The Charles Williams Society

Newsletter

No. 86 Spring 1998

The Charles Williams Society

The Society was founded in 1975, thirty years after Charles Williams?s sudden death at the end of the Second World War. It exists to celebrate Charles Williams and to provide a forum for the exchange of views and information about his life and work.

Members of the Society receive a quarterly newsletter and may attend the Society?s meeting which are held three times a year. Facilities for members also include a postal lending library and a reference library housed at Kings College London.

Officers of the Society

- Chairman: **Mrs Eileen Mable**
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From the Editor

Welcome to the Spring 1998 issue of The Charles Williams Society Newsletter. You will no doubt have noticed the impressive new layout of the Newsletter, the work of Andrew Williams, the Assistant Editor.

The Society recently invested in some computer equipment to be used in the production of the Newsletter ? I am sure you will agree that Andrew has put it to very good use.

As Eileen reported in the last issue, I have been appointed as the new Editor of the Newsletter and will be responsible for its content. Andrew will be responsible for production and circulation.

Any submissions, therefore, should in future be sent to me at the address on page 2.

I would also welcome any comments, suggestions and constructive criticism from members about the Newsletter, particularly regarding any new initiatives that Andrew and I may introduce from time to time.

It is our intention to produce four issues a year, in March, June, September and December. However, if you want to continue receiving the Newsletter you must remember to renew your membership by paying the annual subscription, which was due on 1/3/98. Details about subscription renewals are provided on page 7.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and find it informative.

Best Wishes

Mark Brend

Charles Williams Society meetings

- **Saturday 6th June 1998**
  Annual General Meeting at 12.00 noon in the Frederic Hood Room, Pusey House, St Giles, Oxford. The AGM will be followed at 2.30 p.m. by a meeting at which Dr Barbara Reynolds will speak on "Charles Williams and Dorothy L Sayers".

- **Saturday 14th November 1998**
  Dr Andrew Walker will speak on ?The Narnia Tales of CS Lewis?. The meeting will start at 2.30pm in the Church Room of St. Matthew?s Church, St. Petersburgh place, Bayswater, London (nearest underground stations: Queensway and Bayswater). Please note that there is not much heating in the Church Room - if the weather is cold, dress warmly.

- **Saturday 27th February 1999**
  Speaker to be announced. 2.30pm in St. Matthew's Church Room.

Wanted - A new Secretary for the Society

Gillian Lunn, our secretary, had hoped to hand over to her successor by the time of the June AGM. Unfortunately, there has been no response at all to two previous notices asking for enquiries about her job.

I do not believe that no-one in the Society is capable of taking over from Gillian. Please consider whether this is something that you could do.

Both Gillian and I will willingly give more information about what is involved. Further, Gillian will be happy to give full support to her successor until he or she is well established in the work

Eileen Mable

Reading groups

For information about the **Oxford** reading group please contact Brenda

Council meeting

The Council of the Charles Williams Society met on Saturday 8th November 1997.

- Arrangements for Society meetings in 1998 and 1999 were discussed.
- The new membership brochures are now in use.
- A short bibliography of C.W.'s published work will be prepared for issue to new members.
- It was agreed that some of the late Charles Hadfield's legaey to the Society should be spent on new equipment for publishing the Newsletters and, later, for entering the Internet.
- The 24-hour residential Conference held in July 1997 was much enjoyed and there have been requests for further Conferences in the future. Thanks were expressed to those who arranged the Conference and a date ehosen for a possible Conferenee in 2000.

AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Charles Williams Society will take place this year on Saturday 6th June at 12.00pm in the Frederic Hood Room, Pusey House, Oxford.

