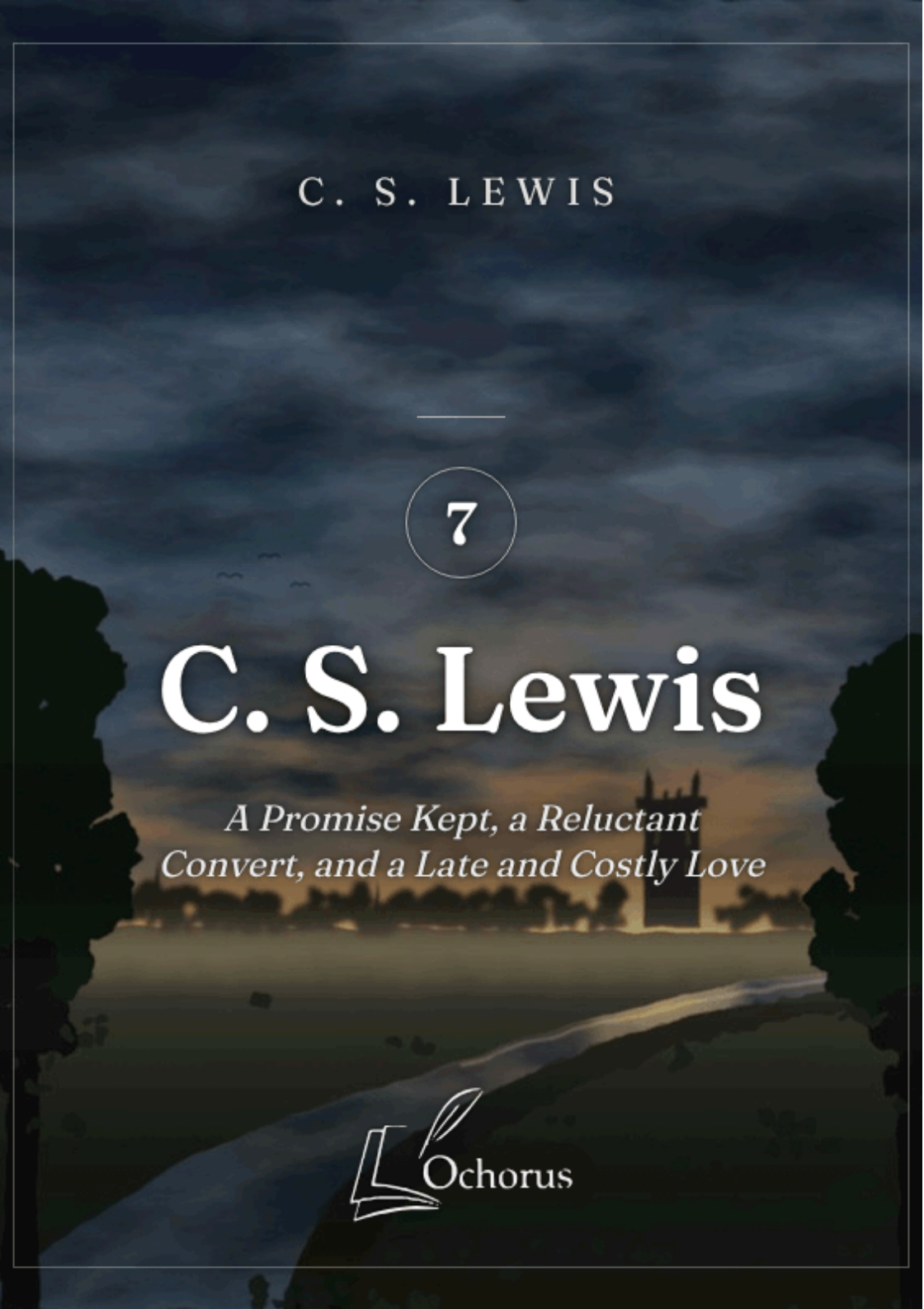

C. S. LEWIS
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C. S. Lewis
A Promise Kept, a Reluctant Convert, and a Late and Costly Love
Ochorus

Portraits of Courage – C. S. Lewis

A Promise Kept, a Reluctant Convert, and a Late and Costly Love

Ochorus Originals

First published 2026.

OCHORUS

About Ochorus

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Matthew 10:8

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About this work

This is a biography of C. S. Lewis, not a book by him. Written by Ochorus as the seventh volume of Portraits of Courage, it tells his whole life in narrative: the Belfast childhood and the mother he lost at nine; the schools he hated and the atheist tutor he loved; the trenches of 1918 and the promise he made to a friend who did not come home; thirty years in the household of that friend's mother; three firsts and a fellowship at Magdalen; the long, reluctant road from atheism to God and then to Christ, by way of Addison's Walk and a sidecar to Whipsnade; the Kilns, the Inklings and Charles Williams; the wartime broadcasts and the talks to airmen; weekly confession, daily prayer, the Agape Fund and thousands of letters answered by hand; the Socratic Club and the Anscombe debate; Narnia and Cambridge; his marriage to Joy Davidman, twice, and her death; A Grief Observed; and his own death at home on 22 November 1963.

It is an independent work. It is not published by, affiliated with, or endorsed by the C. S. Lewis estate or by any company that holds rights in his writings. Lewis's own books are still in copyright and should be obtained from their publishers. This book tells his life in its own words, quotes him only in three short sentences, each with its source, and does not retell his stories. His teaching is set out in a separate Ochorus companion, Key Teachings of C. S. Lewis.

Where the sources disagree, on the year he came to believe in God, on the nature of his relationship with Janie Moore, or on what happened at the Socratic Club in 1948, the book says so and gives the main views fairly. It is written with gratitude but not hagiography, naming real struggles: his pride, his deception of his father, his brother's alcoholism and his own grief. All Scripture is from the King James Version. It ends with lessons from his life, a study guide, a chronology, and a note on sources with further reading, including the public-domain classics he loved that are in the Ochorus library: Athanasius, Augustine, Bunyan, Thomas à Kempis and William Law.

Preface

"I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me."
— Romans 10:20, KJV

The earlier volumes of this series told of a Chinese church leader who died in a Communist labour camp, an American who prayed his way through the villages of the Punjab, a Dutch watchmaker who hid Jews behind a false wall, a Scottish mill girl who went alone up the rivers of Calabar, an African bishop who had once been sold as a slave, and an Indian widow who built a home for thousands of outcast women. This seventh volume tells the story of a man whose courage looked much less dramatic than any of theirs. He was never imprisoned for his faith. He never went to a mission field. He spent nearly all his working life in two of the most comfortable universities in the world, teaching young men to read old poems.

C. S. Lewis is, even so, a portrait of courage. It took courage of an unusual kind to be converted at all, against the grain of his own temper and of the clever company he kept. It took courage to keep, for more than thirty years, a promise made to a friend who was killed in France. It took courage to speak plainly about Christ on the radio to a nation at war, and to go on speaking when the colleagues whose good opinion he valued thought it vulgar. It took courage to marry a dying woman in a hospital ward against the advice of nearly everyone, and more courage still to write down, without disguise, what her death did to his faith. And it took a quieter,

daily courage to answer by hand the letters of thousands of strangers, to go to confession every week, and to give away most of what his books earned.

What This Book Is

This book is a narrative life. It follows Lewis from his birth in Belfast in 1898 to his death in Oxford in 1963, and it tries to give the people around him their due: his father Albert, his mother Flora, his brother Warren, the friend called Paddy Moore and Paddy's mother Janie, J. R. R. Tolkien and the other Inklings, Charles Williams, the priest who heard his confessions, and Joy Davidman, the American poet whom he married twice. It is not an account of his teaching. A companion volume in the Ochorus library, *Key Teachings of C. S. Lewis*, sets out what he believed and wrote about joy, the moral law, pain, prayer, love and glory. The present book touches his ideas only where they are part of the story of his life, and then only briefly. Nor does it retell his stories. Readers who want Narnia, Screwtape or the planets should go to his own books.

A Word About His Words

That is not only a matter of arrangement. Lewis's books are still in copyright, they are still in print, and the people who hold the rights in them guard them carefully, as they are entitled to do. This book is an independent Ochorus biography. It is not published by, affiliated with, or endorsed by the C. S. Lewis estate or by any company that holds rights in his writings. It tells his life in its own words. Apart from three very short sentences, each given with its source, it does not quote him, and where it reports what he thought or felt it does so in paraphrase. His books are named so that readers can find them, and readers are warmly encouraged to

buy them or borrow them from a library and to hear him for themselves. No summary can replace the clarity, the humour and the warmth of the man himself.

Why Courage?

There is a temptation, writing about Lewis, to make him more comfortable than he was. He has become a kind of patron saint for Christians who like books, and his face appears on mugs and calendars. But the man who emerges from his letters, from his brother's diaries and from the memories of those who knew him was not comfortable. He was proud and knew it. He could be overbearing in argument and wounding in his wit. He lost his mother as a child and never really reached his father. He lived for three decades in a household many of his friends found baffling, and some of them found it unhappy. His brother was an alcoholic. His wife died little more than four years after their wedding, and cancer shadowed nearly all of those years. He knew years of exhaustion, and he faced his own death with a mixture of calm and weariness. He was, in short, a sinner who was being made a saint, and the making was slow.

That is what makes his life worth telling. It is the story of a man God pursued for a long time, who resisted for as long as he could, who gave in with very bad grace, and who then spent the rest of his life trying, with all his gifts and all his faults, to serve the One who had caught him.

How This Book Is Written

Like the earlier volumes, this book tries to be honest about its sources. Lewis told part of his own story in *Surprised by Joy* (1955), but that book is selective by design, and in places his memory can be shown to have slipped.

His letters, published in three large volumes, and his brother's diaries give a fuller and sometimes different picture. Biographers have weighed the evidence carefully, and on a few points they still disagree. Where they do, this book says so and gives the main views fairly. It does not invent dialogue, and it does not put thoughts into anyone's head that the sources do not support.

Scripture in This Book

Following the companion volume on his teaching, and the Bible Lewis himself grew up with, all Scripture in this book is quoted from the Authorised (King James) Version, which is in the public domain. Each chapter opens with a passage that carries its theme.

The verse at the head of this preface is Paul's quotation of Isaiah: God was found by those who did not seek him. Lewis would have said that it was the truest sentence anyone could write about his life. He did not go looking for God. For years he did everything he could to avoid him. But he was found, and the finding changed not only him but millions of people who would never meet him. This book is the story of how that happened, and of what the rest of his life was like once it had.

Introduction: The Life He Told, and the Life the Letters Tell

"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts."
— Proverbs 21:2, KJV

C. S. Lewis disliked writing about himself. He disliked being asked about himself, and he was suspicious of the modern habit of reading an author's books as clues to his private life. He thought that a poem or a story should be looked at, not through. It is an irony he would have enjoyed, or perhaps resented, that he has become one of the most written-about Christians of the twentieth century. There are dozens of biographies, several films, plays and novels, a stream of scholarly studies, and an industry of quotations, some genuine and many not. Anyone who tries to tell his life now has to make his way through a great deal of material, and through a few well-worn legends.

His Own Account

Lewis did tell part of his story himself. *Surprised by Joy*, published in 1955 when he was fifty-six, is the account of his childhood, his schooling, his loss of faith and his long road back to it. It is a brilliant book, funny and sharp and searching, and it remains the indispensable source for his early life. But it is not a full autobiography, and it never claims to be. Lewis said plainly

that he was telling the story of his conversion, and only those parts of his life that bore upon it. The book stops in 1931, more than thirty years before his death. It says very little about the war, almost nothing about the Moore household in which he lived for three decades, and nothing at all about his marriage, which had not yet happened.

It also has the weaknesses of all memory. Lewis wrote it in his fifties about events in his childhood and youth, and he wrote it with a purpose. Some of his judgements were sharpened by hindsight. His picture of his father is affectionate but also, many readers have felt, unfair. His account of his English schools is so bitter that his brother, who had attended one of them and liked it, thought it badly overdrawn. And at least one of his dates, the year he came to believe in God, appears to be wrong, as we shall see.

The Letters and the Diaries

Fortunately Lewis was one of the great letter-writers of his age, and an enormous number of his letters survive. They have been gathered and edited by Walter Hooper, a young American who became his secretary for a few weeks in 1963 and spent the rest of his long life serving his literary legacy. The *Collected Letters* fill three thick volumes, and they let us follow Lewis almost week by week from his schooldays to the end. His letters to his boyhood friend Arthur Greeves, written over nearly fifty years, are especially revealing, because Greeves was the one person to whom he told almost everything.

His brother Warren kept a diary for most of his adult life. A selection was published in 1982 under the title *Brothers and Friends*, and Warren also wrote a short memoir of his brother which was printed with the first collection of Lewis's letters in 1966. Warren's testimony is precious, because he knew Jack better and longer than anyone. But it has its own colouring.

He loved his brother fiercely, he disliked Mrs Moore intensely, and in his later years he wrote some things in bitterness that he might have softened in health.

There are also the memories of friends, pupils and colleagues, recorded in books and interviews over many decades, and the published letters and diaries of others in his circle, especially Tolkien. And there are the records kept by colleges, regiments, hospitals and registry offices, which can sometimes settle a question that memory leaves open.

The Biographers

The first full biography was written by two of his friends, Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, and published in 1974. It is warm, detailed and close to its subject. George Sayer, a former pupil who became a close friend, published *Jack* in 1988, a book many readers still think the best portrait of the man. A. N. Wilson's biography of 1990 was livelier and more sceptical, and it provoked argument for some of its claims. Alan Jacobs wrote a fine study of Lewis's imagination, *The Narnian*, in 2005. In 2013, the fiftieth anniversary of Lewis's death, Alister McGrath published a biography that went back to the letters and re-examined the chronology, and it changed some long-accepted dates. Philip and Carol Zaleski's *The Fellowship* of 2015 set Lewis among the other Inklings. Abigail Santamaria's life of Joy Davidman, also of 2015, told the marriage from Joy's side. This book has drawn on all of them, and its debts are listed in the last appendix.

Where the Sources Disagree

On most of the facts of Lewis's life the sources agree. On a few they do not, and it is better to name them at the start.

The first is the date of his conversion to belief in God. Lewis placed it in the summer term of 1929. McGrath, reading the letters closely, has argued that it must have been the summer of 1930, and most scholars now accept his case, though not all. This book gives both dates and explains the reasoning in its place.

The second is the nature of Lewis's relationship with Janie Moore, the mother of his dead friend, with whom he lived from 1919 until her death in 1951. Some biographers believe that in its early years it was a love affair. Others believe it was always the relationship of a young man to a woman who had become a second mother to him. Lewis never explained it, and the evidence is incomplete. This book sets out what is known and what is guessed, and does not pretend to settle what cannot be settled.

The third is a cluster of smaller matters: the exact date of the famous ride to Whipsnade Zoo, the story of his supposed humiliation at the hands of the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe, and several details of his marriage that later films and plays have rearranged for dramatic effect. Each is dealt with where it falls.

The Legends

Some stories about Lewis are simply false, and it does no honour to him to repeat them. He did not lose his faith in reason after a debate in 1948. He did not abandon his Christian writing in old age. The film *Shadowlands*, which many people know better than any book, changed the ages of Joy's sons, left one of them out entirely, and invented scenes and words that never happened, as films do. And a great many sayings attributed to Lewis on the internet are not his at all. This book quotes him only three times, each time from a published book and with the source given. Everything else is told in its own words.

What Kind of Book This Is

This is a Christian biography. It does not pretend to be neutral about the faith Lewis came to hold, but it does try to be fair to the man, including his faults. Lewis had no patience with a cult of personality, and he disliked fuss about himself above almost anything. The truth about a sinner whom God was mending is more use to other sinners than a legend about a saint, and it gives the glory where it belongs. He would want his life told straight. That is what the following chapters attempt.

Little Lea

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."
— Proverbs 22:6, KJV

A Belfast Family

Clive Staples Lewis was born on 29 November 1898 in a semi-detached house called Dundela Villas, in Strandtown, on the eastern edge of Belfast. Belfast at the end of the nineteenth century was a city of shipyards, linen mills and rope works, proud, industrious and deeply Protestant. From the hills above Strandtown one could see the great gantries of the Harland and Wolff yard, where a few years later the *Titanic* would be built. Lewis grew up within sight of the cranes and within sound of the ships' sirens on the lough, and for the rest of his life he loved the soft, wet Ulster countryside of hills, mists and distant sea.

His father, Albert James Lewis, was a solicitor with a practice in the police courts. Albert was the son of a Welsh boilermaker who had settled in Ireland and done well in the shipbuilding trade. He was clever, emotional, fond of oratory and of long words, a keen reader and an anxious man. He loved his sons deeply and never found an easy way to show it. His wife, Florence Augusta Hamilton, always called Flora, came from a different world. Her father, the Reverend Thomas Hamilton, was rector of St

Mark's, Dundela, the parish church where the Lewis boys were baptised. Flora was quiet, humorous and unusually well educated. She had studied at Queen's College in Belfast and had taken a degree with honours in logic and mathematics, at a time when very few women anywhere went to university at all. Albert courted her for years before she agreed to marry him in 1894.

There were two children. Warren Hamilton Lewis was born in June 1895, and Clive three and a half years later. While still very small, Clive announced that he would no longer answer to his name. He had decided to be called after a dog of the neighbourhood, Jacksie, and he held out until the family gave in. The name shortened to Jacks and then to Jack, and Jack he remained to his family and friends for the rest of his life. Only the outside world called him Clive, and later C. S. Lewis.

Two Brothers

The bond between the two boys was the steadiest thing in Lewis's life. Warren, known to the family as Warnie, was his first friend and in many ways his last. In *Surprised by Joy* Lewis remembered a day when his brother brought into the nursery the lid of a biscuit tin covered with moss and decorated with twigs and flowers, to make a toy garden. It was the first beauty he could remember, and it stirred in him a sudden, aching longing that he could not explain. Such moments came to him again and again in childhood, prompted by the sight of distant hills, by a story, by a line of poetry. He later gave the experience a name, and he came to believe that it was one of the threads by which God had been drawing him. That longing belongs to his teaching, and it is explored in the companion volume. For his life, what matters is that it was there from the beginning, and that it would not let him go.

