

" MERE LEWIS "

WILLIAM H. ROWLETTE, M.D.

On November 22, 1963, death snatched away a leading luminary of the Western World, a man recognized for his ability to uplift and inspire his fellow man. Twenty years later, his stature has not been diminished one whit and possibly has been enhanced. A son of the auld sod, he was a man of principle and enlightenment, a spell binding speaker and exceptionally effective writer. He left what might become an indelible mark in the world of western thought. He served his country in war as an officer, was seriously wounded in action, and after the war gained prominence as a writer and speaker before serving his country again in a time of crisis and peril. Dr. Bob Jones, Jr., in speaking of him said "That man smokes tobacco and drinks liquor, but I do believe he's a Christian." Called Jack by his friends, his initials were - not JFK but CSL - Clive Staples Lewis, although I would have been disappointed if you hadn't at least given some thought to John F. Kennedy. ^{little more} Although appointed to the Chair of Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at Magdalene College, Cambridge, he is most closely associated with Oxford where he spent his years as an undergraduate scholar and later a Don for 30 years. Lewis refused all government recognition, even the CBE, but was proud to have been elected a Fellow of the University and Magdalen Colleges Oxford, and Magdalene College Cambridge, to receive an honorary DD from St. Andrews and an honorary D. Litt from Manchester, to be named a Fellow of the British Academy of the Royal Society of Literature and to be presented the Carnegie Medal for the best children's book in 1956. Lewis was outstanding in four different areas of writing including literary criticism, Science Fiction, children's literature and Christian Apologetics. His first publication, however, was a volume of poetry entitled "Spirits in Bondage" which appeared in 1919. In addition to writing books, he also carried on a vast correspondence with family members and friends on both sides of the Atlantic. His close friends included Charles Williams, J.R.R. Tolkien, Dorothy Sayers, Austing and Kay Farrer, Hugo Dyson, Owen Barfield and others.

Lewis was a scholar, a teacher, a writer, a social critic, an amateur theologian as well as a fellow Wellmet. One of his main characteristics as a Christian writer, lay in the freshness and depth of his

observations and the unique manner of expressions which he employed. He came to Christianity via the back door and never suffered the disadvantages of a theological education as such. Consequently he is most effective in communicating the basic ideas of Christianity to the laity in understandable terms. Lewis described himself as "a converted pagan living among the apostate pilgrims." But by others as "the apostle to the skeptics". Although given nominal exposure to the Christian faith in childhood, by age 14 he became "thankfully" atheistic and remained so until 31 when he embraced theism. In his search for truth, he narrowed the genuine religions down to Hinduism and Christianity. As opposed to the leap of faith which denied reason, Lewis felt the case for Christ was so reasonable that all other approaches had very basic flaws in their rationalistic foundations. In his autobiography, Surprised by Joy, he related, "you must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling that whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him who I so earnestly desired not to meet, that which I greatly feared, had at last come upon me and during trinity term of 1929, I gave in and admitted that God was God and knelt and prayed. Perhaps that night the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England, I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal son at least walked home on his own feet, but who can duly adore that love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance to escape." "A young man who wishes to remain a sound atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere. Bibles lay open, millions of surprises, as Herbert says 'fine nets and strategms'. God is, if I might say it, very unscrupulous. "The change from theism to Christianity took place two years later and was in a sense uneventful. On Monday, September 28, he and his brother, Warren, headed for a picnic at Whipsnade zoo via motorcycle, with CSL riding in the sidecar. "When we set out", he wrote, "I didn't believe that Jesus Christ was the son of God and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet, I had

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not spent the journey in thought or in great emotion. Emotional was perhaps the last word we can apply to some of the most important events. It was more like when a man, after a long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake." To a friend he wrote, "what has been holding me back, at any rate, for the last year or so, was not so much difficulty in believing as difficulty in knowing what the doctrine meant; you can't believe a thing while you are ignorant of what the thing is. My puzzle was the whole doctrine of redemption: In what sense does the life and death of Christ "save" or "open salvation to" the world.