Agenda

1 Apologies for absence

2 Report on the year?s activities by the Hon. Secretary

3 Report by the Hon. Librarian

4 Presentation of the accounts by the Hon. Treasurer.

5 Report by the Newsletter Editor

6 Report by the Membership Secretary

7 Report by the Hon. Chairman

8 Eleetion of Council members under paragraph 5 of the Society's constitution

9 Any other business

Gillian Lunn

New members

A warm welcome is extended to the following new member of the Charles Williams Society:

- **Mrs Susan Wendling**
  8405 Elliston Drive
  Wyndmoor
  PA 19038
  USA

Back issues

Members are advised that it is the intention of the editors to include a list of back issues with the next edition of the Society?s Newsletter in June. Previous editions of the Newsletter will be available for purchase by Society members.

Membership list

The June issue of the Newsletter will also be accompanied by a list of current members of the Society. Members who do not wish to have their name and address included in this list are requested to advise the editor, Mark Brend, by the end of

Subscription renewals

Members are reminded that subscriptions fell due on 1st March 1998 for the financial year 1998-9.

The current subscription rates for individual/joint members are:

- **UK members: £10/£15**
- **Concessions £6/£9**
- **Overseas £12/£17 or $22/$30**

Prompt payment of subscriptions is greatly appreciated. A membership renewal form is enclosed.

Members are also urged, where possible, to pay subscriptions by standing order (direct debit). To pay by standing order simply complete the appropriate section of the membership renewal form. Please note that this arrangement can be rescinded at any time.

Membership forms and enquiries about membership should be sent to:

Mrs Lepel Kornicka
15 Kings Avenue, Ealing, London, W5 2SJ Tel: 0181 991 0321.

Postal Auction

A number of books have been donated to the Society. These are now available for members to purchase by postal auction.

As on previous occasions, the following rules apply:

- The books are for sale to members of the Society whose subscriptions and other payments are fully paid up-to-date.
- Separate bids (in pounds sterling) must be made for each book, in writing, to **Gillian Lunn, 26 Village Road, Finchley, London N3 1TL.** Please state clearly the number and title of each book for which you bid.
- Bids do not include postage costs. Overseas members please indicate whether, if you ?win?, you want the book(s) to be posted to you by airmail (strongly advised for safe arrival, though more expensive). British members will be sent their book(s) by second class post unless otherwise indicated.
- The closing date for bids is **30th June 1998**. All bids must reach Gillian Lunn by this date.

Failure to follow the above rules will result in the bid being disqualified

Soon after 30th June Gillian Lunn will send each book to its highest bidder with instructions about payment. She will not inform the ?losers? unless a stamped addressed envelope is enclosed with their bid(s).

Overseas members are asked to pay for books and postage in sterling. This is due to the high cost of bank charges for foreign currency cheques. The Society regrets any inconvenience this may cause.

Please note that some books have been written in by Thelma Shuttleworth who new CW well and discussed the works with him.

Books for sale are listed on the following page. The information

Books for sale by postal auction

Works by Charles Williams

1 **All Hallows Eve**, Faber, 1945.

2 **Arthurian Torso**, OUP, 1948, *poor condition, lacks spine.*

3 **The Descent of the Dove**, Religious Book Club, 1939.

4 **The English Poetic Mind**, OUP, 1932, *poor condition, signed by CW.*

5 **The Forgiveness of Sins**, Bles, 1942.

6 **He Came Down from Heaven**, Heinemann, 1938.

7 **The House of the Octopus**, Edinburgh House, 1945.

8 **James I**, Barker, 1951.

9 **The Letters of Evelyn Underhill**, Longmans, 1944, *introduction by CW.*

10 **Longer Modern Verse**, OUP, 1926, *notes by CW.*

11 **Modern Verse for Young People**, OUP, 1946, *poor copy, ed.: Michal Williams; includes three poems by CW.*

12 **Queen Elizabeth**, Duckworth, 1936.

13 **Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury**, OUP, 1936, *signed by CW*

Other works

14 **CS Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost**, OUP, 1944, *dedicated to CW*

Co-inherence

The following paper was delivered by Dr Brian Horne at the Conference of the Charles Williams Society on July 19th 1997.

