac.

The Emperor is also visible in his antithesis - the headless figure in its crimson cope that moves in P'O l'u. It was an inspiration that made Williams pursue the suggestion in Gibson's footnote, quoting the scurrilous Procopius: 'A monk saw the prince of the demons, instead of Justinian, on the throne - the servants who watched beheld a face without features, a body walking without a head.' What would Williams have felt if, as Yeats did, he had visited the actual present day Byzantium and stood under the dome of Saint Sophia? One certainty is that he would never have wanted to. Exterior travelling was not something that interested him, and although he had an attachment to actual places (the city of London with Amen House in it, and certain other spots in London) it was an attachment, I think, which did not depend on the outer aspect of the place - it was not like Kipling's Pook Hill or Merrow Down, thoug he shared with Kipling the kind of imagination that obliterates distinction between past and present. I remember when I was eighteen, and visiting Rome for the first time, that I wrote to him of my disappointment in 'the hill of Saint John Lateran, whence shining thoughts have come on Augustinianerrand all the Saxon thanes must con'

and he replied: 'We only dislike the surroundings because we are used to them - trams and what not. Lots of people may get used to you, one way or another, and see you as houses and trams and a slow climb, a slight rise, and not see in you also the image of the Caelian mount and the church of Christendom and St Augustine going out from the monastery upon it to the conversion of the Saxon thanes in yourself. But they will be wrong. It will be there all right.'
When I spent four days in Istanbul last year (one of them in house-confinement by the order of the Emperor, as you might say), the two things that brought Williams and his myth most vividly to my mind were these: first, the imperial entrance in St Sophia; the door is of bronze and wood, and good authorities date it from Justinian's day. On either side of the stone threshold is a small depression, and this is said to have been worn by the feet of the guards, as they stood to flank the Emperor's entrance. The second was waking in the dark to hear the calls of the muezzin echoing round the city. Never mind the fact that by daylight one saw the singer on his little balcony dressed in ordinary coat and trousers, or knew even sometimes that the cry was coming from a machine, worked by a switch at the bottom of the minaret; the words and the strange nasal sound, heard in the night, conveyed the mystery.

But Williams didn't need to <u>hear</u> it with his physical senses - the imagination was enough for him. I remember seeing a group of Sikhs at their prayers in a field one evening as I drove by - made vivid for me; but CW felt the power of other faiths withou any such aid. In his article on Malory & the Grail Legend CW spoke of the invention of Galahad as an event in the history of the European imagination which was not surpassed even by Dante's discovery of Beatrice as the theme of the Divine Comedy. Byzantium was already a historical fact and a poetic image before he touched it, yet his own re-creation of it, his development of the image of the City of God on earth, is, I think, worthy to be mentioned in that context: the invention of Galahad, the invention of Byzantium - moments of high inspiration.

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Due to the rising costs of photocopying and postage, subscriptions for the year 1981-82, due in March 1981 will have to be increased to £3 for single members and £4.50 for joint membership. To cover the increased postage costs it will be necessary to charge overseas members an extra 50p, a move which we regret.