

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 70, SUMMER 1993



MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

23 October 1993: Dr Paul Fiddes will speak on "Charles Williams and the problems of evil".

26 February 1994: Rev Huw Mordecai will speak on "Charles Williams and the Occult".

These meetings will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W1 starting at 2.30 pm.

11 June 1994: The Society will hold its Annual General Meeting in Pusey House, Oxford and Anne Ridler will speak on "Charles Williams: the Intelligence of Love". This will be an all-day meeting.

LONDON READING GROUP

Sunday 31 October 1993: We will complete the reading and study of the new poems from Arthurian Poets - Charles Williams edited by David Dodds. We will meet at St Matthews Church Vestry, 27 St Petersburg Place, London W2 at 1pm.

OXFORD READING GROUP

For 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.

COUNCIL MEETING (26 August 1993)

A meeting of the Council was held on 26 August 1993. Arrangements were discussed for 1994 and for marking the 50th anniversary of Charles Williams' death in 1995. A sub-Committee is being appointed to make plans for 1995.

As agreed at the 1993 Annual General Meeting, the Society's membership list will be sent out to members. It is now being prepared.

The Dean of Westminster has written that Charles Williams' name is among those being considered for inclusion in the memorial window in Poets' Corner. The decision may be far into the future and there is nothing further for us to do now.

Council discussed the membership subscription rate and it was agreed that this must rise in March 1994. An announcement will appear in the next Newsletter.

1993 SUBSCRIPTIONS

Reminders are enclosed in this Newsletter for those members who have not yet paid their subscription. We would be grateful if this could be paid as quickly as possible.

SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

A limited number of copies of Notes on the Taliessin Poems of Charles Williams and Charles Williams: Selected Poems are still for sale.

Notes on the Taliessin Poems consists of commentaries on the poems, written by people who had earlier had the benefit of CW's own comments. The commentaries were originally published in this Society's quarterly Newsletter between 1977 and 1986. Gathered into this one volume, they are an invaluable resource for anyone who wishes to understand CW's Taliessin poems more deeply.

Charles Williams: Selected Poems was published in 1986 to mark the centenary of Charles Williams' birth. Anne Ridler has written a short introduction to her selection of seven

poems, one from each of CW's seven collections. This slim volume was hand set and beautifully produced at the Perpetua Press by Vivian Ridler, the last Printer to the University of Oxford. Like other works from the same Press, it is already a collectors' item. It is a lovely thing to own, and it would provide a most elegant introduction to CW's poetry for a new reader.

Copies of both books can be obtained from Richard Wallis, 6 Matlock Court, Kensington Park Road, London W11 3BS. Costs (including postage and packing) are: Notes on the Taliessin Poems £6, Charles Williams: Selected Poems £3. Please make cheques payable to this Society and pay in pounds sterling if you possibly can. If you are unable to do this, please send a cheque \$12 for the Notes and for \$6 for the Selected Poems to cover bank charges for conversion.

ONE-DAY CONFERENCE ON CHARLES WILLIAMS organised by the St Theosevia Centre

A one-day conference on Charles Williams will be held at the St. Theosevia Centre, 2 Canterbury Road, Oxford on Saturday 13 November 1993 from 10.30 am to 4 pm. The speakers will be Mrs Anne Ridler on Charles Williams' poetry, Bishop Kallistos Ware on some of the leading ideas in the novels and Dr Stephen Medcalf.

All are welcome. The charge for the day is £4. Coffee will be provided but those attending should take their own sandwiches.

G K CHESTERTON STUDY CENTRE

The Chesterton Study Centre needs at least £600,000 to purchase and restore Top Meadow, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, where G K Chesterton lived from 1922 until his death in 1936.

Top Meadow would be much more than a memorial to GKC. It would provide a permanent home for the Chesterton archive, be available for seminars and conferences and for religious retreats. The Centre would also hope to be able to rent out Top Meadow's facilities and to sell Chesterton's

publications.

Further information is available from The Chesterton Study Centre, Chandlers, Chandlers Hill, Slough Road, Iver Heath, Bucks SL0 0EA. (tel: 0895 251804).

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to:

John Docherty, 9 Medway Drive, Forest Row, East Sussex RH18 5NU, and

William Newman, 305 W. Hillview, Winslow, AZ. 86047, USA.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Hindsights. An Autobiography by John Heath-Stubbs, published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1993 at £25. Review by Dr Glen Cavaliero.