The Descent of the Dove, Charles Williams's 'Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church', has, as you know, a dedication: 'For the Companions of the Co-inherence'. The Order of the Co-inherence - if one can call it that - had come into being in 1939 in the same year in which *The Descent of the Dove* was published and at the time when the clouds of war were gathering over Europe. Charles Williams had, according to Alice Mary Hadfield in the second of her two books about him, initially been reluctant to agree to the formal constitution of a group of people who wanted to live by the principle of co-inherence, but eventually produced the seven 'sentences' which embodied the concept and gave practical instructions by which the life of co-inherence could be expressed. The year was 1939 and the month was September, that unhappy month in which Britain delivered the ultimatum to Germany that was to mark the beginning of the war in Europe.

The frontispiece of *The Descent of the Dove* is a reproduction of a painting by Louis (or Lodovico) Brea entitled *Paradisa*. Williams does not give its date or its place of origin, but it was probably intended, as many of Brea's paintings were, to be an altarpiece, possibly in Brea's home city of Nice, in the middle of the fifteenth century. It is an extraordinarily crowded canvas depicting the host of heaven: at the centre of the top of the picture is a medallion containing the Blessed Trinity crowning the Virgin; saints of all kinds are gathered around this scene in worshipful adoration; below this group is a still larger group, some engaged in worship others in conversation. Williams says of it: '. . . the painting, above and below, is of the co-inherence of the whole of the redeemed City.' The theme of co-inherence is central to the whole of the book. Indeed it can be seen as its organising principle: a way of interpreting the whole of the history of the

Christian Church. This produces some distinctly odd results; or rather, let me say, results that seem distinctly odd when Williams's account of the Church's history is set against those apparently more conventional histories to which most of us are accustomed.

Yet, it could be argued - and I would so argue - that it is in fact not at all odd when one sees what Williams is doing. He is deliberately adopting, what, in the jargon of contemporary scholarship, is called a hermeneutical principle, and he states it openly in the first pages. In this perhaps he is more honest and self-aware than those historians who have claimed objectivity and detachment in their accounts of events. Moreover, it is becoming a commonplace of modern historiographical scholarship that the attempt at neutrality on the part of the historian is a will-o-the-wisp; that every effort at the writing of history is angled, coloured by the peculiar philosophical assumptions of the historian and that it as well to recognise this fact from the start. But Williams's reading of church history through the lens of co-inherence does produce some unexpected contours in his narrative: more pages to the second century slave girl Felicitas about whom almost nothing is known than to John Calvin about whom so much is known that one mind can barely contain the information? But then the French Reformer did not say: 'Now I suffer what I suffer; then another will be in me who will suffer for me, as I shall suffer for him' and the African slave girl did. Who is to say, *sub specie aeternitatis*, which figure is the more important? Williams, of course, did not claim to be writing his history *sub specie aeternitatis*, he was not so arrogant, but he was trying to reveal some hidden mystery of the Church's life and it seemed right to draw attention to the martyrdom of a virtually unknown second century saint in the way he did. Her utterance about her martyrdom was a demonstration of the activity of the Holy Spirit drawing the citizens of the Holy City into a life of co-inherence.

By the time he came to write *The Descent of the Dove* the theory and perhaps even the practice of co-inherence was fully formed; it had already been explored and discussed in three very different ways in the preceding decade. It was

presented fictionally in the novel *Descent Into Hell* which had appeared in 1937; it was presented theologically in what is one of the most profound and original discussions of the Incarnation, *He Came Down From Heaven* which had appeared in 1938; and it was running like a leitmotif through the poems of *Taliessin Through Logres*, which appeared in 1938. It was to receive further treatment in the fine achievements of his remaining years: *The Cross* (1943), *The Figure of Beatrice* (1943) and *The Forgiveness of Sins* (1944). All this we know, but when and where did it all begin? Why did it, co-inherence, arise as the controlling principle of his life and art?