Lewis was anything but a prude and enjoyed life thoroughly as a man's man. "My happiest hours", he once said, "are spent with three or four old friends in old clothes, tramping together and putting up in small pubs - or else sitting up till the small hours in someone's college rooms talking nonsense, poetry, theology or metaphysics over beer, tea and pipes. There's no sound I like better than adult male laughter."

The years in Oxford were very busy ones although he enjoyed his vacations back home to Ireland or in making walking tours with his friends. As a lecturer he was very much in demand at the college and had a busy schedule of tutorials. A typical Lewis day began with tea at 7:15 a.m. followed by a bath and shave, a brief stroll in Addison's walk before matins in Magdalen chapel. After breakfast in the Commons Room he returned to his quarters to read, write and answer correspondence. He rarely read the newspaper except to glance at the headlines or occasionally work the crossword puzzle. After morning tutorials from 9 til 1, he was driven to his home at nearby Headington Quarry, named "The Kilns" for lunch and a long walk. After tea at 4:15 he returned to the college for further tutorials from 5 til 7 and evening dinner in the High Hall. On Tuesday evening, students who were studying Anglo-Saxon were invited to his quarters for "beer and Beowulf."

As a lecturer, Lewis spoke almost entirely from a written text but

would occasionally add additional examples or explanations which later usually found their way into the basic text before repeating the course. He had a good sense of timing and sense of humor which was a surprise to undergraduates accustomed to hearing drier pedagogues. One undergrad registered his shock as he sat for the first time at the hall in Magdalen and there strode in a big man with a large red face and shabby clothes, looking like nothing so much as a prosperous butcher, who began addressing his audience in a loud, booming voice and with tremendous gusto. Once over this first impression it became obvious that one was listening to not merely a scholar of immense erudition but to a lover of literature who had read every text he mentioned and enjoyed most of them and was eager to share both his knowledge and his enthusiasm with anyone. He lectured for exactly three-quarters of an hour and never waited to answer questions. Two minutes before the end of the lecture he would gather his notes together and return the watch which at one time he was in the habit of borrowing from the nearest student and prepared to leave, lecturing all the time. As he finished his last sentence he would step off the dais and stride down the aisle, out of the door at top speed. If he was late arriving, he would begin even before he entered the hall and several times the great voice came booming up the steps outside the hall door and Lewis would enter in haste, lecturing vigorously. His knowledge certainly seemed prodigious. Every quotation that was not originally in English was given in the correct language, followed by translation, Norse, Olde and Middle English, Latin, Greek, French, German, Italian and even old Welsh.

One of the more interesting institutions in Lewis' life was the Inklings Club, an undetermined and unselected group of friends who gathered about Jack and included in its heyday, Charles Williams, Tolkien, Coghill, Dyson, Barfield, Adam Fox and Dr. Havard, his personal physician. They met in Lewis' rooms on Thursday evenings but also on Tuesday noon at the Eagle and Child Pub, known as the Bird and the Baby, or at the Lamb and the Flag. Extra meetings were occasionally held at the Trout, a countryside pub. Papers were read and discussed, new ideas introduced, previous books criticized with considerable give and take. It is likely that Williams and Tolkien

greatly influenced Lewis and in turn were influenced by him.

Near the end of Michaelmas term in 1941, a young lady who attended Somerville College, complained that no one in Oxford seemed ready to discuss the questions agnostics raised against God. An open forum was arranged for the discussion of the intellectual difficulties connected with religion in general and Christianity in particular. This led to the formation of the Oxford University Socratic Club with CSL as President and which embraced all of the colleges. The club met from 8:15 til 10:30 p.m. and consisted of an atheist or agnostic presenting his side followed by a Christian, or in reverse order. Lewis really enjoyed the rough and tumble of rational opposition with much good humor on both sides. The celebrated atheist, Dr. C.E.M. Joad and Lewis were at it hot and heavy one night, both perspiring profusely when Joad asked the presiding secretary if he might remove his coat. Lewis declined himself despite the heavy tweed jacket - his shirt had a large hole in it which the coat covered. Once when a relativist ended by saying, "the world does not exist, England does not exist, Oxford does not exist and I am confident that I do not exist," Lewis stood up and said "How am I to talk with a man who is not there?"