The brothers were inseparable when they were together. When they were apart, they wrote. Jack was a bookish, imaginative child, short-sighted, clumsy with his hands because of a defect in the joint of his thumbs, and hopeless at games. He drew and wrote endlessly. Together the two boys invented an entire imaginary world. Jack's part was a country called Animal-Land, peopled by dressed animals and knights in armour. Warnie's part was India. In time the two were joined into a single realm called Boxen, with its own history, geography, politics and railway timetables. The Boxen stories, which survive, are full of parliaments and cabinet intrigues. They are not much like the later Narnia books. They are the writings of a boy who listened to the grown-up talk of his father and his father's friends about politics and the law, and turned it into a game.

The House of Books

In April 1905, when Jack was six, the family moved to a large new house that Albert had built a little further out of the city, on the Circular Road in Strandtown. It was called Little Lea. It was a rambling, draughty, rather badly designed house, full of long corridors, odd corners, empty rooms and attics, and above all it was full of books. Lewis remembered them in almost every room and stacked in the attics, and he remembered that no one stopped him reading any of them. On the long wet afternoons that a Belfast childhood offered in abundance, he explored the house and read. He had found his way into the old poets and novelists long before anyone set them for him at school.

It was a sheltered, privileged and happy world. There were maids, a governess, a nurse called Lizzie Endicott who told the boys Irish stories, and summer holidays by the sea in County Down. Flora taught Jack the beginnings of French and Latin herself. The family went to church at St

Mark's, where Jack's grandfather preached sermons that the boy found long. He learned his prayers and said them. There is no sign that faith was ever forced on him, and no sign either that it ever took deep root. Like many children of devout households, he took the Christian world for granted, as he took Little Lea for granted, without asking what it rested on.

Albert

Albert Lewis deserves more justice than his younger son, in his later years, was able to give him. In *Surprised by Joy* Albert appears as a well-meaning but absurd figure, given to rhetorical outbursts, to muddled questions and to misunderstandings that his sons found comic. Many readers, and some of the biographers, have felt that this portrait is unkind. Albert was a man of real intelligence and wide reading. He was generous, he worked very hard to give his sons an education he had never had, and he went on supporting Jack, financially and otherwise, long after most fathers would have stopped. He was also lonely, nervous and stubborn, and when he was most in need of his sons' affection he was least able to win it.

Lewis came to see this himself. In his later years he spoke with deep regret of how he had treated his father, and friends recalled that it weighed on him more than almost anything else in his past. That regret, as we shall see, was part of what brought him to his knees. It belongs to a much later chapter. In 1905, in the new house full of books, father and sons were still close, and the boy who would one day describe a house with a wardrobe that opened onto another world was simply happy.

The verse at the head of this chapter is a promise to parents. Albert and Flora Lewis did, in their way, train up their younger son in the way he should go. For a long time it seemed that the promise had failed, and that he

had departed from it completely. But the book of Proverbs speaks of the end, not the middle. When he was old, he had not departed from it.

August 1908

"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up."
— Psalm 27:10, KJV

The Illness

Early in 1908 Flora Lewis fell ill. The doctors found cancer. In those days an operation for cancer was often performed at home, and Flora's was carried out at Little Lea, with the household doing its best to go on around it. For a while she seemed to rally. She was taken to the seaside to recover, and Jack went with her. Then, in the summer, the disease returned. The house filled with nurses, doctors and the smell of antiseptic. Normal life stopped. The boys were kept out of the sickroom and did not understand what was happening, except that everything had changed.

It was a terrible year for Albert. His own father died in the spring of 1908. His wife was dying through the summer. Within weeks of her death his brother Joseph died too. Albert was a man of strong feeling and little self-command, and under the weight of these losses he became, for a time, almost a stranger to his sons: given to outbursts of grief and temper, absorbed in his own suffering, unable to reach the two frightened boys who were watching him.

A Prayer That Seemed to Fail

Jack prayed. He had been taught that God answers prayer, and he believed it, in the way a nine-year-old believes. He prayed that his mother would be made well. When she died, on 23 August 1908, he prayed that she would be restored to life. Nothing happened.

Looking back nearly fifty years later, Lewis did not describe this as the moment he lost his faith. He was careful about it. He thought that the prayer had not really been addressed to the God of the Christians at all. He had approached God, he said, not as a Saviour or a Judge but as a kind of magician who would do what was asked and then go away. When the magic did not work, he was not shattered; he was simply left with nothing. But he came to believe that the episode laid a foundation for the unbelief that followed. A child who has asked God for something with all his heart and been refused learns something, even if he does not yet know what he has learned.

Flora was forty-six. On the day she died, the leaf on the Shakespeare calendar in her bedroom carried a line from *King Lear*: "Men must endure their going hence." Albert kept the leaf. More than half a century later, Warren had those words cut on his brother's gravestone.

The End of a World

Lewis wrote, looking back, that his mother's death took from him every certainty and every settled happiness he had known. It is the kind of judgement that can sound like the exaggeration of a memoir, but it is borne out by everything that happened next. The two boys, he said, drew closer together and further from their father. From then on they had, in effect, only each other. They loved Albert and pitied him, but they no longer

trusted him to understand them, and they began to keep their real lives from him. It was the beginning of a habit of concealment that would last for twenty years.

There is a tender detail from those weeks. Lewis remembered being taken into the room where his mother lay dead, and being horrified by what he saw: not the face he had known but something strange. He also remembered hating the paraphernalia of the funeral: the flowers, the hearse, the black clothes. He was a sensitive child, and the outward show of death seemed to him an assault. Long afterwards, when he came to write about grief, he wrote with the knowledge of someone who had first met it at nine years old and had never quite recovered from the meeting.

Sent Away

Less than a month after Flora's death, Albert did what many fathers of his class would have done. He sent both boys to boarding school in England. Warnie had already been at Wynyard School in Watford, Hertfordshire, for three years. Now Jack went with him. They crossed the Irish Sea by the night boat from Belfast to Fleetwood, and took the train south. It was the first of many such crossings, and Lewis never forgot the misery of them: the smell of the boat, the dark, grey dawn over Lancashire, and the knowledge that he was being carried away from everything he knew.

Wynyard was a small private school run by a clergyman named Robert Capron, whom the boys called Oldie. It was, by every account including Warnie's, a bad school. Capron was a brutal and erratic man who beat the boys for little or no reason and taught them almost nothing. The school was dwindling, and within two years it would close. Capron was afterwards certified insane. In *Surprised by Joy* Lewis gave Wynyard a bitter nickname taken from the Nazi camps, which he regretted, and which shows how

deeply the place had hurt him. The detail most worth remembering is a different one. At Wynyard, for the first time, Jack was taken regularly to a High Church parish where he heard the Christian faith taught as if it mattered. He began to pray seriously and to read his Bible. For a short time, in that unhappy place, he was something like a believing boy.

What the Psalm Promises

The verse at the head of this chapter is from Psalm 27. Its words are almost too apt. Jack's mother had been taken, and his father, in grief, had withdrawn and sent him away. Neither parent had meant to forsake him, but in every sense a child can feel, he was forsaken. The psalmist does not say that this will not happen. He says what God does when it does: "then the LORD will take me up."

For many years nothing in Lewis's life looked like the fulfilment of that promise. He lost what little faith he had and went on to deny that there was any God to take him up. But the psalm does not set a timetable. Thirty years later, a middle-aged man who had once prayed for his mother's life would write to bereaved strangers with a tenderness that came from his own wound. The child who was carried across the sea in the dark had been taken up after all. He simply did not know it yet.

Schools, and a Faith Let Go

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."
— Psalm 14:1, KJV

Campbell and Cherbourg

Wynyard closed in the summer of 1910 for want of pupils, and for one term that autumn Jack went to Campbell College in Belfast, a mile or so from home. He liked being near Little Lea, but he was ill with a chest complaint and Albert took him away before Christmas. In January 1911 he was sent back to England, to a preparatory school called Cherbourg House in the spa town of Malvern, in Worcestershire. Warnie was by then a pupil at Malvern College, the public school on the hill above it, so the brothers were again within reach of each other.

Cherbourg was a far better school than Wynyard, and Jack spent two and a half years there. He worked hard, read widely and in 1913 won a classical scholarship to Malvern College. But it was at Cherbourg, between the ages of twelve and fourteen, that he quietly ceased to be a Christian. He gave several reasons for it, looking back, and none of them was dramatic.

How the Faith Went

One reason was a kind and sympathetic matron, whom Lewis later wrote of with real affection. She had drifted away from conventional Christianity

into a vague world of spiritualism and theosophy, and she talked about it to the boys. She did not set out to unsettle anyone. But to a clever, lonely boy, her talk had the effect of loosening the outlines of the faith he had been taught. If there were many paths and many mysteries, the plain creed of St Mark's, Dundela, seemed less solid than before.

A second reason was the way he had been trying to pray. At Wynyard he had become anxious about his prayers. He thought that a prayer did not count unless he felt the right things while saying it, and he would lie awake night after night, saying his prayers over and over, trying to produce the proper feelings and never succeeding. It became a torment. Lewis later thought that this false and scrupulous religion, which put the weight on his own inner state rather than on God, made the faith a burden he was glad to put down. When he did put it down, the relief was enormous.

A third reason went deeper. Even as a boy he was struck by the waste, cruelty and indifference of the universe. He read the ancient poets and noticed that their gods were treated as fables by every modern scholar, and he could see no reason why the God of the Christians should be treated differently. Why should Christianity alone be true, out of all the religions of the world? No one he knew could give him an answer that satisfied him, and he did not much want one.

So, without fuss and without telling anyone, he stopped believing. There was no crisis. There was simply the end of something that had never been very strong. He went on saying his prayers in public and going to chapel, because that was expected. Inwardly, he was finished with it.

Malvern College

In September 1913 Jack followed Warnie to Malvern College. Warnie had loved the place. Jack hated it from the first week. Malvern, like most English

public schools of the time, was ruled by the senior boys, the athletes and prefects who were called the Bloods. Junior boys were their servants. They cleaned shoes, carried messages and ran errands at all hours. The school worshipped games, at which Jack was useless. He also hated what he saw of its moral life: the snobbery, the social climbing, and a pervasive culture of sexual favouritism among the boys, which he wrote about frankly forty years later.

Lewis's account of Malvern in *Surprised by Joy* is very bitter, and Warnie, reading it, thought it unjust. The truth probably lies between them. Jack was a shy, clever, bookish boy who did not fit, and he was miserable. He was exhausted by the fagging, he slept badly, and he developed a lasting contempt for the whole system of popularity and power. Lewis's later preoccupation with pride, with the desire to belong to an inner ring, and with the misery of trying to keep up with the right people, all have roots in that year. He would write and preach about such things as a grown man, and those who heard him knew that he was speaking from experience.

There were consolations. Malvern had a good library, and a master named Harry Wakelyn Smith, whom the boys called Smewgy, who taught the classics with a love of poetry that Jack never forgot. And in his reading he discovered the northern myths. A few years before, he had come upon a picture and a few lines about the death of the Norse god Balder, and the old longing had flooded back. Now he read everything he could find about the gods of the north: the sagas, Wagner's operas in summary, the stories of Asgard and Valhalla. He found in them a beauty he did not find in the religion of his childhood.

Arthur Greeves

During the Easter holidays of 1914, at Little Lea, Jack met a boy from the house across the road who was ill in bed. His name was Arthur Greeves. He was three years older than Jack, the son of a well-to-do Belfast family of Plymouth Brethren background, gentle, artistic and often in poor health. Jack had known him slightly and never thought much of him. Then he saw a book on Arthur's bed. It was a book of Norse mythology. Arthur asked whether Jack liked it. Jack said that he did. And in a moment, as Lewis remembered it, each discovered that the other loved exactly the same things.

It was the beginning of a friendship that lasted until Lewis died. For nearly fifty years the two wrote to each other, and Lewis told Arthur things that he told no one else: his doubts, his reading, his temptations, and, years later, the stages of his conversion. Arthur was a Christian, though for some years an uncertain one, and Jack teased him for it. He could not have guessed that the letters he was writing would one day be read by scholars as the most intimate record of his long road back to God.

What the Psalm Says

The verse at the head of this chapter is blunt. In the language of the Psalms the fool is not a person of low intelligence but one who lives as though God were not there. By any worldly measure Jack Lewis was not a fool. He was one of the cleverest boys in the British Isles. But at fourteen he had decided in his heart that there was no God, and he would spend the next sixteen years living by that decision. Lewis himself would later have agreed with the psalm's verdict. He thought that unbelief was rarely a matter of reasoning alone. It was a matter of the heart, and his own heart, at Cherbourg and Malvern, had wanted very much to be left alone.

The Great Knock

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."
— Proverbs 27:17, KJV

A Way Out

Jack's letters home from Malvern were so wretched that even Albert, who often misread his sons, could see that something had to be done. Warnie, who was by then preparing for the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, had been sent to a private tutor, and had done well. In the summer of 1914 Albert decided to send Jack to the same man. In September of that year, a month after the outbreak of the Great War, the fifteen-year-old arrived at a house called Gastons in the village of Great Bookham, in Surrey, to be prepared for university by William Thompson Kirkpatrick.

Kirkpatrick had been Albert's own headmaster at Lurgan College in County Armagh years before. He was by now retired, living with his wife in the Surrey countryside and taking a few private pupils. Albert called him the Great Knock, and so did his sons. He was a tall, lean, ruthless Ulster Scot with side whiskers and a voice like a bell, who had been brought up a Presbyterian and become a convinced atheist. He did not talk about religion much. He simply assumed that no intelligent man could believe it.

The Lesson on the Platform

Lewis told a story of his first meeting with Kirkpatrick that became famous. As they walked from the railway station, Jack, trying to make polite conversation, remarked that the Surrey countryside was wilder than he had expected. Kirkpatrick stopped and asked him what he meant by wild, and what grounds he had for expecting anything else. Within a few minutes the boy had been shown that he had no clear idea of what he had said, no evidence for his expectation, and therefore no right to an opinion at all. Kirkpatrick did not mean it unkindly. It was simply how he spoke. Every remark, however casual, was treated as a proposition to be defended.

Many boys would have been crushed. Jack loved it. For the first time in his life he was being taken seriously by a grown man. He learned to define his terms, to look for evidence, to spot a bad argument at a hundred yards and to say exactly what he meant. He would later say that he owed Kirkpatrick more than he owed almost any other teacher, and the debt is visible on nearly every page he wrote. The clarity of his prose, his habit of beginning with a definition, his relish for an argument and his impatience with muddle were learned in that house in Surrey.

Homer in Surrey

Kirkpatrick's method of teaching languages was as direct as his conversation. On Jack's first morning he sat down with him, opened Homer in Greek, read a passage aloud and translated it, and then left the boy to go on alone with a lexicon. Jack was soon reading Homer at speed and thinking in Greek. He read Latin the same way, and before he left Bookham he had added French, Italian and some German. The two and a half years were among the happiest of his life. He worked in the mornings,

walked the Surrey lanes in the afternoons, read for himself in the evenings, and wrote long letters to Arthur Greeves about everything he read.

He also settled into his unbelief. Kirkpatrick never preached atheism to him, but the whole atmosphere of the house was rationalist, and Jack absorbed it. By sixteen he was writing to Arthur, with all the confidence of youth, that all religions were mythologies invented by human beings, that Christianity was one among them, and that he believed in none. He thought of himself as a hard-headed realist, and in his mind the beauty he loved in poetry and myth and the bleak universe described by science were two separate worlds that had nothing to do with each other.

A Confirmation He Regretted

There is one sad episode from these years. In December 1914, during the Christmas holidays, Jack was confirmed at St Mark's, Dundela, and took his first Communion. He did it to please his father, and because he could not face the argument that would follow if he refused. He did not believe a word of it. Years later he looked back on this as one of the worst things he had ever done. He had, as he saw it, made a solemn act before God in a spirit of complete unbelief, and he had done it out of cowardice. It is a measure of how seriously the older Lewis took the sacraments that he never forgave himself lightly for that day.

A Book Bought at a Station

In March 1916 Jack was waiting at Leatherhead station for a train. He picked a cheap copy of a book off the station bookstall and bought it to read on the journey. It was *Phantastes*, a romance first published in 1858 by George MacDonald, a Scottish Congregational minister who had been

forced out of his pulpit and had made his living as a writer and lecturer. The story follows a young man through a dreamlike fairy country of forests, castles and shadows.

Lewis read it that night and was overwhelmed. He wrote to Arthur that he had had a great literary experience. What he found in it he could not name for many years. It was not that the book persuaded him of anything. He had no idea, then, that MacDonald was a Christian, or that the quality that moved him so deeply had anything to do with the Christian faith. But he felt that a new kind of goodness had touched the longing he had known since childhood. The longing itself seemed cleaner and brighter afterwards, as if it had been washed. The verdict he gave in *Surprised by Joy* is one of the best-known sentences he ever wrote about himself: that the book had begun to work on his imagination, and that the rest of him took much longer to follow.

He was right about the delay. It would be fifteen years before the rest of him caught up. But George MacDonald became, in time, the writer Lewis loved and honoured above all others. Late in life he edited an anthology of MacDonald's writings and called him his master. When, in one of his own stories, Lewis came to put a wise guide into a strange country, the guide was George MacDonald.

Iron Sharpening Iron

The verse at the head of this chapter speaks of friends sharpening each other, as one iron blade sharpens another. It describes the Bookham years well. An old atheist sharpened a young one, and the edge he put on Jack Lewis's mind would one day be turned against everything Kirkpatrick believed. Kirkpatrick died in 1921, long before his pupil became a Christian, and we do not know what he would have made of it. But a God

who uses unbelievers to prepare his servants is not hard to find in Scripture. Cyrus of Persia was called God's shepherd without ever knowing God's name. In a Surrey village, a ruthless logician who thought religion nonsense was training the most effective Christian apologist of his century.

A Promise at Keble

"When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed."
— Ecclesiastes 5:4, KJV

Oxford at War

In December 1916 Jack sat the scholarship examinations at Oxford and was elected to a classical scholarship at University College, one of the oldest colleges in the university. There was a difficulty. To matriculate, every Oxford man had to pass an entrance examination called Responsions, which included elementary mathematics, and Jack, who could translate Homer at sight, could not do sums. He failed the mathematics paper in March 1917. He would almost certainly have failed it again. In the end the war solved the problem for him: after the armistice, men who had served were excused the examination.

He came up to University College in April 1917, but there was not much of a university to come up to. The war had emptied Oxford. Most of the young men were in France, the colleges were half given over to hospitals and military training, and the halls where Jack had expected to hear lectures were full of convalescent soldiers. He had only one term as an undergraduate before the army took him. As an Irishman he was exempt from conscription, which never applied in Ireland. He chose to serve

anyway. He joined the university's Officers' Training Corps, and in June 1917 he was posted to a cadet battalion that was quartered in Keble College, a few minutes' walk away.