We may suppose that it evolved early in life out of his own private meditations on the central mysteries of Christianity: the image of the Church as the Body of Christ with its interrelated and interdependent members, or the divine substitution of the event on Calvary: 'He saved others, himself he cannot save', or the sublime and paradoxical doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the three persons constituting a perfect unity of mutual indwelling. He may even have pondered on an extraordinary assertion in the first epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians: ?... if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever ... he should not divorce her. And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever ... she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband'. (I Cor. 7, 12) - a text which perhaps should receive a great deal more attention than it usually does receive. (Paul, of course, is the great Biblical exponent of co-inherenee). Charles Williams may have done all this; and it may also have been the experience of marriage that gave him the sense a deep interchange of love and understanding. But I think there was something else, something that brought the concept to the front of his mind and embedded it in his heart; and following Alice Mary Hadfield I suggest it was the First World War.

In the first of her two books on Williams, Alice Mary wrote of the suffering he endured in seeing his friends go off into the conflict and his self-laceration in being declared unfit for combat. 'It was in meditation on war and his friends that

he first began to approach the idea that his life was involved in the lives of all other people and not only of people he had chosen to love and live with. He recognised that he benefited from the effort and pains endured by others for him and not at the time concerned with or for him. He saw that pains and effort could and would be inflicted within himself which would be part of the life of the effort and pains of those others.' *(An Introduction to Charles Williams* 1959 p55). And so we should reeall the writings that came during and just after the First World War and examine them for the first imaginative stirrings of that prineiple around which almost everything in the last two deeades of his life was to revolve. And so I turn to the years whieh followed the declaration of peace in 1918.

In 1920 the Oxford University Press publisbed the volume of poems which the poet had been working on during the terrible years of the war and whieh he dedicated to his father and his 'other teacbers', *Divorce.* It contains a short sequence of six poems entitled 'In Time of War'; and in it Williams confronts not only the fear and pain of military conflict and the conditions of tbose engaged upon it, but expresses an intense imaginative identification with those who have been scparated from one another by the harsh demands of the situation. The fourth poem of the sequence is called 'Iu Absence'.

Think not, although you no more walk
In English roads or with us talk,
That we and English roads are free
From your continual company.

For, since on that last enterprise
Were closed your tired and bloody eyes,
On some new expedition gone,
Though your souls leave our souls alone;

Yet now, those seasons to retrieve
Which they somewhile were loath to leave,
And by our sharpened sense discerned,
Your bodies are themselves returned:

Or, being held still in their place,
With strong desire turn backward space,
Make England France, and draw us through
To be environed there with you.

So we, 'neath strangers' footsteps, hear
Your heavy marches sounding near;
And in your silent listening post
Are their confused noises lost.

To walls and window-curtains cling
Your voices at each breakfasting,
As the cups pass from hand to hand,
Crying for drink in No Man's Land.

Through all the gutters of the town
Your blood - your ghostly blood! - runs down,
Spreads in slow pools, and stains the feet
Of all who cross your silent street.

On hills and heaths, where once you lay
Reading beneath the hot noonday,
Now if we lie, how near you keep -
But still, but frozen, but asleep!

The terse simplicity of the verse reminds one of the poems of A.E. Housman, the subject of whose verse was frequently war and the sadness and sense of loss of those caught in its web of destruction. Whereas Williams lacks the lyrical gift of

Housman his vision is less bleak even in a poem so shot through with suffering as this one is. Co-inherence has not yet surfaced, but the perception of lives closely woven together is there moving beneath the surface giving the poem its peculiar poignancy. A kind of exchange between two groups of people, soldiers and civilians, is envisaged here.

In the poem 'Ghosts' a different kind of exchange is imagined: that between the living and the dead. It is a meditation on the possibility of communication across the barrier of death, not by any kind of magical conjuration, table-rapping, or trances, but by an inward imaginative sense of the living presence made possible by the love that is shared. The image of the city appears and with that appearance the theme of co-inherent life announces itself openly:

> But O as now in that high town
> Your souls of courage live,
> Save me from darkness when my own
> I into judgement give.