Autobiographers present themselves in various ways. They can be confessional and introspective (John Cowper Powys); they can interpret their lives in terms of destiny and myth (C S Lewis, Edwin Muir, Kathleen Raine); they can construct monuments of verbal architecture enshrining their careers (Osbert Sitwell) or be casually allusive and non-fictional (Ford Madox Ford, George Moore). And they can write what are essentially recollections, a record of their times, movements and personal contacts. It is to this species of autobiography that Hindsights belongs.

John Heath-Stubbs is among the most accomplished and enjoyable of contemporary poets, belonging to no particular school but writing out of an informed historical sense of the Western cultural tradition; he is a classicist steeped in the literature of the past, an individualist, a skilled verbal craftsman and a wit. As an autobiographer, however, he is somewhat cagey, and these recollections, interesting though they are, yield up no personal secrets, the author remarking of his return to Christianity, for example, that "This was a long and slow process, involving some experiences of a personal nature which I am not prepared to go into."

There is something both frustrating and yet satisfactory about that firmness.

Heath-Stubbs has no particularly unusual career to describe. His has been essentially a literary life, much of it spent in the company of fellow poets. Indeed, one of the most valuable features of this book is its account of the numerous half-forgotten writers who haunted the London publand of the immediate post-war years: the close link between public house and publication are very evident. Among the more celebrated contemporaries of whom he provides portraits are Philip Larkin, Roy Campbell and George Barker; and he has a good deal to say about Charles Williams, Dorothy L Sayers and other Anglican writers of the time. Heath-Stubbs was up at Oxford in the early 1940s, when the influence of C S Lewis was at its height; and he makes some incisive comments on the latter's attitude to the teaching of English literature, pointing out shrewdly enough that Lewis's support of the embargo on the teaching of works published after 1830 saved Oxford undergraduates from the younger dons' distorting enthusiasm for their contemporaries - a distortion from which the more adventurous Cambridge tripos has not always been immune.

There is an interesting account of the author's only meeting with Charles Williams. This consisted principally of an exchange of view on literary rather than on theological matters. Shelley, Wordsworth, Byron and Patmore figured prominently in the conversation; but the real treasure is found in the account of a letter Williams wrote to The New Statesman, refuting a claim by Stephen Spender that modern science had made it impossible any longer to believe in the dogmas of Christianity:

"Williams had written ... asking what scientific discovery of the last hundred years had made it more difficult to believe in these dogmas that it had ever been. 'Nobody,' he said, 'ever maintained that it was likely that a virgin would have a baby or that a dead man would rise from his tomb.'"

A good example of Williams's exactitude and dispassionate wit as an apologist, the letter was never published, being perhaps too subtle or too obvious for that particular left-

wing journal. As to Williams's personal character, Heath-Stubbs makes no more attempt to analyse it than he does to analyse his own, though he does record his impression that Williams's was a visionary imagination of the same order as those of William Blake and of his own contemporary, David Jones.

The book ends with a calm and courageous account of the author's gradual engulfment by blindness, after a lifetime of such bad sight that he was denied the kind of education from which otherwise he would have profited. But he shows no bitterness, despite a scathing account of his Bembridge public school, and is quite without self-pity. The book reveals his continued interest in the world around him, and is a mine of anecdotes and observations, some of them extremely funny. The fact that it was, presumably, dictated may account for certain inaccuracies and repetitions, but has not inhibited the occasional trenchant and provocative observation. Above all this is not an egotistic book: this stalwart champion of Charles Williams' writings himself exemplifies the truth which was central to their author's moral teaching, that a person's identity resides more in the fulfilment of his function than in self-analysis and self-projection. Hindsight certainly makes refreshing reading at the present time.

Christian Fantasy: From 1200 to the Present by Colin Manlove, published by Macmillan in 1992 at £40. 356pp. Review by Rev Dr Brian Horne.