Paddy Moore

The cadets at Keble were billeted two to a room. Jack's room-mate was Edward Francis Courtenay Moore, always called Paddy. He was almost exactly Jack's age, and like him he was Irish. He had been born in Dublin and had grown up partly in Bristol, where his mother had moved after separating from her husband. His mother, Janie King Moore, had come to Oxford to be near him during his training, bringing with her Paddy's eleven-year-old sister Maureen.

Jack and Paddy became friends, and Jack was soon spending his free time with the Moores. Mrs Moore was forty-five, warm, talkative, generous, and in the habit of mothering every young man her son brought home. She had been unhappily married to a Dublin civil engineer whom she called, in letters, the Beast, and she lived on a small allowance from him. She had none of Flora Lewis's learning. But she had a household, and a kitchen table, and a welcome. To a motherless young man of eighteen, who had been sent away from home at nine and had spent the years since among schoolmasters, it was a great deal.

The Promise

It was at some point in these months that Jack and Paddy made a promise to each other. If one of them was killed in France and the other survived, the survivor would look after the dead man's parent. We know of the promise from Maureen, who remembered it many years later, and from the

way Lewis behaved afterwards, which makes sense only if such a promise was made. It was the kind of pact that many young officers made in that war, half in solemnity and half to keep up their courage. Few of them can have kept it as Jack Lewis did.

A Silence Kept From Albert

Jack's letters to his father during these months mention the Moores only in passing. His letters to Arthur Greeves say much more, and they hint at feelings he would not put down in plain words. He spent most of his leave before embarkation not in Belfast, as Albert expected, but with the Moores in Bristol. Albert was hurt and puzzled. It was the beginning of a concealment that would grow over the next ten years until it became one of the burdens of Jack's conscience. The young man who had learned at nine to keep his real life from his father was now hiding from him the most important relationship he had.

Commission and Embarkation

In September 1917 Jack was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the 3rd Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry. Paddy was commissioned in the Rifle Brigade. They parted in the autumn of that year. Jack was given leave and then ordered to the front. He crossed to France in mid-November and reached the trenches on 29 November 1917, his nineteenth birthday.

Paddy went to France too. In March 1918 the German army launched its great spring offensive, the last throw of the war, and the British line was driven back across the old battlefields of the Somme. Paddy Moore was posted missing in the fighting in late March. Some months later his family was told that he had been killed near Péronne. He was nineteen.

The Vow

The verse at the head of this chapter comes from the Preacher, who had seen many vows made and few kept. He warns that a vow should not be made lightly, and that once it is made it should be paid without delay. The promise at Keble was not made to God. Neither young man then believed in God. But it was a promise, solemnly given, and Jack Lewis paid it in full. He paid it for more than thirty years, through poverty and plenty, through his conversion and his fame, at the cost of much of his freedom and of a good deal of his peace. Whatever else may be said of the household that grew out of that promise, it should first be said that a young unbeliever kept his word.

15 April 1918

"A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee."
— Psalm 91:7, KJV

The Trenches

Lewis said very little about the war, then or later. In *Surprised by Joy* he gave it only a few pages, and he said frankly that he had put most of it out of his mind. He mentioned in a few lines the cold, the mud, the weariness, the wounded and the unburied dead. He mentioned that the war was in a curious way unreal to him, as if it were happening to someone else. He was not a professional soldier, and he never pretended to have been a brave one. He did his duty, he endured, and when it was over he tried, with only partial success, to forget it.

His battalion held a sector of the line near Arras, in northern France. The winter of 1917 to 1918 was hard, and in February he fell ill with trench fever, a disease carried by lice that brought high temperatures and aching bones. He spent three weeks in a hospital at Le Tréport on the Channel coast. His letters home from there are almost cheerful: he had a bed, clean sheets and books. He read and recovered and in March went back to his battalion, just as the great German offensive broke.

The Shell

The Somerset Light Infantry were not at the centre of the March onslaught, but in April the Germans attacked again further north, on the River Lys, and Jack's battalion was thrown into the fighting near the village of Mont-Bernenchon. On 14 April the battalion attacked. During the confused fighting Lewis was credited with taking the surrender of some sixty German soldiers, who appeared out of the smoke with their hands up and gave themselves up to him. He was always modest about it. As he told it, taking them amounted to discovering, with great relief, that they wished to surrender.

The next day, 15 April 1918, a shell burst close beside him. It was almost certainly a British shell falling short. Lewis was hit in three places: in the left hand, in the leg, and in the chest, where a fragment lodged below his armpit. The sergeant who was standing next to him, Harry Ayres, was killed outright. Lewis remembered Ayres afterwards with gratitude and affection. He had been a kind, steady man who had looked after his young and inexperienced officer, and Lewis felt that he owed him a great deal.

Lewis was carried back through the casualty stations to a base hospital at Étaples. His wounds were serious but not fatal. Some of the metal was removed at once. A fragment in his chest was left where it was, and he carried it for more than twenty-five years before it was finally taken out in 1944.

The Hospital in London

In late May he was brought back to England and admitted to a hospital in London. He wrote to his father, asking him to come. Albert, who was nervous of travel, set in his routines, and perhaps unable to face it, did not

come. Jack wrote again. Albert still did not come. Through the whole of that summer and autumn, while his son lay wounded and then convalescent in England, Albert Lewis never once crossed the Irish Sea to see him.

It is easy to judge Albert harshly for this, and Jack did judge him harshly. But Albert was a widower of fifty-four, frightened of change, who had never been a traveller. His elder son was also at the front, and he was sick with anxiety for both of them. None of that made his absence hurt any less. Jack never forgot it.

Someone else did come. Janie Moore, who had by then been told that her own son was missing, came at once. She visited Jack in hospital, wrote to him and fussed over him, and when he was transferred in June to a convalescent hospital he asked to be sent to one near Bristol, where the Moores lived. He was moved to other camps and hospitals later in the year, and she followed. By the time news came that Paddy had certainly been killed, the bond between the wounded young officer and the bereaved mother was already strong. Jack had kept his promise before he knew he would have to.

A Book of Poems

While he was convalescing, Lewis prepared a collection of the poems he had written since his schooldays. It was published in March 1919 under the name Clive Hamilton, taking his mother's maiden name, with the title *Spirits in Bondage*. The poems are those of a young man who has seen the war and believes that the universe is either empty or ruled by a cruel power. They are angry, sad and sometimes beautiful, and they set out a creed of defiant atheism. A few readers noticed them. Most did not. Lewis was

disappointed but not discouraged. For the next decade his chief ambition was to be a poet.

The Survivor

In December 1918, a month after the armistice, Lewis was demobilised. He went home to Belfast for Christmas, and his father and brother met him with enormous relief. Then, in January 1919, he went back to Oxford to resume his degree. He was twenty years old. He had been a soldier for eighteen months, and he had been wounded, and his closest friend from training was dead. Many of the young men who had trained with him at Keble had been killed.

Lewis did not talk about survivor's guilt, and he would not have liked the phrase. But he knew that he had been spared when others were not, and he knew that he had no explanation for it. The verse at the head of this chapter is from the ninety-first psalm, which many soldiers carried into that war and many did not carry out. It is not a promise that no believer will ever be hurt, for believers fell in their thousands on the Somme. It is a confession that every life is in the hand of God, and that those who are spared are spared for a purpose. Lewis did not yet believe in that hand. But it had been over him on 15 April 1918, and in time he would come to see it.

Mrs Moore

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."
— James 1:27, KJV

A Household in Oxford

When Lewis returned to Oxford in January 1919, Janie Moore and Maureen came too. Mrs Moore took rooms in the city, and within a short time Jack was spending most of his time outside college hours with them. Undergraduates were required to live in college, so for a while he kept up the appearance of a normal student life while in fact dividing his days between University College and the Moores' lodgings. As soon as the rules allowed, he moved in with them. For the next thirty years, apart from his college rooms, he had no other home.

It was a precarious household. Mrs Moore had very little money: an irregular allowance from her estranged husband and nothing else. Jack had his scholarship and an allowance from his father, which Albert paid on the understanding that his son was living as a student. The two incomes together barely kept them. In the first years they moved again and again from one set of rented rooms to another, often to cheaper and colder lodgings, with Mrs Moore taking in lodgers to make ends meet. In 1922

they settled in a rented house called Hillsboro on the Western Road in Headington, on the eastern edge of Oxford, and stayed there for eight years.

Lewis did the shopping, washed up, ran errands, tutored Maureen in Latin, walked the dog, and studied when he could find a quiet hour. His diary from these years, which he kept from 1922 to 1927 and which was later published, is full of the minor crises of domestic life: a sick maid, a smoking chimney, a quarrel with a lodger, Mrs Moore's headaches, money worries. It is also full of reading, walking, conversation and hard work. It is the diary of a man who was very busy, often tired, and not unhappy.

What Albert Was Not Told

Albert was told almost nothing. He knew that his son had a friendship with the mother of a dead comrade, and he did not like what little he knew. But he did not know that Jack was living with Mrs Moore, and he did not know that the allowance he was sending was partly keeping her household. Jack deceived him, sometimes by silence and sometimes by direct lies, and he went on doing so for ten years. Warnie, who was serving abroad, knew more and disapproved.

Lewis came to regard this deception as one of the great sins of his life. He had taken his father's money under false pretences, he had kept from him the central fact of his life, and he had done it partly out of fear and partly out of contempt. When, after his conversion, he looked back over the years of his unbelief, it was not his intellectual errors that troubled him most. It was this.

What Was the Relationship?

This is the place to ask a question that every biographer has had to ask and none has been able to answer with certainty. What exactly was the relationship between Jack Lewis and Janie Moore?

She was twenty-six years older than he was. She was still legally married. She became, in his letters and in the life of the household, something between a mother, a landlady and a companion. He called her Minto, after a brand of sweets, and in letters to others he often called her his mother. Many people who met them in the 1920s and 1930s assumed that she was his mother, and he did not correct them.

Some biographers believe that in the first years, at least, the two were lovers. They point to the intensity of Jack's feelings for her in 1917 and 1918, to the secrecy with which he surrounded the relationship, to hints in his letters to Arthur Greeves, and to the fact that a young man of twenty and a lonely woman of forty-six were living together under circumstances that would have suggested an affair to anyone in that age. A. N. Wilson and Alister McGrath both think it likely. George Sayer, who knew Lewis well, came to think it probable too, though he had once doubted it.

Others are certain that it was never anything but a filial relationship. They point out that the household always included Maureen, a child and then a young woman living at home. They note that Lewis never spoke of it in such terms to anyone, and that Warnie, who disliked Mrs Moore intensely and had every reason to suspect the worst, came to see her chiefly as a tyrant in the house, not as Jack's mistress. Walter Hooper always insisted that the relationship was one of a son to an adopted mother.

The honest answer is that we do not know. There is no letter or record that settles it, and Lewis, who was otherwise remarkably open about his own sins, kept this part of his life closed. If the relationship began as a love

affair, it seems clear that it did not remain one, and certainly not after his conversion. What is beyond dispute is what came after. For more than thirty years Lewis supported Mrs Moore, lived with her, served her and nursed her, through her decline into a querulous, demanding and often difficult old age, until her death in 1951. Whatever the relationship was at the beginning, at the end it was a long, costly act of faithfulness.

Not an Easy House

Some of Lewis's friends found the household baffling and some found it painful. Mrs Moore was generous, hospitable and kind in many ways. She fed half the stray animals of Headington, she was devoted to Maureen, and she worked hard. But she was also possessive, anxious and a constant source of small demands. She liked to have Jack at her beck and call. She would interrupt his work for errands that could have waited, and she seems to have had little interest in his books or his ideas. Friends who came to the house noticed how often Jack was called away from conversation to some domestic task, and some of them resented it on his behalf.

Lewis almost never complained. In his letters he spoke of her with loyalty, sometimes with humour, and later, as she grew old and ill, with patience. He seems to have regarded the burdens of that house as part of what he owed: to Paddy, to her, and, after 1931, to God. It is possible that his long apprenticeship in serving a demanding woman did more for his soul than all his reading. He would later write with unusual insight about the small daily irritations of family life, about the temptation to resent those we live with, and about the way charity is learned at home or not at all.

Visiting the Widow

The verse at the head of this chapter defines pure religion in two ways: caring for the fatherless and the widow, and keeping oneself unspotted from the world. Mrs Moore was not a widow in 1919, and Maureen was not fatherless, but in every practical sense they had been abandoned, and Paddy's death had taken their last support. A young atheist undergraduate took them in and kept them. He was not, then, practising religion of any kind. But James would have recognised what he was doing. And when Lewis did become a Christian, he did not end the arrangement or try to escape from it. He went on visiting the widow in her affliction, for twenty more years, until she died.

Three Firsts and a Fellowship

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."
— Colossians 3:23, KJV

The Oxford Course

The Oxford that Lewis came back to in 1919 was crowded with ex-servicemen, older than the usual undergraduates, many of them carrying wounds of body or mind, all of them in a hurry to make up for lost years. Lewis was one of them. He read Literae Humaniores, the great Oxford course in Greek and Latin literature, ancient history and philosophy, which was taken in two parts. In March 1920 he took a First in the first part, Honour Moderations. In 1921 he won the Chancellor's English Essay Prize. In the summer of 1922 he took a First in the second part, known as Greats.

That should have been enough to secure him a college fellowship, but in the early 1920s fellowships in philosophy were scarce, and none came. So, with Albert's reluctant financial support, Lewis took the unusual step of reading a third degree, in English language and literature, which he completed in a single year. In July 1923 he took a First in that too. It was a formidable record, and it made him one of the best-qualified young scholars in Oxford.

It did not immediately make him employed. For two more years he lived on very little, examining, marking papers and writing, while the Moore household scraped along. In 1924 he was given a temporary post teaching philosophy at University College, standing in for a tutor who was away for a year. He applied for one fellowship after another and was turned down. His diary from these years records constant anxiety about money and about his future, and a good deal of quiet desperation.

Friends of the Mind

These were also the years in which Lewis made several of the friendships that shaped his life. Owen Barfield, a young man of brilliant and original mind, had come up to Wadham College after the war, and he and Lewis became close friends. Barfield was a poet and a philosopher of language, and in the early 1920s he became a follower of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, a kind of spiritual philosophy that Lewis found repellent. The two argued about it for years, in letters and in long walks, in what Lewis jokingly called their Great War. Lewis learned an enormous amount from Barfield, above all the habit of questioning the modern assumption that whatever is newer must be truer. Barfield later became Lewis's solicitor and the trustee of his charitable fund, and he outlived him by more than thirty years.

There was also Nevill Coghill, a fellow student in the English school, whom Lewis met in a discussion class and was astonished to discover was both the cleverest man in the room and a Christian. There was Cecil Harwood, another follower of Steiner. And there was A. K. Hamilton Jenkin, who taught him to enjoy things for exactly what they were, the ugly and dismal as well as the beautiful. One after another, the most interesting

people Lewis met seemed to him to be either Christians or seriously spiritual seekers. He noticed it, and it disturbed him.

Magdalen

In May 1925 Lewis was elected a Fellow of Magdalen College, as tutor in English Language and Literature. Magdalen was, and is, one of the most beautiful colleges in Oxford, with a great medieval bell tower, a deer park and, behind the college, a path called Addison's Walk that runs around a water meadow between branches of the River Cherwell. Lewis was given a set of rooms in the eighteenth-century New Building, overlooking the deer park on one side and the cloisters on the other. He kept those rooms for nearly thirty years.

Albert was overjoyed. For all the strain between them, his son's success meant more to him than almost anything. Jack, for his part, wrote his father a long and grateful letter acknowledging all that Albert had done to make it possible. It is one of the warmest letters he ever sent him. It still said nothing about Mrs Moore.

The Tutor

Lewis was a demanding tutor. Each week his pupils came to his rooms, one or two at a time, read him an essay, and then had it taken apart. Some found him intimidating, even crushing. He had learned his methods from Kirkpatrick, and he did not believe in flattering anyone. Others found him the best teacher they ever had. He took their work seriously, he made them think, and once the argument was over he was warm, funny and generous with his time. John Betjeman, the future poet laureate, was one of his early pupils, and the two disliked each other heartily. Others, like George Sayer

and the future literary scholars who passed through his rooms, became lifelong friends.

His lectures, on medieval and Renaissance literature, became famous. He lectured without notes, in a loud, clear voice, with enormous learning lightly worn, and his hall was often full. He loved the old books, and he made his hearers love them. He had begun, too, to write the scholarly work that would make his name among his colleagues: a study of the allegorical love poetry of the Middle Ages, which would take him ten years to finish.

Tolkien

On 11 May 1926, at a meeting of the English faculty at Merton College, Lewis met a new professor of Anglo-Saxon, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. His first impressions, recorded in his diary, were not warm. Tolkien was smooth, pale and fluent, and he held views about the English syllabus that Lewis thought wrong. But Tolkien also loved the northern myths that Lewis had loved since boyhood, and before long Lewis joined a club Tolkien had founded, the Kolbítar, or Coalbiters, whose members met to read the Icelandic sagas in the original. The friendship grew slowly and then fast. By 1929 the two men were sitting up late in Lewis's rooms, talking about gods and heroes and the old stories, and Tolkien had begun to show Lewis the poems and tales of his own invented mythology.

Tolkien was a devout Roman Catholic. He had lost his mother when he was twelve, and had been brought up by a priest. He did not argue Lewis into faith; argument was not his way. But he took the Christian faith as utterly serious and utterly real, and he took myth seriously too, and he could not see why the two should be kept apart. In time that conviction would be the key that turned the lock.

As to the Lord

The verse at the head of this chapter tells servants to work heartily, as to the Lord. Lewis in the 1920s did not work as to the Lord. He worked for his own advancement, for the pleasure of the work, and for the household that depended on him. But he worked heartily, and the habits he formed in these years, of reading everything, writing clearly, preparing thoroughly and treating pupils as minds rather than customers, stayed with him. When he became a Christian, he did not need to learn how to work. He only needed to learn for whom.

Hunted

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"
— Psalm 139:7, KJV

The Defences Fall

When Lewis told the story of his conversion in *Surprised by Joy*, he did not describe it as a search. He described it as a pursuit, with himself as the quarry. Through the second half of the 1920s, he said, his defences fell one by one, and each time he retreated to a new position, he found that it too was untenable. It is worth following the retreat, briefly, because it shows the kind of man he was.