Like the sequence 'In Time of War' the tone is light, and the verse moves quickly; nonetheless, the poem is redolent of suffering and the intimation of loss. Co-inherence is born out of the sense of a kind of profound necessity: if others will not offer themselves to and for us, then we are lost - in perdition.

> Your heavenly conversation turn
> Some while in aid of me,
> That I may now, in these dark ways,
> Glimpse of your city see;

This theme, of course, was to be powerfully elaborated seventeen years later in the novel *Descent Into Hell*.

Further into the volume we encounter a poem called 'At the Gates' which I cannot

help but read as a prelude or some kind of pre-echo of the famous poem of 1940, *Apologue on the Parable of the Wedding Garment.* Its subject is forgiveness and, in particular, the fundamental mutuality inherent in the act of forgiving: a theological concept which was to be expounded as the central theme of the long essay of 1944, *The Forgiveness of Sins.*

> Because no man has slandered me
> Or wrought me evil, with what plea
>
> Shall I approach to enter in,
> Where they who suffered under sin
>
> And their oppressors have forgiven,
> Make a sweet concord thorough heaven?

The gates before which the poet stands (before which we all stand) are the gates of heaven and how shall he (and we) gain entrance. Do we produce a list of our good deeds and claim our reward? Williams was no believer in the doctrine that salvation consisted in the possession of more good works to our credit than evil works. He knew that human life was too rich and complicated to be reduced to a balance sheet; he also believed by this time that no salvation is the single individual's own solitary achievement. 'We save others, ourselves we cannot save'.

> Ah, fair souls, purged by love, can ye
>
> Endure that I too should belong -
> I who have wrought, not suffered, wrong, -
>
> To your companionship? for there
> 'Tis your forgiveness makes yon fair.
>
> O let me pass, though I shall walk
> Least in you city, and your talk

Shall never join, who only live
To take your pardon, not to give.

Here, then, in this little collection of poems, *Divorce*, the theme is first consciously and publicly announced; and its birth is out of the author's own experience of suffering and intense awareness of suffering in others. Co-inherence becomes the great substantial fact of existence, all existence, both natural and supernatural. It is true for God as it *is* for Man. It arises, moreover, not out of a serene contemplation of the universe, as a kind of logical deduction from a detached observance of the nature of reality, such as might have been made by a theologian like Thomas Aquinas, but out of a life which sought an answer to the agonies of existence. What possible meaning could there be in a universe in which appalling suffering occurred? How could such unhappiness be endured by ordinary human beings? For Williams the concept of co-inherenee offered the possibility of finding something like an answer. Pain becomes bearable when it is shared. A cliché? Yes, but when the depths of the implications of that cliché are fully understood it becomes the profoundest truth of all. And the truth has to be lived, not merely acknowledged.

And so we come to another war, the Second World War and the death of Alice Mary Hadfield's first husband who was killed in Amiens in June 1940. Charles Williams was by this time in Oxford, and from there he wrote one of the most remarkable letters of sympathy and condolence that I have ever read. To Alice Mary he wrote: ?...he (her husband Peter) dies for my life, and I live his actual death; in a way perhaps he lived through - if not my death at least my pain. And both of us mysteriously live and die through you. O there is no end to it, or to our despair. But in you it is a living despair: it is knowledge, princess - a living death. The past is our food; what you had, you have. No damned nostalgia. The phrases of communion at the Eucharist hold it. "The Body which was given for thee, preserve ...unto everlasting life?. Take and eat this ...Eat it. Peter and me' Alice Mary remarks of this 'The young men of 1915 and 1917, Harold Eyers and Ernest