It should come as no surprise to readers of Charles Williams's novels to discover that they are discussed in a book called Christian Fantasy, but it might surprise them to see who some of Williams's fellow "fantasists" are: Christopher Marlowe and William Blake, Charles Kingsley and Arthur C Clarke. Some of the other names are less surprising: Dante and Spenser, Milton and George Macdonald. Colin Manlove, already the author of a book on C S Lewis and two books on fantasy, has cast his net widely, but some of the fish he has tried to catch seem to be slipping through the holes even as he is hauling it in. The relation of many of the contemporary fantasists to the Christian faith is so remote that it seems tendentious to include them in a volume that is specifically

devoted to Christian variations on the theme. The attempt to include books by Arthur C Clarke and Doris Lessing, for instance, in this survey may simply be an indication of the fact that the author has set himself an impossible task: he has tried to bring the 'story' up to 'the present'; but there are no writers of Christian fantasy in 'the present'. The last work that lays serious claim to this genre was published forty years ago: J R R Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. The Christian imagination has, for the moment at least, lost the capacity to create fantasy.

In the chapter on Charles Williams, Colin Manlove immediately establishes his perspective with the statement: "Of all the writers of Christian fantasy we have considered, Charles Williams is perhaps the most apparently serene; and this at a time when serenity has seemed least possible for the Christian." (p. 215) In this I believe him to be quite correct; Manlove goes right to the heart of the matter when he draws attention to the crucial theological fact about Williams's imagination: its consistent monism; the belief in the principle of both/and rather than either/or; the profound sense of the co-inherence of the natural and the supernatural. Boethius expressed it with appalling clarity in a dictum of which Williams seems to have been fond: All fortune is good fortune. Nothing can lie outside the providence of God. It can be seen, from the writers that are examined, that Dualism, in whatever form: darkness and light, evil and good, spirit and matter, has been an attractive principle to writers of fantasy; but Williams will have none of it; there are, as Manlove points out, no alternative worlds in Williams's writings.

Matter and spirit, the natural and the supernatural, belong together; and the central symbol (as well as the theological fact) of this monism is the Incarnation: the historical demonstration of the co-inherence of divine and human life. So Manlove is able to make the point which I have ^{seen} not expressed so directly or so convincingly before: "Here then we have a Christian fantasy which is so by being finally about Christ. Other such fantasies might consider Christian behaviour, or the way to heaven, or the quest for God in this world, or how to see spiritual things, but these look straight to Christ Himself." (p.218) In contrast to other

fantasists (Macdonald, Tolkien, Lewis) Williams does not create 'another' world which imaginatively parallels and describes this world; the 'other', supernatural world is seen as being within and around this natural world of small, everyday events. His stories have no doors or gates or cracks by means of which human beings can enter another realm; just the opposite, they are full of objects by means of which the supernatural gains entry into the quotidian life of ordinary human beings. 'Indeed we might say that the whole sequence of Charles Williams' novels shows a gradual implanting of the supernatural within the world.' (p.222)

Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars are dealt with somewhat cursorily by Manlove, and one wonders why he felt the need to address the poems at all, for they hardly fit into the genre of fantasy. Readers of Williams's books who are already familiar with the studies by Glen Cavaliero, Thomas Howard and Mary Shideler will probably learn little about Williams that they did not know; but Manlove's analysis of the novels is clear-sighted and sympathetic; and, in any case, one would not recommend a long book merely for one chapter. Other sections are worth mentioning: the chapter on George Macdonald for example, and still earlier in the volume, the pieces on Paradise Lost and The Pilgrim's Progress. Here the author is at his best: revealing and illuminating paradoxes in those texts which have fascinated readers for centuries. He admits to his own book being 'something of an elegy', and so it is: even the most accomplished texts of our own age seem insignificant in comparison to the masterpieces of earlier times.

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Following the business of the Annual General Meeting on 5 June 1993 there were readings from two autobiographies, both of which contained references to Charles Williams. With the publisher's permission we reproduce the extract from Eric Maskell's autobiography Saraband, pps 194 - 200.

"It would be pointless and futile for me to write at length about all or most of the memorable people with whom I had contact through the Christendom Group. Some, such as T S Eliot and Dorothy L Sayers, have been the subject of detailed studies which render anything that I could say about them