He had begun the decade as a materialist, believing that nothing existed but matter and energy. His philosophy studies, and his long arguments with Barfield, persuaded him that this view could not account for reason itself, for if our thoughts were only the by-products of atoms in motion, there was no reason to trust them, including the thought that materialism was true. So he became a kind of idealist, believing in an Absolute Mind behind the universe, but a mind that made no demands and could not be prayed to. That was comfortable. It asked nothing of him.

Then the Absolute began to look less like a philosopher's abstraction and more like a Person. His reading kept betraying him. He read George

Herbert and found that Herbert seemed to understand life better than any modern writer, and that the understanding came through his faith. He read Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*, published in 1925, and found for the first time an outline of history from a Christian point of view that made sense. He reread the old poets and found that the ones he loved most were Christians, and the ones who agreed with him seemed thin.

The Hardest Atheist

Early in 1926 there was an evening Lewis never forgot. One of the most hard-headed men he knew, a philosopher and atheist named T. D. Weldon, sat in his rooms and remarked, almost grudgingly, that the historical evidence for the Gospels was surprisingly good, and that the old pagan stories of a god who dies and rises again looked, oddly, as if they might once have come true. Lewis was shaken. If even this man could not keep the door shut, he wondered where he himself could hide.

The Date

At last, by Lewis's own account, he gave in. He placed the moment in the Trinity term, the summer term, of 1929. He was alone in his room in Magdalen. For weeks he had known that he could not hold out much longer. And one night he stopped resisting. He knelt and prayed, admitting that God was God. He described himself, in a phrase that has become famous, as "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."

The phrase is from *Surprised by Joy*, chapter fourteen. So is the date, and here the biographers have found a difficulty. Alister McGrath, reading through Lewis's letters of 1929 and 1930 in order, noticed that there is no sign in them of a change in 1929. Lewis wrote to his friends about his

reading, his father, his work, as before. But in the letters of 1930 there are clear signs that something had happened: references to going to college chapel, to a new seriousness about religion, and to reading devotional books. McGrath concluded that Lewis had misremembered the year, writing about it twenty-five years later, and that the moment of surrender came in the summer of 1930. Most Lewis scholars have since accepted this, though some still defend the date Lewis gave. This book follows the majority view while noting the other. It does not change the story, only its timing.

Albert's Death

The redating matters for one reason above all. It means that Lewis came to belief in God not before but after the death of his father.

In the summer of 1929 Albert Lewis fell ill. Jack went home to Belfast in August to be with him. Doctors found cancer. Through August and into September Jack sat with his father at Little Lea, and the long hours together seem to have softened some of the old bitterness. In the third week of September, when Albert seemed steady and the doctors saw no immediate danger, Jack returned to Oxford for the start of term. Within days a telegram summoned him back. He crossed at once, but he arrived too late. Albert had died on 25 September 1929.

Lewis was overwhelmed with grief and with guilt. He had spent ten years deceiving his father, mocking him behind his back and keeping him at arm's length. Now there was nothing more to be done. Some of the most unguarded words he ever wrote, in letters to friends in the months that followed, are about his father: about Albert's courage in his last illness, about his own coldness, about how impossible it was to set things right. If McGrath is correct about the date, this grief was part of the ground on

which, a few months later, Lewis knelt down. A man who had behaved badly to his earthly father and could no longer make amends found himself on his knees before another Father.

Not Yet a Christian

It is important to see what Lewis's surrender was, and what it was not. He believed in God. He did not yet believe in Christ. He had become what he called a theist: one who believes in a Creator, owes him obedience, and has no idea what else to say about him. It was a cold and joyless conversion, by his own description, and he expected nothing from it but duty.

He did what he thought a theist ought to do. He began to go to his parish church on Sundays and to college chapel on weekdays. He did not much enjoy it. He disliked hymns, which he thought were mostly bad poetry badly sung, and he disliked the sense of being a public convert. He went anyway, because he thought that if he believed in God he ought to show it by attending the worship of God, and because the church was the only place where that worship was offered. It was, in its way, an act of obedience before faith. Lewis later thought that it was one of the wisest things he ever did.

No Escape

The psalm at the head of this chapter asks where one could go to escape God, and answers that there is nowhere. Heaven, hell, the uttermost parts of the sea and the darkness itself are all full of him. Lewis knew that psalm. In the 1920s he had tried, with all his intelligence, to find a place where God was not. He had tried materialism and idealism and the cool detachment of the scholar. Each time, he found that God was there already.

In the end he stopped running, not because he had found a better argument, but because he had been cornered. It was the beginning, not the end, of his conversion. But it was the beginning.

Addison's Walk

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."
— John 1:14, KJV

A Theist in Church

For more than a year after his surrender, Lewis lived as a theist. He prayed, he went to church, he read the Gospels, and he tried to obey his conscience. What he could not do was believe in Christ. The doctrines of the Christian faith, the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection, seemed to him at best puzzling and at worst meaningless. He could not see how the death of a man in Palestine nineteen hundred years ago could have anything to do with him now. Above all he could not understand the doctrine of the atonement: in what sense could the death of one man take away the sins of another?

In his letters to Arthur Greeves, now a believer of a gentle and rather uncertain kind, Lewis discussed these questions honestly. He also began to discuss them with his friends at Oxford. He was, in his own way, still looking. But this time he was looking in the right direction, and he was no longer running away.

The Night of 19 September 1931

On Saturday 19 September 1931, Lewis invited two friends to dine with him at Magdalen. One was Tolkien. The other was Hugo Dyson, a lecturer in English at the University of Reading, a quick, witty, exuberant man and a Christian. After dinner the three went out into the night and walked along Addison's Walk, the path beside the Cherwell that runs around the water meadow behind the college. They talked for hours. The subject was myth.

What they said was reconstructed afterwards from Lewis's letters to Greeves and from a poem Tolkien later wrote about the conversation. Lewis loved myths. He loved the old stories of Balder, of Adonis, of Osiris, of the god who dies and comes back to life, and when he met them in pagan literature they moved him profoundly. He did not ask what they meant. He felt their meaning without being able to put it into words. But when he met the same pattern in the Gospels, he demanded explanations, and the explanations he was offered seemed thin.

Tolkien and Dyson turned this around. Why, they asked, should Lewis not approach the story of Christ in the same way he approached the pagan myths, letting it move him and mean something to him before he could explain it? And then they made the decisive point. The story of Christ, they said, was a myth like the others, with all their power and beauty, but with one immense difference: it had really happened. The dying and rising God had come, in history, at a particular time and in a particular place, under a particular Roman governor, and the pagan stories had been dim anticipations of the true one. God had told the story not in words but in events. The myth had become fact.

Lewis listened, argued, and listened again. At about three in the morning Tolkien went home. Lewis and Dyson walked on and talked until

nearly four.

The Ride to Whipsnade

Lewis did not become a Christian that night. But the conversation had removed the barrier that had stood between him and faith. He had understood that he could approach the Gospels as he approached the myths he loved, and that their meaning did not depend on his being able to explain it all in advance.

Nine days later, on Monday 28 September 1931, Warnie drove Jack to Whipsnade Zoo, which had opened in Bedfordshire that year. Warnie was on leave from the army, and he had a motorcycle with a sidecar. It was a sunny morning. Jack sat in the sidecar. What happened on the journey was not the result of a new argument, or even of conscious thought. As he put it in *Surprised by Joy*: "When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did." He compared it to waking: one becomes aware that one is already awake, without remembering the moment it happened.

This book follows the date most biographers give for the ride, 28 September, which fits the dates of Lewis's letters. One or two accounts give an earlier day the same month. Like the question of 1929 or 1930, it changes the timing and not the story.

The Letters to Arthur

On 1 October 1931 Lewis wrote to Arthur Greeves. He told him, quite simply, that he now believed not only in God but in Christ, and that his long night talk with Dyson and Tolkien had had a great deal to do with it. A few weeks later he wrote again, at much greater length, explaining what

had changed. He had come to see the story of Christ as a true myth, and to see that the doctrines the church drew from it were human attempts to translate into concepts what God had already expressed in a more real language, in actual events. He did not yet understand everything. He was certain only that he believed.

Warnie, Too

There was a second conversion in the family that year, and it is sometimes forgotten. Warnie, who had drifted away from faith much as Jack had, though with less philosophy, had been making his own quiet way back. In the spring of 1931, while serving with the army in England, he began to pray again and found that he believed. By the end of that year both brothers were believers again, and from then on they shared the faith as they had shared everything else since the nursery. When Warnie came home for good, the brothers worshipped together at Holy Trinity.

Christmas Day 1931

On Christmas Day 1931, Lewis took Communion at Holy Trinity Church in Headington Quarry, the parish church near the house where the household had moved the year before. It was his first Communion since the miserable confirmation of 1914. This time he believed. He remained a faithful communicant of the Church of England for the rest of his life, and he was buried in that same churchyard.

The Word Made Flesh

The verse at the head of this chapter is the heart of what Lewis came to believe on Addison's Walk. The Word, the eternal reason and meaning of

the universe, did not remain an idea. He became flesh, and he lived among us, and he was seen. For a man who had spent his life loving stories of gods and doubting that any of them were true, it was the most astonishing news in the world. All his longings, all his love of myth, all his rigour of mind, were not contradicted by the Gospel but fulfilled in it. Lewis spent the rest of his life trying to tell others what he had seen that night. The companion volume to this book describes how he told it. This book records simply that, at thirty-two, in a sidecar on the road to a zoo, he came home.

The Kilns

"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it."
— Psalm 127:1, KJV

A House on the Hill

After Albert's death, Little Lea was sold, and the brothers divided what their father had left them. With his share, and with money of Mrs Moore's from a legacy, Lewis was able to do something the household had never been able to do before: buy a home. In the summer of 1930 they found one. It was a low, brick house built on the site of an old brickworks at the foot of Shotover Hill, about three miles east of Oxford, in the hamlet of Headington Quarry. Two old kilns stood beside it, and gave the house its name. It came with eight acres of woodland, a large overgrown garden, and a flooded clay pit that had become a pond. Lewis loved it at first sight.

The Kilns cost £3,300. Mrs Moore paid the largest part and the brothers the rest, and the house was bought in her name, with Jack and Warnie each having the right to live there for life. After their deaths it was to pass to Maureen. The household moved in on 10 October 1930. Lewis lived there for the next thirty-three years, and he died there.

The Household

It was never a quiet house. Mrs Moore ran it, with a succession of maids and helpers whom she was apt to quarrel with and dismiss. Maureen, by then in her twenties and training as a music teacher, lived there until her marriage in 1940. A gardener and handyman named Fred Paxford joined the household in 1930 and stayed for more than thirty years. Paxford was a gloomy, kindly countryman who always expected the worst and was usually cheerful about it. He became a fixture of Lewis's life, and there were dogs, cats and at one point a large number of hens.

In December 1932 Warnie retired from the army after eighteen years' service, as a captain, and came home for good. He was recalled to the colours in 1939 and served briefly in France before being sent home again in 1940, by then a major, and Major Lewis he remained. He was given his own rooms at the Kilns, and he settled into a life of reading, walking, gardening and writing. Over the next few years he sorted and typed out the whole mass of the Lewis family papers, letters and diaries going back to the nineteenth century, into eleven bound volumes. Later he wrote several well-received books on the history of seventeenth-century France, his own great interest. And from the 1940s onwards he served, without pay, as his brother's secretary.

The arrangement was not always easy. Warnie and Mrs Moore disliked each other. He thought her tyrannical and she thought him idle. He took refuge in his books and in long walks, and sometimes in drink. Jack stood between them and tried to keep the peace. But the brothers were together again, as they had been as boys at Little Lea, and for both of them that counted for more than the friction.

The Pond and the Woods

Lewis loved the grounds of the Kilns. He swam in the pond in all weathers, sometimes punting a flat-bottomed boat across it. He walked in the woods every day. He knew the birds and the trees, and he cleared paths through the undergrowth. Friends who visited remembered him striding about in old clothes, a pipe in his mouth, talking at full speed. It was a quiet, almost rural life only three miles from the city, and it suited him. Many of the landscapes of his later stories have something of the Kilns about them: the woods, the water, the sense of an ordinary English place on the edge of something wild.

Holy Trinity

From the Kilns, Holy Trinity Church was a short walk across the fields. It was a plain Victorian village church built for the quarrymen of Headington, and it became Lewis's parish church for the rest of his life. He went to the early service of Holy Communion on Sunday mornings, usually at eight, and he sat in a pew near the front, at the side, where he could see the altar and be seen by very few. He did not stay for the later, sung service, because he disliked hymns. He was a faithful, regular, undemonstrative member of the congregation. In time the vicar, the congregation and the village came to know him not as a famous author but as Mr Lewis from the Kilns, who came early, slipped away quickly, and gave generously and quietly to the parish.

The First Christian Book

The first book Lewis wrote as a Christian was written in a fortnight. In August 1932, staying with Arthur Greeves at his home near Belfast, he

wrote an allegory of his own journey to faith, modelled on John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It was published in 1933 as *The Pilgrim's Regress*. It is not one of his best books. It is too clever, too full of private allusions, and some of its satire is bitter. Lewis himself later thought it was needlessly obscure and uncharitable. But it shows how quickly he set out to put his faith into writing, and how naturally he turned to Bunyan, the tinker of Bedford whom he admired all his life.

His scholarly work went on alongside. In 1936 he published *The Allegory of Love*, the study of medieval love poetry he had been writing for a decade. It made his name at once among literary scholars and won a major prize. It remains a classic of its field. In 1938 he published his first novel, *Out of the Silent Planet*, a story of a voyage to Mars. A great deal of Christian thought was hidden inside it, and Lewis was amused to discover that hardly any reviewer noticed.

Unless the Lord Build

The verse at the head of this chapter is a warning to builders. The household at the Kilns was not, on any ordinary reckoning, well built. It was a strange collection of people: an Oxford don, his retired brother, an older woman who was not his mother, her grown daughter, a gloomy gardener and a stream of maids. Its tempers were frayed and its peace was uncertain. Yet it lasted for more than twenty years, and out of it came a stream of books that have been read by millions. Lewis would have been the first to say that it was not his skill as a householder that kept it together. He prayed for that house, and he served it, and he trusted that the Lord was building it even when the builders were at odds. He was right.

Thursday Evenings

"Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name."
— Malachi 3:16, KJV

The Inklings

Some time in the early 1930s, a small group of friends began to meet in Lewis's rooms at Magdalen on Thursday evenings. Nobody planned it. The name was borrowed from an undergraduate literary club at University College that had invited Tolkien and Lewis to some of its meetings; when the club died, the name passed to the friends. It was a pun, Tolkien later explained, on people with vague ideas and on people who dabbled in ink. They called themselves the Inklings.

The membership shifted over the years, but its core was always Lewis, his brother Warnie and Tolkien. Others came often: Hugo Dyson, when he was in Oxford; Owen Barfield, when he could get away from his London law practice; Nevill Coghill; a doctor named Robert Havard, who looked after Lewis's health and that of his household and whom the others called Humphrey; Adam Fox, the dean of divinity at Magdalen; and, later, Tolkien's son Christopher and others. They were all men, nearly all

Christians, and nearly all scholars or writers. Most of them were, in one way or another, at odds with the fashions of the literary world of their day.

The pattern was simple. On Thursday nights, after dinner, they gathered in Lewis's sitting room. Warnie made tea. Someone produced a manuscript and read from it aloud: a chapter, a poem, a paper. The others criticised it, sometimes kindly and sometimes savagely. Then the talk ranged wherever it went, often until late at night. On Tuesday mornings, or later Monday mornings, a group of the same friends met for an hour or so in a pub on St Giles called the Eagle and Child, which they called the Bird and Baby. There they talked and drank beer and did not read manuscripts.

What Was Read There

An enormous amount of twentieth-century literature was first heard in those rooms. Tolkien read most of *The Lord of the Rings* to the Inklings, chapter by chapter, over more than a decade. Lewis read his own novels, his books of theology, and some of the letters of a senior devil. Warnie read his chapters on the court of Louis XIV. Charles Williams read his poems and his novels. Lewis was the group's centre. It was his rooms they met in, his enthusiasm that drove them, his voice that dominated the talk. Tolkien said more than once that without Lewis's encouragement he would never have finished his great book. Lewis was its first and most devoted reader.

Not everyone was so enthusiastic. Dyson, famously, could not bear Tolkien's elves and did not hide it. Friendship among the Inklings was robust, and nobody expected to be spared. Lewis valued exactly that. He thought that real friends were people who loved the same truth and were looking at the same thing together, not people who flattered each other. Years later he would write a book in which he described friendship among

the loves, and the Thursday evenings at Magdalen were the experience behind that chapter.

Charles Williams

In 1936 Lewis read a novel called *The Place of the Lion* by an author named Charles Williams, an editor at the Oxford University Press in London. He was so excited by it that he wrote to Williams to say so. By a coincidence that both men enjoyed, Williams had just read the proofs of Lewis's *The Allegory of Love* at the press, and had been about to write to Lewis in the same terms. The two letters crossed. A friendship began at once.

Williams was a strange and remarkable man. He came from a poor London family, had left university without a degree, and had worked at the Press since before the First World War. He wrote poetry, plays, theology and a series of what he called spiritual thrillers, novels in which the supernatural breaks into ordinary London life. He had a burning, almost hypnotic personality, and many who met him felt that he lived closer to the unseen world than anyone they knew. He also had an unconventional private life, and in his younger years he had been involved with an occult society, the kind of thing that Lewis normally distrusted. Later scholars have uncovered aspects of his relationships with young women that trouble many readers today, though the Inklings seem to have known little of them.

In September 1939, when war broke out, the Oxford University Press moved its London office to Oxford to escape the expected bombing, and Williams moved with it. For the next six years he was in Oxford, and he became one of the most important figures in Lewis's life. Lewis arranged for him to lecture in the university, which was an unusual honour for a man without a degree, and his lectures on Milton were a sensation. He came to the Thursday evenings and the Tuesday mornings. He talked

theology with Lewis late into the night. He also gave Lewis an idea that would matter to him greatly in the last years of his life: that Christians can, in a real sense, carry one another's burdens, so that one may bear in love some part of another's suffering or fear. Williams called it the doctrine of substitution, or coinherence.

15 May 1945

The war in Europe ended on 8 May 1945. A week later, on Tuesday 15 May, Lewis called at the Radcliffe Infirmary on his way to the usual morning meeting, meaning to leave a book or a message for Charles Williams, who had been taken into hospital a few days before. He was told that Williams had just died after an operation. He was fifty-eight. Lewis went on to the Eagle and Child and told the others.