Nottingham, returned to Charles in the deaths of 1940.' And 'below life and death lay a profounder union in a more significant bloodshed on Calvary' *(Charles Williams. An Exploration of His Life and Work.* 1983. pp. 192 - 193) This affirmation of the 'profounder union' was at the heart of the austere essay of 1943 on the Cross. 'By that central substitution,' he wrote, ' which was the thing added by the Cross to the Incarnation, He became everywhere the centre of, and everywhere He energised and reaffirmed all our substitutions and exchanges. He took what remained, after the Fall, of the torn web of humanity in all times and places, and not so much by a miracle of healing as by a growth within it made it whole.' *(The Image of the City,* Edited by Anne Ridler, 1958, p. 137)

I have tried to trace the origin of Charles Williams's concept of co-inherence and believe I have found it in the experience of suffering, but it would be quite wrong to leave the matter in the discovery of the source of the river. What is really important is what became of the river as it flowed through the world of his life and work. Perhaps he already knew in those early years that what was true of suffering was true also of joy. That is to say that what was true was simply true: a universal truth that governed all life in whatever mode. All life in the kingdom, he remarked, was vicarious: we participate in the joys of others as much as in their sufferings. No happiness is our own: the gladness of heart that suddenly enraptures us is as much a gift of another as the inexplicable misery that enters our lives when we least expect it. The essay on the Cross has to be balanced by *The Figure of Beatrice.* The purpose of God in the act of Incarnation was not merely to demonstrate supreme love by dying on a cross, it was elevate humanity to the divine life of the coinherent Trinity. To use the formulation of St. Athanasius: 'God became man in order that we might become divine'. Or, to use the statement of the Athanasian Creed so beloved of Charles Williams himself: Christ was one with us 'not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by the taking of the Manhood into God.'

Steeple on a Hill

Professor Jeremy Hooker reviews *Steeple on a Hill*, a collection of poems by Glen Cavaliero, published by Tantarus Press.

Glen Cavaliero is a poet with an appetite for landscape. As he says in 'Wetherlam Work', a poem in his new collection, *Steeple on a Hill*, the mountain is 'mine to feed-on as to see'. The result is bodily knowledge, which is in the tradition of romantic and modern English landscape poetry, which embodies spiritual vision through its rendering of the 'matter' of place.

Cavaliero responds keenly to the poetry of place-names, but avoids writing a neo-Georgian verse which evokes a mythic England replete with 'haunts of ancient peace'. He has a strong historical sense, and depicts landscapes that are products of cultural history. In 'Broadwell sequence', for instance, he writes: 'in old green poudering gardens/flowers and leaves consort with lute and glove'. It is in his language, in words and images and puns ('pondering'), that the past haunts the present in places that disclose their human shaping.

Cavaliero has, too, a sense of the inexhaustible being of nature. This is linked to the ambivalence of the sacred, to dread as well as ecstasy in face of elemental powers and nature's otherness. Nature also provokes in him a sense of loss. This points to an earlier time, 'when,' he says in 'The Passing of the Gods', 'a god's warm imprint/is engraved upon the land'. But, 'calligraphy erased', the link between the sacred and profane is broken.

Cavaliero writes of a disenchanted world, but instead of describing a state in which it is evacuated of divine meaning, he intimates an absence that haunts places and landscapes with a numinous aura.

Steeple on a Hill is Cavaliero's fourth published collection of poems. In terms of

vision, it shares common ground with his earlier collections. Its language and rhythms, however, have a new vigonr and expressiveness, a dynamism that finds verbal correspondences for natural energies. In 'The Strid', for example: 'fury of froth and water-fret that smashes/spits and gurgles along this limestone cleft/all upper Wharfedale's streams flow into'. It is in this mode, I feel, rather than in the Betjeman-like satire of 'Pilgrim's Progress', that Cavaliero most effectively shows his gratitude to the writers he mentions in a prefatory note, Arthur Machen, John Cowper Powys and David Jones, 'whose books have explored the numinous quality of the world in which we live'. In this way, Steeple on a Hill gives new life to the tradition on which it draws.