superfluous. There are, however, two about whom I feel it may be worth while to record my memories, Maurice Reckitt himself, who died in his ninety-fourth year in 1980, and Charles Williams, who died suddenly in early middle age in 1945. Maurice had been an outstandingly good-looking young man, with a remarkable likeness to the future Earl of Avon. He was devoted to his wife, to ballroom dancing and to croquet, in the last of which he acquired international status; he once said that there were no men who could beat him at the game but quite a few women. Unlike some lay apologists for religion he was a loyal and steady practising, though sometimes exasperated, churchman and was a member of the Church Assembly for some years. His literary output, both of books and of articles, was continuous and extensive; it was almost entirely in the field of Christian sociology. His style was lucid and entertaining, and is in the most striking contrast imaginable to the turgid dullness of most theological writing at the present day. It was in the spoken word, however, that he excelled for pungency and wit, and the effect was enhanced by the peculiar high-pitched emphasis which exploded in the last accented syllable of his sentences and which was so infectious that his hearers tended to adopt it unconsciously themselves, temporarily and in some cases even permanently. He had a story about a M.P. who, whenever he could think of a joke, made it and, whenever he could not, assumed a severe expression and declared 'This is no time for frivolity'. The first part of this story might well have applied to Maurice himself; and what good jokes they were! That they were always relevant and never malicious I must add. Take, for example, this extract from the small book which first emboldened me to write to him:

I remember hearing a tale of a man who went to call upon a neighbour and was greeted at the door by the growls of an apparently ferocious dog. His friend expostulated with his pusillanimity. 'The dog's perfectly harmless,' he said, 'you know it and I know it.' 'Possibly,' his friend replied, 'but does the dog know it?' The Church is a Society essentially at issue with the cupidity, the cruelty, the cynicism and the insensibility of the plutocratic world order by which it is everywhere surrounded. You know it and I know it. But does the dog know it? Does the Church, in its external character as a

human association of churchgoers, claiming with very varying degrees of knowledge and enthusiasm the Christian name, in any true sense know these things? Would not it - and the world upon which it reacted - look very different if it did? (Religion and Social Purpose, 1935, p. 53).

Or this, from the same work:

If you had told any typical Christian thinker in any century from the twelfth to the sixteenth century that religion had nothing to do with economics, and that bishops must not intrude in these matters upon the deliberations of laymen - propositions which to many of the correspondents to our newspapers appear to be axiomatic - he would either have trembled for your faith or feared for your reason. He would have regarded you, in short, as either a heretic or a lunatic. (ibid., pp. 12f)

One of the most useful functions of Maurice's interventions was to bring life to a discussion that had run into a rut of boredom. There was a meeting at which someone was elaborating at unnecessary length the relevant but uncontroverted thesis that the effects of the fall had extended beyond man into the material world as a whole. Suddenly from the depths of a basketwork chair came the clarion voice of Maurice: 'I know - "Groaning and travailing, groaning and travailing"!' And that summed the argument up. But the best example of this enviable gift that I can remember comes from an annual public meeting of the Cowley, Wantage and All Saints Missionary Association. It was a hot summer afternoon and the audience had been reduced to a state of somnolence by a series of utterances from worthy but boring clerics, when Maurice was called upon to speak. 'I find it difficult', he began, 'to understand why I should be here as the only layman on a platform otherwise entirely occupied by the clergy. I can only suppose that I am here for the same reason for which the cannibal attended the missionary meeting. I represent the point of view of the consumer!' The note of triumph on which the last sentence culminated evoked a burst of laughter after which his hearers hung on every word.

Though his style was admirable for its lucidity, his

handwriting manifested a standard of illegibility which it is granted to few to attain, an illegibility which derived not, as with most bad writers, from omitting vital graphic elements but from over-writing several times, so that the finished product resembled weeds rather than words. Maurice's own recipe for interpreting it was: 'Throw it on the floor and walk round it; then some of it'll leap out at you.' This frequently worked; but most of his friends would try to arrange that their letters reach him on a Monday, when his secretary would produce a neatly typewritten reply.

Maurice was a wealthy man, as the trade name 'Reckitt and Coleman' would suggest; he was also a generous one, and before his death he had set up the Christendom Trust to set forward the Christian social thinking to which his own life had been dedicated. He described his own vocation as 'being available', and Vigo Demant described him on his ninetieth birthday as 'one of the few fairly rich men who will get through the needle's eye'. His tombstone bears a sentence of G K Chesterton's which he was fond of quoting: 'One must somehow find a way of loving the world without trusting it.'