It was the first great loss of Lewis's adult life since his father's death, and it struck him hard. And yet, as he wrote to friends at the time, he found that his faith was strengthened rather than shaken by it. He felt, in a way he could not explain, that Williams was not lost, and that the idea of the next life had become more real to him, not less. Two years later he edited a volume of essays by Williams's friends, among them Dorothy L. Sayers, Tolkien and Barfield, as a tribute to him.

The Book of Remembrance

The verse at the head of this chapter is from Malachi, the last of the prophets. In a cynical and faithless age, a few people who feared the Lord met and talked together, and God listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him. It is a fine description of the Inklings at their best. They were a handful of Christian friends in a sceptical university, reading their

work to one another and talking about the things of God. They were not a church and they were not saints. But God hearkened, and books were written in those rooms that are still being read in a hundred languages.

A Voice on the Wireless

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."
— 1 Peter 3:15, KJV

Evacuees at the Kilns

When war came again in September 1939, Lewis was forty. He was too old to fight, and his wounds would have excused him anyway, but the war reached the Kilns at once. Within days a group of schoolgirls evacuated from London arrived to live there, and over the next years a succession of evacuee children passed through the house. Lewis, a bachelor who had very little to do with children and claimed not to like them, found that he rather enjoyed them. He also joined the Home Guard, and took his turn, every week or so, patrolling the streets of Oxford with a rifle in the small hours, which he described in letters as a mixture of boredom, cold and unexpectedly good conversation.

Warnie was recalled to the army and sent to France. He came back after the evacuation of the British army in 1940 and was retired again. The household settled down to rationing, blackout and anxiety, like every household in Britain.

The Problem of Pain

Before the war began, a publisher named Ashley Sampson had asked Lewis to write a short book on the problem of suffering for a series of popular Christian books. Lewis agreed, and wrote it during the first winter of the war, reading the chapters aloud to the Inklings as he went. *The Problem of Pain* was published in October 1940, and dedicated to them. It is a closely argued book, written for readers who wanted to know how a good and all-powerful God could allow the world to suffer as it did. In a country waiting to be bombed, there were a great many such readers. It sold well and was reprinted again and again, and it made Lewis's name outside the university for the first time.

Screwtape

On a Sunday in July 1940, Lewis was sitting in Holy Trinity Church during the service when an idea came to him for a book. It would be a series of letters from an experienced devil to a junior devil, a nephew who was trying to tempt a young man in England away from God. Everything in it would be upside down: God would be the Enemy, and vice and despair the goal. Lewis wrote to Warnie about the idea that week.

The letters appeared one at a time in an Anglican weekly paper, *The Guardian*, from May to November 1941. The editor paid Lewis two pounds for each one. Lewis refused the money and had it sent instead to a fund for the widows of clergy. In February 1942 the letters were published as a book, *The Screwtape Letters*, dedicated to Tolkien. It was an immediate and enormous success. It was reprinted eight times in its first year, and it has never been out of print since. It is the book that first made Lewis famous on both sides of the Atlantic. Lewis himself found it a strain. It had

come to him easily, but he later admitted that living for months inside the mind of a devil had been a dry and stifling experience, and he refused for years to write any more.

The BBC

Among the readers of *The Problem of Pain* was the Reverend James Welch, the director of religious broadcasting at the BBC. In February 1941 he wrote to Lewis asking whether he would give some talks on the radio. Lewis hesitated, then agreed. He was coached in the new art of broadcasting by a BBC producer, the Presbyterian minister Eric Fenn, who taught him to write for the ear: shorter sentences, plainer words, one idea at a time.

The first talk went out on Wednesday 6 August 1941, at a quarter to eight in the evening, for fifteen minutes. It was the beginning of four series of talks over the next three years. The first series asked whether there is any real standard of right and wrong, and what it might tell us about the universe. The second explained what Christians believe. The third was about Christian behaviour, and the fourth about the doctrine of God. Lewis spoke in a deep, unhurried, slightly gruff voice with no clerical solemnity at all. He sounded like an intelligent man talking sense across a kitchen table. Listeners all over the country, many of whom had never heard the faith explained without pious language, wrote to him in their hundreds.

Lewis did not like broadcasting, and he did not like the fame it brought him. He had to travel to London, often at night, through the blackout and the bombing, to speak live into a microphone. He was paid modestly. But he thought that the talks were a duty. The country was at war; many of its people did not know what the faith they were defending was; and he had been asked. The talks were published as three short books and, in 1952,

gathered into one volume as *Mere Christianity*, which has led countless readers to faith.

The Royal Air Force

At about the same time, Lewis was invited by the chaplaincy of the Royal Air Force to speak to airmen at bases around the country. He gave his first talk at the RAF station at Abingdon, near Oxford, in the spring of 1941, and he went on giving them for several years, travelling to stations all over Britain during the university vacations. It was hard work. The audiences were made up of men who had been ordered to attend, many of them tired, sceptical or bored, and many of them knew that they would very likely be killed within months. Lewis felt that the first talks were failures. He was not used to audiences who had not chosen to hear him, and he found it difficult to speak to men whose education and experience were so different from his own.

He learned. He came to think of the RAF talks as a hard but invaluable school. He had to drop his learned allusions, translate every theological term into plain English, and take seriously the questions of men who had no time for anything that sounded like a sermon. It was, he thought, an exercise in humility, and it made him a better apologist.

The Weight of Glory

There were other invitations. On 8 June 1941 he preached at evensong in the university church of St Mary the Virgin, in Oxford, to a congregation that filled the church and spilled out into the street. The sermon was published as *The Weight of Glory*, and many readers think it the finest thing he ever wrote. In February 1943 he gave a series of lectures at the University

of Durham that became *The Abolition of Man*. In the same years he wrote two more novels of other planets and a dream-fantasy of a bus ride from hell to heaven. The war years were the most productive of his life.

Ready Always to Give an Answer

The verse at the head of this chapter is Peter's charge to Christians to be ready to give a reason for their hope. It has been called the charter of Christian apologetics, and Lewis took it as a description of his own vocation. But it is worth noticing the last three words: with meekness and fear. Lewis was not always meek. In argument he could be overbearing, and he knew it. But he did treat his hearers, whether airmen in a hut or listeners in a kitchen, with respect. He did not talk down to them. He took their objections seriously because he had once made them himself. And he gave his answers in fear, in the old sense of the word: in reverence before the God he was speaking about, and in the knowledge that he too would give account.

A Rule of Life

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."
— James 5:16, KJV

Fame and Its Dangers

By 1941 Lewis was becoming famous, and he knew the danger. He was a proud man by temperament, and he had always enjoyed winning arguments. Now thousands of strangers were writing to tell him that he had changed their lives. It is a hard thing for any man to hear, and harder for one who had spent his youth wanting to be thought clever. Lewis feared, rightly, that the success of his Christian books could become a trap: that he might become an expert on religion and stop being a Christian, or that his pride might feed on the very work he was doing for God.

He did several things about it. They are less often told than the story of his books, but they are at least as important to understanding his life.

Father Walter Adams

In October 1940 Lewis began going to confession. He chose as his confessor an elderly priest of the Society of St John the Evangelist, an Anglican religious order whose members were known as the Cowley

Fathers, after the district of east Oxford where their mother house stood. Father Walter Adams was then over seventy. He was a quiet, unremarkable-looking man, much sought after as a spiritual director, who had been a parish priest before joining the Society during the First World War. Those who knew him spoke of his humility, his gentleness and his complete absence of fuss.

The decision did not come easily. Lewis admitted in a letter that he dreaded it, and that what might seem a small step to others was a very large one for him. Afterwards he found that it had done him good. He went on going, almost every week, for the next twelve years, until Father Adams died in 1952. It was, by any standard, an extraordinary discipline for a busy Oxford don in the middle of a war, and it was a sign of how seriously he took his own sins.

Confession to a priest was not, and is not, common among English Protestants, and many evangelical readers will find it strange. Lewis did not regard it as necessary for every Christian, and he never urged it on others. He seems to have chosen it because he knew his own heart and did not trust himself to deal with it alone. He needed someone outside himself who would hear the worst, not be impressed by his fame, and tell him the truth. Father Adams did that, and by every account he did it without fuss, pointing his penitent away from himself to Christ.

Prayer

Under Father Adams's direction, Lewis's life of prayer became regular and disciplined. He said the daily offices of the Prayer Book, morning and evening prayer, when he could, often in his college chapel or alone in his rooms. He read the Psalms through, as the Prayer Book appoints, month by month. He made his Communion at least once a week, and when he could

more often. And he prayed by name for a great many people. As his correspondence grew, so did his list. By the end of his life it was very long, and it included people he had never met, who had written to him for help and whom he had promised to remember. He took those promises seriously. When he told a stranger that he would pray for them, he did.

He was honest, too, about the dryness of prayer. Some of his most helpful letters to correspondents were about the times when prayer felt like talking to an empty room, and about going on anyway. He knew those times well. He did not think that feelings were a reliable measure of prayer, and he had learned at Wynyard what damage could be done by trying to manufacture them. The man who had tormented himself as a boy over whether his prayers felt right had learned, as a man, simply to pray.

He wrote about prayer in his last book, published after his death, a series of imaginary letters to a friend. Its teaching belongs to the companion volume. What belongs here is the fact behind it: that it was written by a man who had prayed every day for thirty years, often without feeling anything, and had found that God was faithful.

The Agape Fund

The second thing Lewis did about fame concerned money. In the early 1940s the royalties from his Christian books began to arrive in quantities he had never imagined. He had always been careless with money, and he had a horror of becoming rich on religion. So, with the help of Owen Barfield, who was by then his solicitor, he set up a charitable trust. It was called the Agape Fund, from the Greek word for love. From then on, two-thirds of his royalties were paid into it, and the money was given away, quietly and usually anonymously, to people in need: widows, struggling clergy,

students, families who could not pay school fees, and many others whom he heard of through his letters or his friends.

Lewis gave away a great deal of his remaining income as well, often in cash, to anyone who asked. Friends sometimes warned him that he was being taken advantage of. He thought that was a risk worth taking. He was also hopeless about tax, and in the early years of his success he did not realise that money he had already given away could still be taxed as his income. Part of the purpose of the trust, which Barfield arranged, was to put his giving on a footing that would not ruin him. Lewis remained, by the standards of his position, a man of very simple habits: shabby clothes, cheap tobacco, beer in a pub, long walks, and a house with worn furniture and holes in the carpet.

The Letters

The third thing was the letters. From the early 1940s onwards, Lewis received a flood of letters from strangers. Some were from people struggling with doubt. Some were from the bereaved, the lonely and the frightened. Some were from children who had read his stories. Some were from cranks. He answered nearly all of them, most of them by hand, with a steel-nibbed pen dipped in ink, because he never learned to type. It took him an hour or two every morning, and sometimes much more.

From the time Warnie came home from the army in 1940, he helped. He typed many of the replies, handled routine correspondence, and kept the files. By his own reckoning he typed many thousands of letters for his brother over the years. But Lewis wrote the important ones himself. Some of his correspondents wrote to him for years, and he kept up long exchanges with people he never met: a widow in America, a young man struggling with faith, a nun, a schoolgirl. He gave them his time, his

attention and his advice, and he prayed for them. He thought that it was his duty, and he complained about it, and he went on doing it until a few weeks before his death.

In the years after the war, when Britain was still under severe rationing, some of his American readers began to send him food parcels: hams, tinned meat, sugar, butter. Lewis shared them with his household and with others in Oxford who had less. His letters of thanks are full of real delight.

Healed by Confession

The verse at the head of this chapter joins confession and prayer, and promises healing. Lewis practised both. He confessed his faults to another, for twelve years, week by week; and he prayed for others, for decades, by name. It is hard to know what that discipline did for him. But those who knew him in his later years noticed a change. The young man who had been arrogant, combative and cruel in his wit became, without losing his edge, a man of real humility and real kindness. He did not become a saint overnight. But he was being healed, slowly, in the way that James describes.

The Socratic Club

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."
— 1 Thessalonians 5:21, KJV

Stella Aldwinckle's Idea

In the autumn of 1941 a woman named Stella Aldwinckle, who worked as a chaplain to women students for the Oxford Pastorate, an evangelical ministry in the university, had an idea. She had noticed that many students had honest questions about the Christian faith and nowhere to ask them. The religious societies in Oxford were for believers. The atheist and secular societies were for unbelievers. There was no place where the two sides could meet on equal terms and argue the case out in public. She decided to start one, and she asked Lewis to be its president.

Lewis agreed with enthusiasm. It was exactly the kind of thing he loved. The new society was named the Socratic Club, after the Greek philosopher who had taught that one should follow the argument wherever it leads. Its first meeting was held in January 1942. Its rule was simple. At each meeting a speaker would read a paper, and someone from the other side would reply, or the other way round, and then the floor was open. Christians were to hear the strongest case against their faith, and unbelievers the strongest case for it. Lewis was president for twelve years, until he left for Cambridge in 1954.

The Meetings

The club met on Monday evenings during term, usually in a college common room, and the meetings were often crowded. Students sat on the floor and stood in the doorway. The speakers included some of the most distinguished philosophers, scientists and theologians in Britain, believers and unbelievers alike. Lewis read papers himself, replied to others, and took part in the discussion. He was in his element. Those who attended remembered his booming voice, his quickness, his good humour, and his capacity to demolish a careless argument in a sentence.

It was not always comfortable. Some of the unbelieving speakers were very able, and some of the debates went badly for the Christian side. Lewis did not mind that. He thought it was the whole point. A faith that could not stand up to argument was not worth having, and a Christian who had never heard the case against his faith was not ready to defend it. He wanted the club to be fair. He wanted the believers to lose sometimes, if they deserved to.

Miracles

In 1947 Lewis published *Miracles*, a book arguing that the miracles of the Bible are not ruled out by reason or science. Part of its argument, in the third chapter, was directed against naturalism, the view that nature is all there is. Lewis argued that if naturalism were true, human reasoning would be nothing more than the product of blind physical causes, and we would then have no grounds for trusting it, including the reasoning that led to naturalism. The theory, in other words, cut away the branch it was sitting on.

It was an argument he had held since the 1920s, and he thought it was one of his strongest. The book sold well, and in September 1947 the American news magazine *Time* put Lewis on its cover. He was by now one of the most famous Christians in the English-speaking world.

2 February 1948

On 2 February 1948, a young philosopher named Elizabeth Anscombe read a paper to the Socratic Club replying to the third chapter of *Miracles*. She was twenty-eight, a research fellow at Somerville College, a former pupil of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, and a devout Roman Catholic. She was not attacking Christianity. She was attacking what she considered a bad argument for it. Her criticism was technical. She argued that Lewis had confused two different senses of words like cause and reason, and that his argument against naturalism, as he had stated it, did not work.

By the accounts of those present, it was a sharp and difficult evening. Lewis replied and the discussion went on. Afterwards some who were there thought he had been badly beaten. Lewis himself seems to have agreed that she had made a real point. Over the following years he rewrote the chapter, and in 1960, when a new edition of *Miracles* was published, the third chapter had been carefully revised to meet her objections.

The Legend

Out of that evening grew a legend that is still often repeated. It holds that Lewis was so humiliated by Anscombe that he lost confidence in reason, gave up writing apologetics, and retreated into children's stories. A. N. Wilson's biography gave the story wide currency in 1990.

The legend is mostly false. It is true that Lewis wrote fewer books of direct apologetics after 1948, and true that he took Anscombe's criticism seriously. But he did not abandon apologetics. He went on presiding over the Socratic Club for six more years, went on lecturing and debating, and went on writing Christian books of many kinds for the rest of his life, including a revised version of the very argument she had criticised. The Narnia books had been in his mind for years before 1948, and he began to write the first of them in earnest in 1948 and 1949 for reasons that had nothing to do with Anscombe. And Anscombe herself, later in life, said that the legend was nonsense. She remembered the meeting as a serious discussion of a definite philosophical point, and she thought Lewis's revised chapter was a great improvement, though she still had reservations. She also observed, drily, that those who wrote about the occasion as a great defeat seemed to her to be showing more about their own attitudes than about what happened.

What does seem to be true is that the evening left a mark on Lewis. Friends who saw him soon afterwards remembered him as unusually low, and he did not hide from them that he thought he had come off worse. It reminded him that his arguments were not infallible, and that he could be wrong. He may well have concluded that the kind of apologetics he had done during the war had served its time, and that other kinds of writing would now reach people better. But that is a long way from a crisis of faith.

Prove All Things

The verse at the head of this chapter is Paul's instruction to test everything and to keep what is good. It could have been the motto of the Socratic Club. It is also a fair description of how Lewis dealt with his defeat. He tested his own argument, found it wanting, revised it, and kept what was

good in it. That is not the behaviour of a man whose faith was shaken. It is the behaviour of a scholar who believed that the truth could survive any honest criticism, and that a Christian should be the first to welcome it. His pride was hurt. His faith was not.

The Long Decline

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."
— Galatians 6:2, KJV

The Hardest Years

The years just after the Second World War were, in public, the summit of Lewis's fame. In private they were among the hardest of his life. He was exhausted by the war years, in which he had taught, lectured, written, broadcast and travelled without a break. The household at the Kilns was growing more difficult. And the two people he lived with were both, in different ways, falling apart.

Mrs Moore

Janie Moore was in her seventies. She suffered from varicose ulcers in her legs, and she grew steadily less able to move about. She also grew more demanding, more anxious and more querulous. She quarrelled with the maids, worried about everything, and wanted Jack at hand constantly. Visitors to the Kilns in those years remembered seeing Lewis called from his work or his conversation, again and again, to deal with some small domestic crisis: a dog that needed walking, a maid who had given notice, a message, a cup of tea. Warnie's diary from these years is full of fury at her, and at what he saw as her tyranny over his brother.

Lewis did not complain, at least not often. His letters to friends sometimes speak of the pressure of the household, and he asked one or two close correspondents for their prayers, without going into detail. To most people he said nothing at all. He nursed her, fetched and carried for her, and listened to her. He seems to have thought that this was simply his duty, and that the duty did not lessen because it had become hard.