Steeple on a Hill may be obtained from Tantarus Press, 5 Birch Terrace, Hangingbirch Lane, Horam, East Sussex, TN21 0PA. The cost is £8.99 plus £1.00 postage and packaging.

The Letters of Dorothy L Sayers

Volume 2

1937 - 1943 From Novelist to Playwright

Chosen and edited by Barbara Reynolds, with a Preface by P.D. James.

Dr Brian Horne reviews *The Letters of Dorothy L Sayers Volume 2, 1937 - 1943 From Novelist to Playwright*, published by Carole Green

Should a story-teller also be a moralist? Dorothy L. Sayers, as one might have expected, had pronounced views on the matter and expressed them robustly. Unlike G.K. Chesterton, who was quite content to be regarded as a propagandist, Sayers emphatically rejected the role. In a letter of 7 April 1943 to a Mr. Stephen Hobhouse she wrote: 'I may as well begin by saying that it is not the business of the story-teller to preach sermons or draw moral conclusions; his job is to depict men as they are... It is because she had clear and determined ideas on the vocation and craft of the creative artist that she was taken by surprise when a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. William Temple, arrived inviting her to accept the award of a Lambeth Doctorate of Divinity. Eventually she refused, feeling that to accept the honour would be to compromise her sense of herself as a writer whose best work arose in the sphere of the imagination. She was wary of taking on the mantle of the Christian apologist, despite the fact that, by this time (1943), one of her finest and most renowned books, *The Mind of the Maker*, had already been published.

Her correspondence with Temple on this matter is full of interest and gives something of the flavour of the character of this combative and gifted woman: 'A Doctorate of Letters - yes: I have served Letters as faithfully as I knew how. But I have only served Divinity, as it were, accidentally, coming to it as a writer rather

than as a Christian person.' (Letter of 7 September, 1943) The relation between religion and art, morality and fiction, is one of the recurring themes in this splendid collection of letters meticulously edited by Barbara Reynolds.

These letters cover the turbulent years of the late thirties and the early part of the Second World War. Shortly after the declaration of war in 1939 she put her services as a writer at the disposal of the Ministry of Information. The association was not a success: to Dr. J.H. Oldham she wrote a letter (2 October, 1939) in which she described the Ministry as an 'overcrowded monkeyhouse of graft and incompetence'. These were years in which we can see her exploring, intellectually, in all sorts of directions; and those who know her only for her fiction or for her plays or for her theology will be intrigued by her interest in and grasp of political and social issues. There is, for example, her theory of work and its relation, on the one hand to personal fulfilment, and on the other hand to money.

Her letter to Dr. Bryan Monahan in January 1943 should be compulsory reading for all contemporary politicians. But these were also the years of *The Man Born to be King*, the radio plays that would make Dorothy L. Sayers a household name. The enterprise was fraught with difficulties and frustrations from the start and there were times when it seemed as if the plays would never be written or produced. The letters tell, in fascinating detail, the whole story of the plays. At the centre of the scene is the figure of the remarkable Dr. James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting at the BBC, who initiated the project in February 1940. He it was who steered the project through to its triumphant conclusion, having to deal not only with an author of strong opinions who was not afraid to give offence, but also with officials and producers at the BBC who could be both insensitive to the playwright's intentions and quick to take offence. By dint of his patience, courtesy and tenacity the plays were written and produced for the BBC - to great acclaim - by Sayers's beloved Val Gielgud.

Dorothy L. Sayers already knew Charles Williams by this time and there is one delightful vignette of him in Simpson's restaurant. But their close association was

still in the future; and the story of their friendship has already been told by Barbara Reynolds in her book on Sayers's encounter with Dante, *The Passionate Intellect*. The reader of this volume will not only gain a deeper insight into the extraordinary mind and life of the writer of these letters but will also receive something else: a vivid impression of the world in which she lived - so close in time to our own and yet so different from our own.