Lewis spent the weekends at his home, the Kilns, and attended Holy Trinity Church where on a July Sunday morning in 1940 he was struck with the inspiration to write what would become his most famous book. He would call it "As one Devil to Another" and it would consist of letters from Screwtape - his abysmal sublimity under-secretary Screwtape of the Infernal Civil Service Lowerarcy, to his nephew Wormwood, a junior devil who had just been assigned to a new convert on earth. The thirty-one letters were sent to the editor of the Guardian, a magazine, who published them in weekly installments from May until November 1942, but later printed in bookform as The Screwtape Letters, which went rapidly through eight reprints and then was printed in the colonies by Macmillan, where it topped the best seller list. Lewis had already decided that monies made from religious writing should go to charity and his lawyer, Owen Barfield, helped him set up a charitable trust to which would be paid 2/3 of the royalties to help the poor. Prior publications included "The Pilgrim's Regress"

in 1932, an introduction to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and The Allegory of Love, A Study in Medieval Tradition which firmly established him as a first rate scholar and writer in 1936, and The Problem of Pain, a Christian book which addressed the problem of why Christians suffer. Four-fifths of the world's suffering, said he, grows out of the wickedness of human souls who have misused their freedom of will. Pain is one of God's methods of enabling a man to face his self-will and have it destroyed before self-will destroys the man. "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." After reading this book, Dr. James Welch, Director of Religious Broadcasting for BBC, asked Lewis to present a series of four 15 minute radio broadcasts live from London under the title of "Right or Wrong - a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe" which he reluctantly agreed to do. Due to an overwhelming response, an additional program was arranged to answer questions raised and which prompted a huge pile of mail - some of which Lewis related "were written by lunatics and signed "Jehovah" or began "Dear Mr. Lewis: I was married at age 20 to a man I didn't love..."A fall out from this was, an invitation from the RAF head Chaplain to give talks on various RAF bases and to which he readily agreed. Another broadcast series followed "What Christians Believe" ending with a synopsis of the faith in which he stated, "Enemy occupied territory - that's what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed by surprise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage." A third series of broadcasts, "Christian Behavior" appeared in the summer of 1942 and the last "Beyond Personality" was aired in the Spring of 1944. The last three series were published in a single volume, Mere Christianity . His most quoted passage concerns St. Augustine's argument that Christ was either God or a bad man and goes thusly:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish things that people often say about Him. I'm willing to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God. This is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said, would not be a great

moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is, the Son of God: or else He's a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

The Great Divorce appeared in 1945 in the Guardian in weekly installments and makes the point that the innumerable choices of life conditions a soul for eternity and that these choices are a perfect reflection of the will of the individual. It uses the format of a dream in which a bus load of men and women who live in the grey city of Hell travel to Heaven but turn down a warm invitation to enter. Miracles was written in 1943 but not published until 1947. Often he would work on several different books at one time and took years to complete volume III of the Oxford History of the English Language, or The O-HELL as he called it. Surprised by Joy was his autobiography from birth to conversion. The Four Loves was completed from a radio series for the Episcopal Radio Foundation in the U.S. However, when the bishops went over the script they felt Lewis was too frank for the American audience. Lewis felt it ironic that a country which peddled so much pornography could not bear to hear a Christian discussion of sex. He worked with others on a new translation of the Psalms and later wrote Reflections on the Psalms.