Warnie

Warnie, meanwhile, was drinking. He had always enjoyed a drink, as most army officers of his generation did, but in the years after the war his drinking became something else. He would go on binges that lasted days or weeks, often when he was away from home or under strain, and he would sometimes end in hospital. In the summer of 1947, on holiday in Ireland, he drank himself into such a state that he was taken into Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital at Drogheda, run by an order of Irish nuns, the Medical Missionaries of Mary. Jack crossed to Ireland to be with him. The nuns nursed Warnie back to health, then and on many later occasions, and he grew deeply attached to them.

Lewis never wrote publicly about his brother's alcoholism, and he rarely wrote of it privately. He did not lecture or reproach him, at least not in any record that survives. He worried, prayed, fetched him home, and forgave him. The brothers' love for each other never wavered. But Warnie's drinking added greatly to the strain of Jack's life, and there were times when Jack, who depended on his brother more than anyone, could not depend on him at all.

June 1949

In June 1949 Lewis collapsed. He had been working without a holiday for years, he was run down, and he picked up a serious streptococcal infection. He was rushed into the Acland nursing home in Oxford, where he was treated with injections of the new drug penicillin. His doctor, Robert Havard, told Warnie that his brother was dangerously exhausted and needed a complete rest. Warnie, under the strain, began drinking heavily again.

Lewis recovered, but slowly. His friends began to worry seriously about him. Some of them felt that the burden of the household at the Kilns was killing him, and one or two said so. But Lewis would not hear of changing the arrangement. He had made a promise, and he would keep it.

Restholme

In April 1950 the decision was taken out of his hands. Mrs Moore, by then seventy-eight, after a series of falls, could no longer be cared for at home. She was moved to a nursing home in Oxford called Restholme. Lewis visited her almost every day for the rest of her life, often travelling across Oxford in the middle of a heavy working day to sit with her. She was often confused, and the visits cannot always have been easy. He went anyway.

She died on 12 January 1951, of influenza, at the age of seventy-eight. She was buried in the churchyard of Holy Trinity, Headington Quarry, where Jack would one day lie as well. Lewis had kept his promise to Paddy Moore for more than thirty years.

Relief and Grief

What Lewis felt at her death he did not say publicly. To friends he admitted a kind of relief, as anyone who has nursed a long illness will understand, and also real grief. She had been the centre of his household for half his life. She had given him a home when he had none, and whatever else the relationship had been, it had been long and close. Warnie, on the other hand, recorded his relief without any mixture at all. The house became, for a few years, quieter.

Passed Over

In these same years Lewis suffered a series of disappointments in his career. He was by now, by any reasonable measure, one of the most distinguished literary scholars in Oxford, the author of *The Allegory of Love* and of a stream of other learned work, and the best-attended lecturer in the English faculty. Yet he was never offered a professorship at Oxford. More than once he was passed over for a chair he might reasonably have expected. In 1951 he was a candidate for the elected post of Professor of Poetry, and lost to the poet Cecil Day-Lewis.

Some of his colleagues frankly disapproved of him. They thought that a scholar who wrote popular books about religion, spoke on the radio and was on the cover of an American magazine was not quite respectable. Some were offended by his outspoken faith. Others simply disliked his personality, which could be loud and overbearing in the common room. Lewis felt the slights, but he did not complain about them in public, and there is little bitterness about them in his letters. He had, by then, learned something about humility, and something about not needing the good opinion of the people around him.

The Law of Christ

The verse at the head of this chapter tells Christians to bear one another's burdens. Lewis bore a great many in these years: an old woman's decline, a brother's drinking, a heavy load of teaching, and the letters of thousands of strangers. He did it, for the most part, without being thanked and without telling anyone. It nearly broke his health. But it was in these years, when his life was at its most constricted, that he began to write the books that would carry his name furthest of all.

A Wardrobe and a Chair

"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."
— Matthew 18:3, KJV

Pictures in His Head

Lewis always said that his stories began not with ideas but with pictures. Since he was about sixteen, he said, he had carried in his mind a picture of a faun carrying an umbrella and parcels through a snowy wood. For many years he did nothing with it. In 1939, when the evacuee children came to the Kilns, he began a story about four children sent away from London who find their way into another world, and wrote a few sentences. Then he put it aside. Nearly ten years later, in 1948 and 1949, he took it up again and finished it.

He read it to Tolkien, who disliked it intensely. Tolkien thought it a hasty jumble of different mythologies, with fauns and Father Christmas and talking beavers all in the same wood, and he said so. Lewis was discouraged but not deterred. He read it to Roger Lancelyn Green, a former pupil who wrote children's books, and Green loved it. Lewis went on.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was published in October 1950, with illustrations by a young artist named Pauline Baynes. Six more books followed, one a year, until 1956. Together they became *The Chronicles of*

Narnia. The last of them, *The Last Battle*, won the Carnegie Medal, the highest award for children's literature in Britain.

This book does not retell them. Lewis insisted that they were not allegories, in which each character stands for something else, but stories in which he imagined what the Son of God might be like if there were another world and he came into it. Readers of every age have found in them the goodness, the terror and the joy of Christ, and they have been read by many tens of millions of children since. Readers who want them should go to the books themselves.

Why Children's Books?

People were surprised. Lewis was a bachelor in his fifties who had no children of his own and little experience of them. Many of his friends thought it an odd turn. Lewis gave several explanations, in essays written later. He said that the fairy story was simply the best form for what he wanted to say. He said that a story for children could sometimes slip past what he called the watchful dragons: the stiffness and reluctance that many people feel about religion because they were told as children that they ought to feel certain things about God. And he held that a good story for children ought to be one that grown-ups could enjoy as well.

There may also have been a more personal reason. Lewis had lost his own childhood suddenly, at nine, and had spent much of his youth longing for something he could not name. The man who wrote the Narnia books was writing, in a sense, for the boy at Little Lea. He was giving to other children what he would have given anything to have been given himself.

Letters From Children

The children wrote to him. They wrote in thousands, from Britain, America and all over the world, and he answered them. His letters to children are among the most charming things he wrote: patient, funny, never condescending, and always taking their questions seriously. When a child worried that he loved Aslan more than Jesus, Lewis wrote back gently that the child could not really do so, since the things he loved Aslan for were the very things Jesus had done and said.

Cambridge

In 1954 the University of Cambridge created a new chair, the professorship of Medieval and Renaissance English, and the electors offered it to Lewis. He at first declined. He did not want to leave the Kilns or Warnie, and he did not think he could manage the move. The electors, among them his friend Tolkien, persisted, and the college to which the chair was attached, Magdalene, offered him a fellowship and rooms. It was arranged that he could spend the week in Cambridge during term and come home to the Kilns at weekends. In June 1954 he accepted.

It was the recognition that Oxford had never given him, and it made a great difference to his life. On 29 November 1954, his fifty-sixth birthday, he gave his inaugural lecture in Cambridge to a crowded hall. In it he argued that the great divide in the history of Western culture was not between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as most scholars thought, but between the whole of the old Christian world and the modern one, and he presented himself, half jokingly, as a surviving specimen of the older kind. On 1 January 1955 he moved into his rooms at Magdalene.

He was happy at Cambridge. The atmosphere was kinder than at Oxford, and he found his new colleagues welcoming. He had no undergraduates to tutor, only lectures to give and research students to supervise, and after thirty years of tutorials it was a great release. Magdalene, a small, friendly, rather old-fashioned college, suited him well. He spent the week there during term and went home to Oxford by the slow cross-country train at the weekends.

Two Books of 1955 and 1956

In 1955 Lewis published *Surprised by Joy*, the account of his early life and conversion. He had been working on it for years. Its title, taken from a sonnet of Wordsworth, named the longing he had known since childhood. His friends would soon enjoy the joke that he was about to be surprised by a Joy of quite another kind. In 1956 he published *Till We Have Faces*, a retelling of an ancient myth, which he thought the best book he had written and which most readers at the time ignored. It was dedicated to a woman who had helped him with it: Joy Davidman, an American writer who had been his friend for several years. Their story belongs to the next chapters.

As Little Children

The verse at the head of this chapter is Jesus' warning that no one enters the kingdom of heaven without becoming like a child. Lewis was the most learned man most people had ever met. He read a dozen languages and knew the whole of European literature. And yet, in his fifties, he turned to writing stories for children, and some of what he most wanted to say he said in them. It is a kind of parable. The scholar who had once thought religion

beneath a grown man's intelligence had learned that the kingdom belongs to those who receive it as children, and he spent the best of his imagination on helping children receive it.

Joy Davidman

"For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth."
— Psalm 71:5, KJV

A Girl From the Bronx

Helen Joy Davidman was born in New York City on 18 April 1915, the daughter of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Her father, Joseph Davidman, was a schoolteacher and later a school principal. Her family were not religious, and Joy grew up an atheist. She was astonishingly clever. She went to Hunter College at fifteen, took a master's degree in English at Columbia University at twenty, and was soon publishing poems, reviews and novels. In 1938 her first book of poems, *Letter to a Comrade*, won a national prize for young poets, the Yale Series of Younger Poets award, and was published to wide praise.

Like many young American intellectuals of the Depression years, Joy turned to Communism. She joined the Communist Party in 1938, and for several years she wrote for its magazine, *New Masses*. She went briefly to Hollywood as a scriptwriter, without success. In 1942 she married a fellow Communist and writer, William Lindsay Gresham, who had fought for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War and who suffered from alcoholism

and depression. They had two sons, David, born in 1944, and Douglas, born in 1945. They lived in a house in the country north of New York.

A Night in 1946

The marriage was unhappy from the start. Bill drank, was unfaithful, and was subject to violent moods. One evening in the spring of 1946 he telephoned Joy from New York to say that he was having a breakdown, that he could not come home, and that he did not know what he would do. Then he rang off. Joy was alone in the house with two small children, with no way of reaching him and nothing she could do.

What happened next she described a few years later in an essay she wrote about her conversion. In her helplessness her pride gave way, and for the first time in her life she found that she was aware of God. She did not reason her way to him. She felt that he was there, in the room, and that he had been waiting for her. She found herself on her knees, praying. Bill came home safely, and not long afterwards both of them began attending a Presbyterian church, though Bill's faith did not last.

Joy had already been reading the books of C. S. Lewis, and after her conversion she read more. She found in them the clearest account she knew of the faith she had stumbled into, and an intellect that matched her own.

The First Letter

In January 1950 she wrote to him. Her early letters have not survived, but Warnie, who handled much of his brother's post, later recalled that hers stood out from the rest: they were lively, direct and well informed, and their writer was plainly a match for Jack in argument. Lewis replied. A correspondence began that lasted more than two years.

By 1952 Joy's marriage was in ruins. She was ill and exhausted, and she decided to go to England for a few months, partly to recover, partly to work on a book, and partly, it seems clear, to meet the man whose letters had come to mean so much to her. She left the boys with Bill and with her cousin Renée Pierce, who had come to live with them after leaving a marriage of her own. In August she sailed for England.

The Eastgate Hotel

On 24 September 1952, Lewis met Joy Davidman for the first time, at lunch in the Eastgate Hotel in Oxford, opposite Magdalen. She had come with a friend. The lunch was a success, and it was followed by others, at Magdalen and at the Kilns. Joy was blunt, funny, abrasive and fearless. She said exactly what she thought, she was not in the least overawed by Lewis, and she beat him at his own game of argument. He enjoyed it hugely. Warnie, when he met her, liked her too, and he remained her loyal friend to the end.

That December, Joy spent Christmas at the Kilns. While she was there a letter came from Bill. He told her that he and Renée had fallen in love and asked for a divorce. Joy showed the letter to Lewis, and he advised her to agree. She went back to America in January 1953 to settle her affairs.

London and Headington

In November 1953 Joy came back to England, this time with her sons, and settled in London. She was poor: Bill was supposed to send money, and rarely did. She supported herself and the boys by writing and by occasional work, and Lewis quietly helped to pay the boys' school fees. Her divorce was granted in 1954. Her book on the Ten Commandments, *Smoke on the*

Mountain, had appeared in America in 1953, and when it was published in Britain in 1955 Lewis wrote a foreword for it.

She and her sons visited the Kilns in the holidays. David and Douglas, then about nine and eight, were enthralled by the house, its woods, its pond, and the tall, kindly professor who had written the Narnia books. In 1955 Joy moved to Headington, to a house in the Old High Street, about a mile from the Kilns. Lewis found it for her and paid the rent.

By then it was obvious to their friends that Joy was in love with Lewis. Whether Lewis was in love with her is much less clear, and he himself seems not to have known for some time. He enjoyed her company more than anyone's outside the Inklings. He depended on her for criticism and encouragement in his writing. But he was a bachelor of nearly sixty who had never expected to marry, and he seems to have thought of their relationship as a deep friendship and nothing more.

A Wedding of Convenience

In 1956 the British Home Office refused to renew Joy's permit to live in England. She and her sons would have to return to America. Lewis could not bear the thought of losing her company, and he could see no reason why she and her sons should be sent back to a country where they had no home and very little money. He offered a solution. He would marry her in a civil ceremony, which would give her British nationality and the right to stay. The marriage would be a legal formality only. They would not live together. She would remain at her own house, and he at the Kilns.

On 23 April 1956 C. S. Lewis and Joy Davidman Gresham were married at the register office in St Giles, Oxford. Very few people were told. Lewis did not regard it as a real marriage, since it had not taken place in church, and he expected nothing to change.

Hope From Youth

The verse at the head of this chapter is a prayer of an old man who has trusted God since his youth. Joy Davidman had not trusted God from her youth. She came to him at thirty, as Lewis had come at thirty-two, after years of atheism and against the grain of all her education. Like him, she had been found by a God she had not been looking for. That shared experience was part of what drew them together. They were two converts, two former unbelievers, two people who had spent their lives in argument and had both, at last, knelt down. Neither of them knew, in the spring of 1956, how little time they had.

A Bedside Wedding

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up."
— James 5:14-15, KJV

18 October 1956

For some months in 1956 Joy had been suffering pains in her hip and leg. Her doctor thought it was rheumatism. On the evening of 18 October 1956, her thigh bone snapped. She was taken to the Wingfield-Morris Orthopaedic Hospital in Headington. X-rays showed that the femur had been eaten away by cancer, and further tests found cancer in her breast and in other bones. The doctors did not expect her to live long.

It was this, Lewis afterwards said, that made him understand his own feelings. Faced with the prospect of losing her, he found that what he felt for Joy was not friendship at all, or not only. He was in love with her. The civil marriage, which he had treated as a formality, now seemed to him a mockery: he was legally married to a woman he loved and who was dying, and in the eyes of the Church, and in his own, he was not married to her at all.

Speaking Openly

He began, for the first time, to tell his friends. Some were astonished, some were dismayed, and one or two were hostile. Tolkien in particular seems to have been hurt not to have been told of the civil marriage, and he never warmed to Joy. Warnie, who had known all along, supported his brother completely. On 24 December 1956 a notice appeared in *The Times* announcing that a marriage had taken place between Professor C. S. Lewis and Mrs Joy Gresham, and asking that no letters be sent.

Joy was moved from one hospital to another, and her treatment was long and painful: operations, radiation and great suffering. Lewis visited her every day he could. When he was in Cambridge, he wrote to her.

The Bishop's Refusal

Lewis wanted a Christian marriage. But Joy had been divorced, and her former husband was still alive. The Church of England in the 1950s did not marry divorced people in church while a former spouse lived, and the Bishop of Oxford, Harry Carpenter, refused permission for the marriage. Lewis argued that Joy's first marriage had not been a valid Christian marriage at all, since Bill Gresham had himself been married and divorced before he married her. The bishop was not persuaded. Lewis, who had always been a loyal and obedient churchman, would not go behind his back.

Peter Bide

In March 1957 the doctors told Lewis that Joy had very little time left. Lewis thought of a former pupil of his, Peter Bide, who had become a priest and was serving a parish in Sussex. Bide was said to have been used by God

in the healing of a sick child. Lewis asked him to come to Oxford, not to marry them but to lay hands on Joy and pray for her healing.

Bide came. When he arrived and understood the whole situation, he was moved by it. Lewis had not asked him to marry them, but Bide decided that he would. He later explained that, faced with a dying woman and a man who loved her and wanted to be married to her before God, he could not in conscience refuse. He knew that the Bishop of Oxford would not be pleased, and he was right.

21 March 1957

On 21 March 1957, in Joy's hospital room, Peter Bide married C. S. Lewis and Joy Davidman according to the rites of the Church of England. Warnie was there. Joy could not rise from her bed. After the marriage Bide laid his hands on her and prayed for her healing. Then he went home.

In letters written at the time, Lewis prepared his friends to hear that he would very soon be a widower.

In April Joy was sent home to the Kilns to die, and a nurse came to care for her. Lewis, Warnie, the boys when they were home, and the household gathered round her.

Remission

She did not die. Over the following weeks and months, to the astonishment of her doctors, the cancer stopped advancing. Then it began to recede. The diseased bones started to heal. By the summer she was able to sit up, then to move about the house in a wheelchair, and by the end of the year she could walk with a stick. By 1958 she was strong enough to go out, to visit friends,

and to go on holiday. The doctors had no explanation for it. They could only say that remission of that kind sometimes happened, though rarely.

Lewis believed that God had answered prayer, and so did Joy. They did not claim to understand why. Many people had prayed for her, in Oxford and in America and elsewhere, and the prayer Bide had offered at her bedside was one among them. Lewis was careful not to say too much, and he never treated her recovery as a proof of anything. But he was grateful with all his heart.

Something Borne

At the same time, something odd happened to Lewis himself. In the summer of 1957 he began to suffer from severe pain in his back and legs. The doctors found that he had osteoporosis, a loss of calcium from his bones, and he was forced to wear a surgical belt and to give up many of the long walks he loved. As Joy's bones grew stronger, his grew weaker.

Lewis wondered, in letters to friends, whether he had been allowed to bear a little of her suffering. He remembered what Charles Williams had taught about the possibility of carrying another person's burden in love, and he had prayed that he might be allowed to take some of her pain. He did not claim that this had happened. He thought it possible, and he was glad if it had. The idea will strike some readers as strange. But it is not very far from the verse in Galatians about bearing one another's burdens, or from what Paul says of filling up in his own flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, the church. And whatever the truth of it, it was an act of love.

The Prayer of Faith

The verse at the head of this chapter is James's instruction to the sick: call the elders, let them anoint and pray, and the prayer of faith will raise the sick up. A parish priest from Sussex came to Joy's bedside in March 1957, laid his hands on her and prayed, and she was raised up, for a while. It would be wrong to say that the prayer of faith always brings healing in this life, and James does not say so. Joy herself would die three years later. But for those three years, Lewis and Joy believed that God had heard them, and they received the time that was given them as a gift. It was the happiest time of Lewis's life.