Charles Williams - novelist, poet, dramatist and brilliant lay theologian - was certainly one of the most invigorating and stimulating men that it has been my good fortune to encounter. A conversation between him and Maurice Reckitt was as entertaining a display of wit and wisdom as I can remember to have experienced. Yet in other respects than the intensity of their Christian conviction and the speed of their mental reactions they might seem to have had little in common. Physically, Williams was not particularly impressive. He was rather below middle height and peered through rather thick lenses. It was in the excitability and volubility of his speech that his enormous interior energy and enthusiasm were manifested and became infectious. Though largely self-educated, he was a man of profound intellectual depth and, with this, of great spiritual integrity. With the emotional temperament of a Welshman and the accent and sense of humour of a cockney, the impression which an audience received from him on their first meeting could begin with a kind of stunned incredulity, which rapidly passed into wild enthusiasm. I vividly remember the effect which he produced

on the students of Lincoln Theological College by reciting the opening lines of Milton's Paradise Lost:

Of man's first disobedience an' the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, 'oose mortal tiste
Brort death into the world and all our wow ...
Sing, 'eavenly muse, that on the sicred top ...,

[in an accent] which was probably more like Milton's own pronunciation than the etiolated accents of our modern academics!

Most readers of Williams easily recognise how deeply concerned he was to emphasise the goodness and authenticity of the physical, including the sexual, aspect of human existence and human nature, 'the holy and glorious flesh' as he sometimes described it. What they do not always understand is that, with all the exuberance with which he would extol the glories of romantic love, he was firmly and no less exuberantly committed to the great Christian values of chastity, fidelity and monogamy. C S Lewis describes in one of his letters the impact made by a lecture given by Williams on Milton's Comus:

We actually heard a lecture on Comus which put the importance where Milton put it. In fact the lecture was a panegyric of chastity. Just imagine the incredulity with which (at first) an audience of undergraduates listened to something so unheard of. But he beat them in the end.

He is an ugly man with rather a cockney voice. But no one ever thinks of this for five minutes after he had begun speaking. His face becomes almost angelic. Both in public and in private he is of nearly all the men I have met the one whose address most overflows with love. It is simply irresistible. These young men and women were lapping up what he said about Chastity before the end of the hour. It's a big thing to have done. (Letters of C S Lewis, p. 196)

Nevertheless, with all his enthusiasm for the romantic nature of married love, Williams made no pretence of glossing over

the more banal aspects of domesticity. I remember him describing how he used to make early-morning tea for his wife. 'I usually enjoy doing it. But there are times when there's nothing that I want to do less. And then I say to myself, "Well, dash it all, I am married to the woman!" And then I get up and make it.'

It would be quite wrong to suppose that with his intense aesthetic sensibility Williams was inclined to underrate the importance of the rational and intellectual aspect of human experience. He once arrived rather late at a meeting at which I was speaking. I forget about what topic. In the discussion after my speech he mentioned that he had just come from Fleet Street, where everyone seemed to be living in a world of false values. 'I've just seen a poster saying "Tragic Death of a Peer". Just fancy that - what is there tragic about the death of a peer? And then, when I came into this room I heard Father Mascall saying, "What is really important is to be careful how we define our terms." And my heart leapt up when I beheld a rinebow in the sky!'

At the risk of being outrageously egoistic I will dare to illustrate this same point from a review which Williams wrote in 1943 of my first serious theological work He Who Is in the now defunct journal Time and Tide. He began by saying that in writing on philosophical theology I had confirmed the line in Comus where the Elder Brother says that philosophy is

a perpetual feast of nectar's sweets
Where no crude surfeit reigns ...

and then continued:

This is supposed to be a simile of intellectual satisfaction. So it is, but it is also a perfectly correct literal statement. There was a moment in He Who Is when I found myself savouring a particular doctrine with an almost physical delight; and, except from false fear, I do not know why I say almost. It was in my mouth 'sweet as honey'; it melted exquisitely into my corporeal organism and bestowed a richness. Perhaps the Apocalyptic John also was talking more sense than we know when he spoke of

'eating a book'. It would be humbling if we discovered that the saints and prophets were physiologically as well as psychologically accurate. The physical effect of intellectual ideas has still to be examined by psycho-analysts and doctors. We shall yet perhaps see graphs showing the relative effects on a fifty-years-old one-legged west-country industrialist of the Platonic ideas, the Cartesian dualism and the geopolitics of Houshofer. (Time and Tide 9 October 1943)