The Chronicles of Narnia, written between 1949 and 1952 may well become Lewis' main claim to fame. It is a seven volume set of children's books and is basically a prolonged fairy tale set in a cosmos. Here his great imagination and love of mythology are displayed while maintaining a subliminal Christian theme. Narnia is a place with magic portals into and out of our world and is populated by not only human-like characters but also of talking trees and talking animals. There is Puddleglum the Marshwiggle, Trufflehunter the Badger, Tumnus the Fawn, Rumblepuffin the courteous giant, Trumpkin the dwarf, Glimfeather the owl and a cast of hundreds. It all started out with

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a mental image of a golden lion which evolved into a book, The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe but grew into the full series. The Magician's Nephew and The Last Battle were the last two books written but were the bookends - the beginning and the end. Aslan the Golden Lion represents Christ while Jadis the White Witch depicts the forces of evil.

The space trilogy includes Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra and That Hideous Strength but The Abolition of Man is a small explanatory volume which should also be included. They are a blend of science fiction, mythology and Christian allegory and the main character, Dr. Elwin Ransom, is a philologist from Cambridge who gets shanghaied into a space ship headed for the planet Malacandra - Mars. He later goes to Perelandra - Venus. The basic theme is a mythical account of the temptation and fall of man.

Lewis' increasing fame outside Oxford seemed to mitigate against his recognition within it and he was never elected to a professorship there. Tolkien had explained that "no Oxford Don was forgiven for writing books outside his field of study - except for detective stories which Dons, like everyone else, read when they were down with the flu. It was unforgivable that Lewis wrote international best-sellers, and worse still that many were of a religious nature." In 1954 Cambridge advertised a new professorship of Medieval and Renaissance literature attached to Magdalene College and Basil Wiley, Professor of English wrote asking Lewis to apply which he did and was accepted. He made the move in January 1955 after presenting a colorful inaugural lecture, "De Descriptione Temporum" in November 1954. At Cambridge he no longer had to endure tutorials and had time to lecture on those branches of literature which most interested him. His tie to Oxford remained strong, however, and he continued to maintain his home near Oxford and spent his weekends and vacations there, riding the slow train - "The Cantab Crawler" over on Monday evenings. The Inklings moved their sessions up to Monday noon to accommodate the schedule.

Separate from the University life was a home life which had quite a

degree of pathos. Born in 1898 in County Down, Ulster, he was the son of Albert Lewis, a solicitor and first generation professional man, although descended from a long line of Welsh farmers. His mother, Flora Hamilton, was a Clergyman's daughter and came from a family of respectable antiquity. She was an intelligent, well-educated woman who had taken a first in mathematics at Queens College, Belfast. Flora began teaching her two sons, Warren, two years older, and Jack, Latin and French when they were six but she died when Jack was nine. He wrote "With my mother's death all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable disappeared from my life." Following her death, the Lewis boys had marked difficulty in relating to their father. They lapsed into a dream world all of their own, created an imaginary land called Boxen with talking animals and Asian Indians and were very close. They were sent to boarding school in England.

Jack was always an avid reader and his father had many volumes at home to choose from. While at Cherbourg School, he became profoundly interested in Norse mythology after reading Siegfried and Twilight of the Gods which led to exploring other books on Norse and Teutonic legends and the Sagas and Icelandic Eddas. He also developed an interest in Wagner and the Ring and bought the complete set of Gramophone records. A common interest in Norse Mythology made him a friend for life with Arthur Greeves, a neighbor in Ulster, and they corresponded on a weekly basis for the next 40 years. Arthur was a committed Christian and perhaps was more an influence than Lewis realized. Following Malvern College, his father sent Jack to live with Professor Kirkpatrick, also an Ulster Scot who had taught Albert at Lurgan College and apparently had an excellent reasoning mind, forcing Lewis to give firm reasons for every statement which he uttered. He was taught to translate Greek and Latin, going through Demosthenes, Cicero, Lucretius, Catullus and Homer but somehow always prided himself upon having avoided Caesar. In his spare time the young man read Milton, Spenser, Mallory, The High History of the Holy Grail, Gawain and the Green Knight, The Kalevala, Signey's Arcadia, William Morris, Yeats and the Phantases by George Macdonald who profoundly influenced his later writing. Jack was never athletically inclined