Three Years

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ... A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance."
— Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4, KJV

A Late Happiness

Lewis was nearly sixty when Joy came home to the Kilns, and he had never expected to be married. He found, to his own amazement, that he was happy in a way he had not been since childhood. He told friends so, simply and without embarrassment. He had not known, he said in effect, that such happiness was possible, and he had certainly not expected it to come to him so late, or in such circumstances.

Joy brought the Kilns to life. The house had been neglected for years. Mrs Moore had not been able to look after it in her last decade, and the two brothers had not much cared. There were holes in the carpets, broken windows, threadbare furniture and damp in the walls. Joy, once she could move about, set about putting it right. She had the house redecorated, the carpets replaced and the heating improved. She took charge of the accounts and of the household staff. She discovered, to her indignation, that poachers and trespassers had been using the Kilns woods for years, and she saw them off. Paxford, who had run the place in his own way for nearly

thirty years, did not altogether like the change. Warnie did. He and Joy became firm friends, and he was delighted to see the old house come back to life.

A Marriage of True Minds

The two of them were extraordinarily well matched. Joy was the only person Lewis had ever met, apart from a few of the Inklings, who could argue with him on equal terms, and she did so constantly. She was quick, funny, sharp-tongued and sometimes rude. Several of Lewis's friends disliked her, and some thought she was bad for him. Others saw that she made him happy, and loved her for it. She helped him with his writing, read his drafts, made suggestions and criticisms, and encouraged him. Lewis said that *Till We Have Faces* owed a great deal to her, and his later books bear signs of their conversations.

They also prayed together, went to church together, and read together. Joy shared her husband's faith wholeheartedly. Their marriage was, in the fullest sense, a Christian one.

Ireland

In July 1958, with Joy strong enough to travel, the two of them went to Ireland for a belated honeymoon. It was the first time Lewis had ever flown. They visited Arthur Greeves and other old friends and relatives, and toured the countryside of Lewis's childhood: the hills and coast of County Down and further afield, as far as Donegal. Lewis showed Joy everything he had loved as a boy, and Joy, who had grown up in the Bronx, loved it too.

Work in Those Years

Lewis went on working. In term he was in Cambridge during the week, and he came home to the Kilns as early as he could on Fridays. In 1958 he published *Reflections on the Psalms*, a book written for ordinary readers about the difficulties and the delights of praying the Psalms, and in 1960 *The Four Loves*, a book about affection, friendship, romantic love and charity. In the summer of 1958 he recorded a series of talks on the four loves for an American religious broadcasting organisation. Some American listeners were shocked by his frankness about sex, and the talks were not widely broadcast at the time. He also wrote a sequel to the Screwtape letters, in the form of a toast proposed by the senior devil at a dinner for young tempters, which was published in an American magazine in 1959.

The Cancer Returns

In October 1959 a routine examination at the hospital showed that the cancer had come back. There were new tumours in Joy's bones. The doctors said that she could be given treatment that might hold it back for a time, but that it would not cure her. Lewis wrote to friends with a heavy heart. They had known it might happen. Knowing did not make it easier.

Greece

Joy had always wanted to see Greece. For a scholar of classical literature like Lewis, it would have been the journey of a lifetime too, and he had never made it. In the spring of 1960, with the doctors' reluctant agreement, they went. They travelled with two old friends, Roger Lancelyn Green, Lewis's former pupil, and his wife June. From 3 to 14 April they toured Greece and the islands: Athens, Mycenae, Rhodes, Crete and Knossos. Joy was in pain

much of the time and could not walk far, but she was determined to see all she could, and she saw a great deal. Lewis, who had read about these places all his life, saw them at last, with his wife beside him.

Green kept a diary of the trip, and later dedicated his biography of Lewis to the memory of Jack and Joy and of what he called their tour of the Greek islands. Everyone who was there remembered it as a time of great happiness, in spite of everything. It was the last journey Joy ever made.

The End

After their return Joy's condition grew worse quickly. In the early summer she had a major operation. Early in July she was taken into the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford. Lewis was with her as much as he could be. On 13 July 1960 she died, with him at her side. She was forty-five.

Before she died she received absolution from Austin Farrer, one of the most distinguished theologians in England, who had become a close friend of them both. Lewis afterwards told friends that at the end she had been at peace with God. Her body was cremated at the Oxford crematorium, where Farrer took the funeral service, and her ashes were scattered in the rose garden there. Lewis wrote a short poem for her memorial plaque, which can still be read there.

A Time to Dance

The verse at the head of this chapter speaks of the seasons God appoints for every purpose: a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. Lewis and Joy had been given a time to dance. It lasted a little over three years after the bedside wedding, and four from the day in the register office. It was brief, and it was overshadowed from beginning to

end by the knowledge of her illness. But they took it as a gift, and they were glad in it. When it ended, the time to weep began, and Lewis entered it more completely than he had ever entered anything.

A Grief Observed

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?"
— Psalm 22:1, KJV

The Notebooks

In the weeks after Joy's death, Lewis did what he had always done with experience: he wrote it down. He had found some old exercise books in the house, and in them, almost every day, he set down what he was feeling and thinking. He did not write for publication. He seems to have written partly to keep himself from going under, and partly because writing was the only way he knew to look at something clearly. He filled four notebooks. Then he stopped, because he had run out of notebooks, and because he found that he had come to the end of something.

The first sentence of the first notebook has become one of the most quoted sentences he ever wrote. "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear." What follows is not a treatise on suffering. Lewis had written that book twenty years before, in *The Problem of Pain*, and he had written it as a philosopher. These notebooks were written by a husband, and they are raw.

What the Notebooks Say

In them Lewis records his grief as it happened, day after day. He describes the physical sensations of it: the restlessness, the laziness, the inability to concentrate. He describes the embarrassment of meeting people who did not know what to say, and his own fear of becoming a bore. He describes the way his memories of Joy began, within weeks, to fade and blur, and his terror that he would lose the real woman and be left with an image of his own making.

And he describes, with an honesty that shocked many of his readers, what grief did to his faith. He did not stop believing in God. What frightened him was not that God might not exist, but that God might be other than he had thought: not loving, but cruel. He felt, in the first weeks, that when he turned to God in his need he found a door shut in his face, and silence behind it. He wrote some things about God in those pages that he would not have allowed a pupil to write in an essay. He wrote them because they were what he felt, and because he had decided not to lie.

Then, slowly, the notebooks change. Lewis begins to see that his own frantic demands had been part of the problem: that a man who is shouting cannot hear. He begins to recognise that his picture of God, like his picture of Joy, had been in part his own construction, and that the real God would have to keep breaking it, as the real Joy had broken his picture of her when she was alive. He does not find answers. He finds that the questions themselves begin to look different. And by the end he has come, not to understanding, but to a kind of peace, and a sense that Joy, wherever she was, was at peace with God too.

Published Under Another Name

In time he came to think that the notebooks might help others who were grieving. But the writing was too private to sign, and he did not want it read as the latest offering of a famous Christian author. So he arranged for it to appear under a pseudonym. It appeared in September 1961, published by Faber and Faber, under the name N. W. Clerk, and with the title *A Grief Observed*. It sold modestly. Very few people knew who had written it.

After Lewis's death the book was reissued under his own name, and it has since been read by millions of grieving people. Many have said that it was the only book they could bear to read after a death. It has helped them, they say, not because it explains suffering, but because it does not pretend. It shows a Christian of great faith and great intelligence being knocked flat by grief and getting up again, slowly, without having had his questions answered. Readers who have lost someone have found that they are not alone.

The Book and the Man

It is sometimes said that *A Grief Observed* shows that Lewis lost his faith at the end of his life, or that it undoes the arguments of his earlier books. That is not how he saw it, and it is not what the book itself shows. In the notebooks he goes down into the dark and comes up again. In the months and years that followed he went on praying, going to church, making his Communion and writing about the Christian faith, and his letters of that time are full of a gentle, chastened confidence in God. What the book shows is that faith is not the same as being free from doubt and anguish. It is what remains, and what holds, when doubt and anguish have done their worst.

The Boys

Joy left behind two sons, and Lewis became their guardian. David was sixteen when his mother died, and Douglas fourteen. Both were at boarding school. Lewis, a bachelor of sixty-one who had spent his life among books and adults, now found himself the father of two teenage boys who had just lost their mother.

He did his best, and he did it with great kindness. He paid for their education, gave them a home at the Kilns in the holidays, and treated them with respect. Bill Gresham came to England that summer to see his sons, and Lewis received him courteously. Bill died in 1962.

David, the elder, was a difficult and unhappy young man. In his teens he decided to embrace the Judaism of his mother's family, and to live as an observant Jew. Lewis, who might have been expected to resist, supported him. He took advice from Jewish scholars in Oxford, helped to arrange for him to learn Hebrew and to keep the Jewish food laws, and made sure he could practise his faith as he wished. Douglas, the younger, was closer to Lewis and to Warnie. He loved the Kilns and its woods, and after Lewis's death he remained close to Warnie for the rest of Warnie's life. Many years later he came to a settled Christian faith of his own, and became a writer and a guardian of his stepfather's literary legacy.

Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?

The verse at the head of this chapter is the cry of Psalm 22, which Jesus took on his lips on the cross. It is the prayer of a man who feels abandoned by God, and it is in the Bible. Lewis did not need to be told that a Christian may pray such a prayer. He prayed it, in effect, in his notebooks in the summer of 1960. But Psalm 22 does not end in abandonment. It moves, in

its second half, to praise, to the assembly of God's people, and to the declaration that God has not hidden his face from the afflicted but has heard. Lewis's notebooks move in the same direction. He was not given an explanation. He was given, in time, the knowledge that he had been heard.

Going Hence

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."
— 2 Timothy 4:6-7, KJV

Failing Health

Lewis had always been physically strong. He had walked enormous distances, swum in all weathers and worked long hours for forty years. But after Joy's death his health began to fail. In the summer of 1961 he was found to have an enlarged prostate, and an operation was planned. Before it could be carried out, it was discovered that his kidneys and heart were affected, and the doctors decided that he was not strong enough for surgery. He was put on a strict low-protein diet, given a catheter, and told to rest. He missed the whole of the autumn term at Cambridge in 1961. Friends who saw him were shocked at how old and tired he looked.

He bore it patiently, and with humour. His letters of these years are full of his ailments, described with resignation and a certain dry comedy. He went back to Cambridge in 1962, and taught for another year. He went on writing: a short book on literary criticism, *An Experiment in Criticism*, appeared in 1961, and he was working on a book about prayer, in the form of letters to an imaginary friend, and on a book about the medieval picture

of the universe, drawn from his lectures. Both were published after his death.

Walter Hooper

In June 1963 a young American named Walter Hooper came to Oxford. He was a teacher from Kentucky, aged thirty-two, who had corresponded with Lewis for some years and was writing a study of his work. Lewis invited him to the Kilns and liked him at once. Warnie was away in Ireland, drinking again, and Lewis needed help with his letters. He asked Hooper to stay on as his secretary for a while, and Hooper agreed.

Hooper was with Lewis for only a few weeks, but they were crucial weeks, and they shaped the rest of Hooper's life. After Lewis's death he devoted himself for half a century to editing and publishing Lewis's writings, including the three volumes of letters on which every later biographer has depended. Some scholars have questioned aspects of his account of how close he was to Lewis, and of some of the material he published. But his labour preserved a great deal that might otherwise have been lost.

15 July 1963

On Monday 15 July 1963, Lewis was due to go into the Acland nursing home in Oxford for tests. Soon after he arrived, he had a heart attack and fell into a coma. The doctors did not expect him to live. The next afternoon, 16 July, he was given the last rites of the Church. About an hour later, to everyone's astonishment, he woke up and asked for a cup of tea.

For a week or two afterwards he was confused, suffering from hallucinations and lapses of memory, and he could not be left alone. Then

he slowly recovered his mind. When he was well enough to speak of it, he said, half seriously, that he had found the experience of nearly dying very gentle, and that he was almost sorry to have been sent back. He compared himself to Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead only to have to die again later. He did not dread death. He was simply tired.

Resignation

It was clear that Lewis could not go back to work. In August 1963 he resigned his professorship at Cambridge. Friends cleared his rooms at Magdalene and brought his books and papers back to the Kilns. Magdalene College elected him an honorary fellow. Hooper went home to America in September, intending to come back in the new year. Warnie came home from Ireland, and the two brothers settled down together at the Kilns, as they had begun, in the last weeks of Jack's life.

Those weeks were peaceful. Warnie later wrote of them with deep tenderness. The brothers read, talked, did crosswords, went for slow walks in the garden when Jack was strong enough, and remembered their childhood. Lewis answered his letters as long as he could. He knew that he was dying, and he was calm about it. He spoke of it to Warnie simply, without fear, and Warnie was struck by his brother's peace.

22 November 1963

Friday 22 November 1963 began quietly. Lewis was tired and drowsy. In the afternoon Warnie brought him tea in his bedroom. At about half past five Warnie heard a crash from the bedroom and ran in. His brother had fallen at the foot of his bed and was unconscious. Within a few minutes he

was dead. He was a week short of his sixty-fifth birthday. The cause of death was recorded as kidney failure and heart failure.

On the same day, about an hour later by English time, President John F. Kennedy was shot dead in Dallas. The English novelist Aldous Huxley died that day too, in California. The news from Dallas filled every newspaper in the world, and the death of an Oxford don in his bedroom was barely noticed.

The Funeral

Lewis was buried on the morning of Tuesday 26 November 1963 in the churchyard of Holy Trinity, Headington Quarry. It was a cold, still, sunny day, and there was frost on the ground. The vicar, Ronald Head, took the service. The congregation was small: friends, colleagues and neighbours. Tolkien was there, and Barfield, and Havard, and others of the old circle. Those who were there remembered a candle carried before the coffin from the church to the grave, burning steadily in the still air.

Warnie was not there. The shock of his brother's death had sent him back to drink, and he stayed in bed at the Kilns. It was a grief to him for the rest of his life that he had not stood at his brother's grave.

The grave was later marked with a plain stone, which Warnie chose. On it, under his brother's name and dates, he had cut the line from *King Lear* that had been on the calendar in their mother's bedroom on the day she died in 1908: "Men must endure their going hence."

The Good Fight

The verse at the head of this chapter is Paul's farewell, written in prison near the end of his life: I am ready to be offered, I have fought a good fight,

I have kept the faith. Lewis would not have claimed those words for himself. He was too aware of his failings, and he had too little patience with anyone who made him into a hero. But they are true of him, all the same. He had come to faith late and against his will, and once he had come, he had kept it, through fame and through humiliation, through a difficult household and a brief, bright marriage, through grief that almost broke him and illness that wore him out. When the time of his departure came, he was ready.

The Legacy of C. S. Lewis

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."
— Daniel 12:3, KJV

Warnie's Last Years

Warren Lewis outlived his brother by nine and a half years. They were lonely years. In time he left the Kilns, which under the terms of the original purchase passed to Maureen, and moved to a smaller house nearby in Headington, where a few loyal friends looked after him. He drank, at times heavily, and went back again and again to the nuns at Drogheda, who welcomed him as one of their own. He also did a great deal of useful work. He edited the first collection of his brother's letters, published in 1966, with a memoir that is still one of the best portraits of Jack. He went on keeping his diary, and in it he wrote, again and again, of how much he missed his brother.

He died on 9 April 1973, and was buried in the same grave as Jack, under the same stone, in the churchyard at Headington Quarry. The two brothers who had invented Boxen in the attic of Little Lea, who had crossed the Irish Sea together in the dark in 1908, and who had shared a house for thirty years, now share a grave.

The Books

When Lewis died, many people assumed that his books would fade. Fashions in religious writing change quickly, and his had been very much the voice of a particular time: of the war years, of the BBC, of an England that was passing. Some critics confidently predicted that he would be forgotten within a generation.

The opposite happened. In the decades after his death his books sold more than they had during his life, and they have never stopped selling. *Mere Christianity* became one of the most influential Christian books of the century, especially in America, where it has been cited by countless people as the book that led them to faith. *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Problem of Pain* remained steadily in print. *A Grief Observed*, reissued under his own name, found a new readership among the bereaved. *The Chronicles of Narnia* have been translated into many dozens of languages, adapted for radio, stage, television and film, and read by successive generations of children around the world.

His scholarly work, too, has lasted. *The Allegory of Love*, his study of Spenser and of the medieval picture of the universe are still read by students of English literature. At Oxford and Cambridge, and in universities across the world, he is now studied as a writer in his own right.

The Man Behind the Books

What kind of man was he? Those who knew him describe a big, ruddy, untidy man with a booming laugh and a prodigious memory, who could quote whole pages of poetry and loved long walks, beer, plain food and good conversation. He disliked fuss, modern gadgets, newspapers and talk about himself. He could be overbearing in argument and was sometimes

wounding in his wit. But he was also, by every account, generous to a fault, unfailingly kind to the weak and the troubled, faithful in his friendships, and humble about his own spiritual state.

He was not a saint in any stained-glass sense. He had real faults, and he knew them better than his admirers did. But the long story told in this book is the story of a man in whom God was steadily at work. The arrogant young atheist of the 1920s became, by the end of his life, a man who went to confession every week for twelve years, gave away most of his income, answered thousands of letters from strangers, nursed an old woman through her long decline, married a dying woman and loved her to the end, and faced his own death in peace. That transformation is perhaps the most convincing argument for Christianity that he ever offered.

Poets' Corner

On 22 November 2013, the fiftieth anniversary of his death, a memorial stone to C. S. Lewis was dedicated in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, among the memorials to Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and the other great writers of the English language. Its inscription, cut in a circle around his name like the rays of a sun, is a sentence from an address he gave to the Socratic Club in 1944, likening the Christian faith to the risen sun, by whose light everything else is seen.

It was a remarkable honour for a man who had been passed over for every professorship in his own university and whose Christian writing many of his colleagues had despised. It came half a century late. Lewis would probably have laughed.

Where He Must Be Weighed

Lewis was loved by evangelicals, and he still is. But he never called himself an evangelical, and on several points his views differed from those of most evangelical readers. He held a high view of Scripture as the Word of God, but not the doctrine of inerrancy. He believed in a purifying purgatory and prayed for the dead. He hoped that some who had never known the name of Christ might yet be saved by him. He made a weekly confession to a priest. These matters belong to his teaching, and they are weighed carefully in the companion volume, *Key Teachings of C. S. Lewis*. They are mentioned here only so that no reader mistakes this book's gratitude for an endorsement of everything he believed. Lewis himself would have wanted every claim tested by Scripture, and he would have wanted his readers to follow Christ, not him.