No doubt it will come as a surprise to some that 'the particular doctrine in question was that of the self-sufficiency of God', even when he added that 'one's physical reactions have nothing to do - at least calculably - with the truth of the doctrine, nor was the doctrine new, but I have quoted this passage simply in order to show how very organically in Williams's view of reality the intellectual and the aesthetic were mutually integrated. Indeed I think that one of the reasons for his concern with the language of poetry was that it seemed to him that aesthetic images were often more successful than conceptual forms in expressing the depth and the multiplicity of the real world. I once very daringly asked him whether the line, in one of the Taliessin poems 'The feet of creation walk backward through the waters' was meant as a description of the effects of sin and the Fall. With characteristic humility he replied after a moment's thought, 'I have never thought of that before, but it is certainly one of the things that it means.' Paradoxical and even frivolous as this answer might seem, there could hardly be a clearer spontaneous avowal that the poet's function is not to give expression to the dredged-up precipitates of his own subconscious but to witness to his imperfect but nevertheless authentic perceptions of the manifold aspects of objective reality. This, however, is not the place for a discussion of Williams's theology, fascinating as that topic would be.

One last recollection; I cannot recall the context of this incident, but it is certainly characteristic and I tell it as I remember it. Williams told us that he had been having his hair cut, and the barber had told him that he (the barber) had just got engaged to be married. 'He said to

me, "Yer know, sir, it makes yer feel just fine. I felt that if a bloke 'ad dotted me in the eye I'd 'av stood 'im a pint." I leapt out of the chair and seized him by the hand and said, "My friend, do you know that's just what Dante said in the Vita Nuova: "Such a warmth of charity came upon me that most certainly in that moment if anyone had done me an injury I would have forgiven him.'?"' What effect this had on the other occupants of the barber's saloon Williams did not tell us; I imagine that to him his reaction was the most natural thing in the world. For if ever there was a Christian to whom it was obvious that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, that Christian was Charles Williams for whom 'there [was] only one reason why anything should be loved on this earth - because God loves it.' (Time and Tide, 9 October 1943)

In these days, when for so many professional theologians the fundamental theological categories seem to be drabness and obscurity, it is comforting to remember the life and work of this inspired and inspiring layman. But indeed Williams and Reckitt were only two of a number of highly intelligent lay men and women - T S Eliot, Dorothy L Sayers and C S Lewis spring at once to mind - whom the Anglican Church possessed in those days, who wrote grippingly, lucidly and enlighteningly because they were convinced of the truth of orthodox Christianity and of its relevance to the problems of mankind. The strength of their conviction gave their writings more, not less, apologetic force."

© E L Maskell 1992. Extract from Saraband: The memoirs of E L Maskell published by Gracewing in 1992, 392 pp, ISBN 0 85244 222 X)

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Extracts from "Poems of Conformity" by Charles Williams,
published by Oxford University Press in 1917

A Song of Opposites

Each separate thing, howe'er it be
By manifold devices known,
Hath in them all a unity,
And is in all ways that alone.

Perfect the bird in song or flight,
Perfect the flower in growth or smell;
So in each separate mental sight
Perfect my maid's completions dwell.

In many opposites revealed
She wholly is herself in each,
And does dividual vision yield
But my dividual sense to teach.

So, as young doves that try the air
Although her glances timid be,
The heavens themselves shall not outdare
Her delicate audacity.

So will her mind, in fellowship
Of art, see, hear, rebuke, admire,
Whose art, in touch of breast and lip,
Flames upward in love's flying fire.

She who is glad at vanities
And laughs in temporal delights
Hath wisdom yet in mysteries
Which are the dreams of anchorites.

So visible in many a turn,
Moves her essential unity,
And sensitively so I learn
To know the customary she.

O moments that should make me wise! -
But O the rarer times that be,
When she withdraws from any guise
To open singularity!

When all her spirit is expressed
In all her body's holy charms,
And only she is manifest
Ere yet she leans into my arms!

© Michael Williams

Richmond Park

Three men came over Richmond Park,
In friendly jocund mood;
The wind blew dusk, the wind blew dark;
Great trees about them stood,
Those on the right were drowned in mist,
To the left they grew a wood.

There was a friend to right of me,
There was a friend to left.
My soul was 'ware, all suddenly,
It trod a dangerous cleft.
My heart between two strange hearts beat,
Of livelihood bereft.

I knew not either alien heart,
Nor either alien tone,
Nor what from ambush there would start;
Softly they walked unknown.
I dropped to separating depths,
And drifted there alone.

But God drew back this soul of mine
Into its earthly ark;
I saw the lights of Putney shine
Beneath us in the dark,
And - God be thanked! - I heard my friends
Talking in Richmond Park.

© Michael Williams

OFFICERS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

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