and indeed was somewhat clumsy, though large for his age. Both he and Warren lacked a functioning prehensile thumb which made manual dexterity almost impossible. Warren attended Sandhurst, received a commission into the Army and was sent to France. Jack passed his examination for Oxford with high marks. In Summer term 1917, the war was in it's third year and only 12 scholars were enrolled in University College, most of the building being used as a military hospital. Although he could have avoided military service as an Irish citizen, Jack felt obligated to serve and joined the Officers Training Corps at Keble College. He made an immediate friend in Paddie Moore, visited the Moore home in Bristol and they made a mutual agreement that if either were killed, the other would assume responsibility for Moore's mother or Lewis' father. Jack was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the Somerset Light Infantry and arrived in France in November 1917. He mentions his brief army career in *Terms of the Comradeship*, *The Terror of the Trench* and *The Fatigue*. He was hospitalized for one month with trench fever and discovered G.K. Chesterton's Everlasting Man while there. During the course of Von Ludendorf's failed offensive in the West, he captured 60 Germans but dismissed it as a joke by saying they suddenly appeared, a crowd of field gray figures with their hands up. In April 1918 a short-falling English artillery shell seriously wounded him and he was hospitalized in France and England before being demobilized in time to begin the January 1919 term at Oxford. Paddy Moore was killed in March 1918 near Arras and true to his word Lewis assumed the care of Mrs. Moore and her daughter Maureen, the mother, until her death in 1951. This arrangement created further alienation with Albert Lewis. After the war, Warren remained a career officer, returning to England infrequently, and was in Shanghai in 1929 when their father died. After settling the estate, the brothers bought a house in Headington Quarry known as "The Kilns" which became their official residence.

After Mrs. Moore's death in 1951, Helen Joy Davidman entered Lewis' life and despite a deadly illness gave him some of the happiest years of his life. She and her husband, William Gresham had been converted to Christianity after reading some of Lewis' books and she came to England from the U.S. to see him, leaving her husband and family behind. Lewis enjoyed an intellectual friendship but Joy had other things

on her mind and after her divorce she moved to London, bringing her two small sons with her. In 1955 she moved to Oxford but was faced with an expiring visitors permit which the home office was not going to renew because of her brief association with Communism in the late 1930's. In order to allow her to stay, Lewis married her in a civil ceremony but they maintained separate living arrangements. In October 1956 after having a problem with "rheumatism" she sustained a pathological fracture of the left leg and bone cancer was discovered. Since she was unable to walk and would have to be care for, Lewis arranged for her to come to the Kilns and had the marriage bans duly published, but there was no physical consummation. Father Peter Bide, a priest in London and faith-healer came to Oxford and laid hands on Joy's leg and also performed a religious marriage in the hospital. The doctors said a healing miracle had taken place and by the Autumn of 1957 they were able to dismiss all of the nurses, and she was able to dine out. She did notably well until October 1959 when a recurrence of cancer was evident. Joy's lifelong ambition had been to visit Greece and in April 1959 they made a trip through the Isles of Greece with their friends the Lancelyn Greens. She died three months later and Lewis poured out his grief in A Grief Observed, written under the pseudonym of H.W. Clerk. In the meantime, Lewis' own health had declined and he had developed osteoporosis, renal disease and prostatic hypertrophy. In August 1963 he resigned his chair at Cambridge but continued to receive friends at the Kilns until his death there in November.

Although Lewis now has been dead for 20 years, his books continue to be widely read, and to influence people in all walks of life. Under the direction of Clyde Kilby, Wheaton College in Illinois has become a repository of his writings and a center for studying Lewisomania. Walter Hooper, an American who became Jack's personal secretary in his last months of life, is director of the Lewis collection at the Codleian Library in Oxford.

Then Aslan turned to them and said, 'You are - as you used to call it, in the shadowlands - dead. The term is over: The Holidays have begun. The dream has ended: This is the morning....

And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say they all lived happily every after. But for them, it was only the beginning of the story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and title page: Now at last they were beginning chapter one of the great story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

"The Last Battle"