The Letters of Dorothy L Sayers, Volume 2 1937 - 1943, From Novelist to Playwright may be obtained from Carole Green Publishing, 10 market Street, Swavesey, Cambridge,CB4 5QG.

The cost is £20.00 plus £3.50 postage and packaging. Cheques should be made out to Dorothy L Sayers Society (Letters). Eurocheques should be drawn in sterling. For USA orders, send dollar cheques for $33.50 plus $6.00 p&p.

Anne Scott

Recollections of Charles Williams

The following is an edited transcript of a conversation I had with Anne Scott in March 1997. Anne, who died in October 1997, and was remembered by Richard Wallis in issue no. 85, knew CW well when he lived and worked in Oxford during the war years.

When talking to Anne I was struck by the vividness of her memories of CW, and how her friendship with him enriched her understanding of his work. I hope this brief record of her recollections will enrich our understanding too.

Mark Brend (MB): You first met CW when you were a student, during the war?

Anne Scott (AS): Yes. It would have been 1940. I went to hear him speak.

MB: You were obviously struck by him straight away?

AS: Totally, yes. I?d never heard anybody who sounded in the least like him. He was so passionately convinced of the importance of poetry. He spoke with a sort of incandescence that I?d never come across before which enthralled me. Then, when I got to know him, there was always this stream of conversation ? quotations and so on ? what I call verbal fireworks, but never in an overbearing or self-conscious way at all. He was always totally interested in what he was talking about. Yet he was always prepared to listen, at the drop of a hat, to the person he was talking to, whoever that person might be and whatever they had to say ? he?d be thoroughly interested in that too!

MB: It seems that many people were struck by him in this way.

AS: There was this enormous Christian charity. You can see it in his biographies. He wrote biographies of people like Henry VII, who I think was fairly

uninteresting, and you got the impression that he found him interesting as a person, and loveable.

MB: Can you give an idea of the sort of things he spoke about in conversation with you?

AS: After I graduated, when I was taking a shorthand typing course, I got into the habit of meeting him from work, and we?d walk down the Cowley Road together. Then I?d go into Magdalen Chapel for Evensong, and he?d go on home. So we were talking steadily for over an hour every day. We?d talk about the poetry he was writing at the time, the news of course, the war. If something had happened in my life that I?d been worried about - for example, I had a sister who?d been quite ill from time to time ? we?d talk about that. He did not talk about his own personal life, apart from to say that he was very unhappy about the bombing of London ? he loved London. Like his books (it is impossible to imagine them being written by anyone else), his comments were intensely individual. Alas, alas, I didn?t keep a diary...

MB: You mentioned that he acknowledged the dark side of life. Earlier in his life he had shown an interest in the occult, and had been a member of The Order of the Golden Dawn. Did he ever mention that?

AS: No. He?d grown out of it by the time I knew him. He loved ceremony ? The Golden Dawn was something he?d enjoyed at the time and just left behind, I think.

MB: Was he disappointed by his lack of commercial success as a writer?

AS: It was beginning to happen, just in the last few years of his life. His Dante book did well, and he was very pleased by that. Of course, during the war there was a tremendous shortage of paper, and books were printed in small editions and then not reprinted. I think that was very unfortunate from his point of view. His name was becoming well known at a time when the availability of his books was limited.

MB: He was obviously a deeply Christian man. Would he talk about his own faith, or would he talk more in the abstract about belief and God.

AS: I think... more in the abstract. I remember when somebody I admired had cancer, I said that it made me feel that all the nice things in life were so thin that you could put your finger through them, and something horrible would be on the other side, and he said ?you?re not to talk like that, that?s heresy?. Although he completely saw the point and was very far from insensitive to the horrors of life, he said it was an absolutely central article of faith that if we believed in a God who was good, as we did, that we should acknowledge the darkness bnt hold in our minds that there was an answer, and if we didn?t know it now we would one day, and God was in control anyway.