Shining as the Stars

The verse at the head of this chapter is from the book of Daniel: those who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever. No one can count how many people C. S. Lewis turned to righteousness. Some of them heard him on the radio in 1941. Some read *Mere Christianity* in a university library in 1970 or 2010. Some met Aslan as children and recognised him, years later, in the Gospels. Some found *A Grief Observed* on the worst night of their lives. Lewis never knew most of them. He would have said that it was not his doing, and he would have been right. But he was the instrument, and the star shines on.

Appendix A: Lessons from the Life of C. S. Lewis

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."
— Romans 15:4, KJV

The lessons below gather some of the themes of this book so that readers can return to them. They are not a method, and they are not a portrait of a perfect man. Lewis would have been embarrassed by any attempt to make him a model. They are lessons drawn from the way God dealt with him, and each rests on Scripture rather than on his example alone.

1. God Pursues Those Who Run

Lewis did not find God; he was found. Through years of argument and evasion, God kept closing every exit, until at last the most reluctant of converts knelt down. No one is beyond that pursuit. "I was found of them that sought me not" (Romans 10:20, KJV).

2. Old Wounds Can Be Brought Back to God

Lewis's unbelief had roots in a child's unanswered prayer and a mother's death. He did not pretend that the wound did not matter. In time he

brought it back to God, and it became the source of his tenderness to the grieving. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3, KJV).

3. A Promise Is Worth Keeping

At eighteen, Lewis promised a friend that he would care for his family if he died. He kept that promise for more than thirty years, at great cost, long after anyone would have blamed him for letting it go. "He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not" shall dwell in God's holy hill (Psalm 15:4, KJV).

4. The Mind Is Not the Enemy of Faith

Lewis was trained to argue by an atheist, and he never stopped arguing. He came to believe that honest thinking leads towards God, not away from him, and he spent his life giving reasons for his hope. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 1:18, KJV).

5. Friendship Is a Means of Grace

It was in conversation with friends, walking under the trees at Magdalen, that the last barrier to faith came down. For the rest of his life Lewis was sustained by a circle of Christian friends who loved the same things and told each other the truth. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Proverbs 27:17, KJV).

6. Belong to a Church

Lewis disliked hymns and was not by temperament a joiner. He went to church anyway, every week for thirty years, because he believed that a Christian must belong to the body of Christ. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Hebrews 10:25, KJV).

7. Confess Your Sins

Fame was a danger to Lewis's soul, and he knew it. Week after week for twelve years he confessed his sins to an old priest who was not impressed by him. Readers who do not share his practice may still share his humility. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, KJV).

8. Pray When Prayer Is Dry

Lewis prayed every day for decades, often without feeling anything, and he prayed by name for people he had never met. He had learned as a boy that feelings are a poor measure of prayer. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17, KJV).

9. Give Freely

Lewis put two-thirds of his royalties into a trust for the poor and gave away much of the rest. He lived simply and did not want to grow rich on the gospel. "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8, KJV).

10. Serve the Ones Who Write to You

Lewis answered thousands of letters from strangers, by hand, for more than twenty years. It was dull, exhausting and unseen work, and he did it as a duty to Christ. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40, KJV).

11. Take Criticism Honestly

When a young philosopher showed that one of his arguments was flawed, Lewis was hurt, but he went back to his desk and rewrote it. A Christian need not fear the truth, even when it is unwelcome. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Proverbs 27:6, KJV).

12. Love Late, and Love Fully

Lewis married a dying woman in a hospital room and loved her to the end. He did not hold back his heart for fear of losing her, though he knew that he would. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Song of Solomon 8:7, KJV).

13. Grief Is Not Unbelief

When Joy died, Lewis did not hide his anguish or his doubts. He wrote them down, and in the end he came through them. A Christian may cry out to God in the dark, as the psalmists and Christ himself did. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD" (Psalm 130:1, KJV).

14. Die Ready

Lewis faced his death calmly and without fear, having lived for thirty years in the faith he had once resisted. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21, KJV).

Appendix B: Chapter-by-Chapter Study and Reflection Guide

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."
— James 1:22, KJV

This guide is for personal reflection, small groups, or a reading course of about twenty weeks. Its purpose is not to make C. S. Lewis an object of admiration, but to let his life hold up a mirror in which readers can examine their own discipleship under Scripture. Groups may find it helpful to begin each session with the chapter's opening verse and to end with prayer. Those who want to go further are encouraged to read Lewis's own books, obtained from their publishers or a library, alongside these chapters.

Chapter 1 - Little Lea

Central idea

A bookish Belfast childhood, a close brother and a house full of books gave Lewis the materials of his imagination, and a longing he could not name.

Scriptures to revisit

Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Psalm 16:6.

Reflection

1. What did your childhood give you that God has since used? 2. Is there a longing in you that nothing on earth has satisfied?

Chapter 2 - August 1908

Central idea

A mother's death, a prayer that seemed unanswered, and a father lost in grief sent a nine-year-old into the world alone.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 27:10; Psalm 34:18; Isaiah 49:15.

Reflection

1. Is there an old disappointment with God you have never brought back to him? 2. Whom do you know who is grieving as a child?

Chapter 3 - Schools, and a Faith Let Go

Central idea

Anxious, feelings-centred prayer and a vague spirituality loosened a boy's faith; a cruel school culture taught him the misery of the inner ring.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 14:1; Matthew 6:7-8; James 4:6.

Reflection

1. Do you measure your prayers by your feelings? 2. Where are you tempted to seek the approval of the “right people”?

Chapter 4 - The Great Knock

Central idea

An atheist tutor sharpened the mind God would later use, and a book bought at a station touched an imagination that reason had not yet reached.

Scriptures to revisit

Proverbs 27:17; Isaiah 45:4-5; Philippians 4:8.

Reflection

1. Who has sharpened your thinking, whether believer or not? 2. What beauty has pointed you towards God before you understood it?

Chapter 5 - A Promise at Keble

Central idea

Two young soldiers made a pact to care for each other’s families, and one of them kept it for more than thirty years.

Scriptures to revisit

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5; Psalm 15:4; Matthew 5:37.

Reflection

1. What promises have you made that you are tempted to let slip? 2. What would it cost you to keep them?

Chapter 6 - 15 April 1918

Central idea

The war wounded Lewis, killed the sergeant beside him and took his friend, and he survived without knowing why.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 91; Psalm 31:15; Romans 8:28.

Reflection

1. When have you been spared something others were not? 2. How do you understand God's purposes in that?

Chapter 7 - Mrs Moore

Central idea

A young atheist took in a bereaved mother and her daughter and served them for three decades, in a household that was never easy and never fully explained.

Scriptures to revisit

James 1:27; Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 4:25.

Reflection

1. Is there anyone from whom you hide the truth of your life? 2. Whom has God given you to serve at home?

Chapter 8 - Three Firsts and a Fellowship

Central idea

Hard work and lean years made Lewis a scholar, and friendships with Barfield, Coghill and Tolkien began to unsettle his unbelief.

Scriptures to revisit

Colossians 3:23; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Proverbs 13:20.

Reflection

1. For whom do you do your work? 2. Which of your friends challenge you most?

Chapter 9 - Hunted

Central idea

God closed every exit; a father's death and a son's regret came before a reluctant surrender to belief in God.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 139:1-12; Jonah 1:1-3; Luke 15:17-20.

Reflection

1. Have you ever felt pursued by God? 2. Is there anyone you wronged who can no longer be put right, and have you brought that to God?

Chapter 10 - Addison's Walk

Central idea

A night conversation about myth, and a quiet ride in a sidecar, brought Lewis from belief in God to faith in Christ.

Scriptures to revisit

John 1:14; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Luke 24:13-32.

Reflection

1. How did you come to faith in Christ, not merely belief in God? 2. Whom has God used to remove barriers to faith for you?

Chapter 11 - The Kilns

Central idea

A strange household on the edge of Oxford, a faithful parish church and a first Christian book: the shape of a converted life.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 127:1; Hebrews 10:24-25; Acts 2:42.

Reflection

1. Do you belong to a local church, even when it does not suit your tastes?
2. Who is God building into your household?

Chapter 12 - Thursday Evenings

Central idea

The Inklings met to read their work and talk about the things of God, and Charles Williams's friendship and death marked Lewis deeply.

Scriptures to revisit

Malachi 3:16; Proverbs 18:24; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14.

Reflection

1. Do you have friends with whom you can speak of God honestly? 2. How might you be such a friend?

Chapter 13 - A Voice on the Wireless

Central idea

In war Lewis wrote of pain, invented a devil's letters, spoke on the BBC and learned humility talking to airmen.

Scriptures to revisit

1 Peter 3:15; Colossians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 9:22.

Reflection

1. Could you explain your faith plainly to a neighbour? 2. What would you need to drop to be understood?

Chapter 14 - A Rule of Life

Central idea

Confession, disciplined prayer, a trust for the poor and the daily burden of letters guarded Lewis against the dangers of fame.

Scriptures to revisit

James 5:16; Matthew 6:1-6; 2 Corinthians 9:7.

Reflection

1. Who knows the worst about you? 2. What is your rule of prayer and giving?

Chapter 15 - The Socratic Club

Central idea

Lewis welcomed the strongest objections to his faith, and when he was answered well he revised his work rather than abandoning it.

Scriptures to revisit

1 Thessalonians 5:21; Proverbs 18:17; Acts 17:11.

Reflection

1. How do you respond when an argument you trust is shown to be weak? 2. Are you afraid of hard questions?

Chapter 16 - The Long Decline

Central idea

An old woman's decline, a brother's drinking and professional slights tested Lewis's patience and nearly broke his health.

Scriptures to revisit

Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 Peter 5:6.

Reflection

1. Whose burden are you carrying, unseen? 2. How do you respond when others are honoured and you are passed over?

Chapter 17 - A Wardrobe and a Chair

Central idea

A scholar in his fifties wrote for children, and Cambridge gave him the recognition Oxford had withheld.

Scriptures to revisit

Matthew 18:3; Mark 10:14-15; Psalm 8:2.

Reflection

1. What would it mean for you to receive the kingdom as a child? 2. How do you speak of God to children?

Chapter 18 - Joy Davidman

Central idea

A former Communist from New York, converted in a night of helplessness, became Lewis's friend and, by a legal formality, his wife.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 71:5; Psalm 46:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Reflection

1. What brought you to the end of your own strength? 2. Whom has God brought into your life unexpectedly?

Chapter 19 - A Bedside Wedding

Central idea

Faced with Joy's cancer, Lewis discovered he loved her; a priest married them at her bedside and prayed for her healing.

Scriptures to revisit

James 5:14-15; Ruth 1:16-17; Colossians 1:24.

Reflection

1. Have you ever been willing to love at great cost? 2. How do you pray for the sick?

Chapter 20 - Three Years

Central idea

A late and unexpected happiness, a journey to Greece and the return of the cancer: a time to dance, and then a time to weep.

Scriptures to revisit

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Psalm 90:12; Song of Solomon 8:6-7.

Reflection

1. Are you receiving today's gifts as gifts? 2. How would you spend three years if you knew that was all you had?

Chapter 21 - A Grief Observed

Central idea

Lewis wrote his grief down without disguise, went down into the dark, and came up again with no answers but a renewed trust.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 22; Psalm 88; Lamentations 3:19-26.

Reflection

1. Have you allowed yourself to grieve honestly before God? 2. How can you sit with someone who is grieving without pretending?

Chapter 22 - Going Hence

Central idea

Illness, a coma, resignation and a quiet death at home, with a brother who loved him and a faith that held.

Scriptures to revisit

2 Timothy 4:6-8; John 11:25-26; Philippians 1:21-23.

Reflection

1. How do you think about your own death? 2. What would you want to have kept?

Chapter 23 - The Legacy of C. S. Lewis

Central idea

His books, his transformed character and a memorial in Westminster Abbey, together with the places where his teaching must be weighed.

Scriptures to revisit

Daniel 12:3; 1 Corinthians 3:5-7; Hebrews 13:7.

Reflection

1. Whose faith have you been asked to follow, and how do you test it? 2. To whom might God use you to point the way?

Appendix C: Chronology of the Life and Times of C. S. Lewis

> *"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."*
> *— Psalm 90:12, KJV*

The dates below are meant as orientation. Where the sources disagree, the disagreement is noted.

1895 - Warren

Warren Hamilton Lewis is born in Belfast on 16 June, the elder son of Albert James Lewis, a solicitor, and Florence (Flora) Hamilton Lewis.

1898 - Jack

Clive Staples Lewis is born on 29 November at Dundela Villas, Strandtown, Belfast. As a small boy he takes the name Jacksie, later Jack.

1905 - Little Lea

In April the family moves to Little Lea, a new house on the Circular Road, Strandtown. Warnie goes to Wynyard School, Watford.

1908 - His Mother's Death

Flora Lewis dies of cancer on 23 August. In September Jack is sent to Wynyard School with Warnie.

1910-1913 - Schools

Wynyard closes in 1910. Jack spends a term at Campbell College, Belfast, then from January 1911 attends Cherbourg House, Malvern, where he abandons the Christian faith.

1913-1914 - Malvern College

Jack attends Malvern College from September 1913 to the summer of 1914. In April 1914 he meets Arthur Greeves.

1914-1917 - Great Bookham

From September 1914 Jack is tutored by William T. Kirkpatrick at Great Bookham, Surrey. He is confirmed at St Mark's, Dundela, in December 1914, without belief.

1916 - Phantastes

In March he buys George MacDonald's *Phantastes* at Leatherhead station. In December he wins a scholarship to University College, Oxford.

1917 - Oxford and the Army

He comes up to University College in April. In June he joins a cadet battalion at Keble College and shares a room with Paddy Moore.

Commissioned in the Somerset Light Infantry in September, he reaches the front line in France on his nineteenth birthday, 29 November.

1918 - Wounded

Paddy Moore is posted missing in late March and later confirmed killed. On 15 April Lewis is wounded at Mont-Bernenchon, and Sergeant Harry Ayres is killed beside him. He convalesces in England and is demobilised in December.

1919 - Return to Oxford

Lewis resumes his studies in January. Mrs Moore and Maureen settle in Oxford. *Spirits in Bondage* is published in March under the name Clive Hamilton.

1920-1923 - Three Firsts

First Class in Honour Moderations (1920), Literae Humaniores (1922) and English (1923).

1925 - Magdalen

In May Lewis is elected a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as tutor in English.

1926 - Tolkien

On 11 May Lewis meets J. R. R. Tolkien at a meeting of the English faculty at Merton College.

1929 - His Father's Death

Albert Lewis dies in Belfast on 25 September.

1929 or 1930 - Theism

Lewis kneels and acknowledges God in his rooms at Magdalen. He dates it to the summer term of 1929; Alister McGrath has argued, and most scholars now accept, that it was the summer term of 1930.

1930 - The Kilns

On 10 October Lewis, Mrs Moore and Maureen move into the Kilns, Headington Quarry.

1931 - Faith in Christ

On 19 September Lewis talks through the night with Tolkien and Hugo Dyson on Addison's Walk. On 28 September, on the way to Whipsnade Zoo, he comes to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. On Christmas Day he takes Communion at Holy Trinity, Headington Quarry.

1932-1933 - The Pilgrim's Regress

Warnie retires from the army in December 1932 and makes his home at the Kilns. *The Pilgrim's Regress* is published in 1933.

1936-1938 - Scholar and Novelist

The Allegory of Love (1936). Friendship with Charles Williams begins. *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938).

1939 - War

Evacuee children come to the Kilns. Charles Williams moves to Oxford with the Oxford University Press.

1940 - Pain and Confession

The Problem of Pain is published in October. In the same month Lewis begins weekly confession with Father Walter Adams of the Society of St John the Evangelist.

1941 - Screwtape and the BBC

The Screwtape Letters appear weekly in *The Guardian* from May to November. Lewis begins speaking to the RAF. His first BBC talk is broadcast on 6 August. He preaches *The Weight of Glory* on 8 June.

1942 - The Socratic Club

The Socratic Club holds its first meeting in January, with Lewis as president. *The Screwtape Letters* is published as a book in February. Around this time the Agape Fund is set up.

1943-1945 - The War Years

The Abolition of Man (1943), *Perelandra* (1943), the last of the broadcast talks (1944), *That Hideous Strength* and *The Great Divorce* (1945). Charles Williams dies on 15 May 1945.

1947 - Miracles

Miracles is published. Lewis appears on the cover of *Time* in September. Warnie is treated at Drogheda.

1948 - Anscombe

On 2 February Elizabeth Anscombe reads her criticism of *Miracles* to the Socratic Club. Lewis later revises the chapter for the 1960 edition.

1949 - Exhaustion

In June Lewis collapses and is treated in the Acland nursing home.

1950 - Narnia

In January Joy Davidman first writes to Lewis. In April Mrs Moore enters Restholme nursing home. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is published in October.

1951 - Mrs Moore's Death

Janie Moore dies on 12 January and is buried at Holy Trinity, Headington Quarry.

1952 - Meeting Joy

Mere Christianity is published. Father Walter Adams dies. On 24 September Lewis meets Joy Davidman at the Eastgate Hotel, Oxford.

1954-1955 - Cambridge

Lewis accepts the new chair of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge, gives his inaugural lecture on 29 November 1954, and takes up residence at Magdalene College in January 1955. *Surprised by Joy* is published in 1955.

1956 - Marriage and Cancer

The Last Battle, the seventh Narnia book, and *Till We Have Faces* are published. On 23 April Lewis and Joy marry in a civil ceremony at the Oxford register office. On 18 October Joy's femur breaks and cancer is diagnosed.

1957 - The Bedside Wedding

On 21 March Peter Bide marries Lewis and Joy in her hospital room and prays for her healing. Joy goes home to the Kilns and her cancer goes into remission. Lewis develops osteoporosis.

1958-1959 - Three Years

Reflections on the Psalms (1958). A honeymoon in Ireland (1958). In October 1959 Joy's cancer returns.

1960 - Greece and Joy's Death

The Four Loves is published. From 3 to 14 April Lewis and Joy tour Greece with Roger and June Lancelyn Green. Joy dies at the Radcliffe Infirmary on 13 July. Lewis becomes guardian of David and Douglas Gresham.

1961 - A Grief Observed

A Grief Observed is published in September under the name N. W. Clerk. Lewis falls seriously ill and misses the autumn term.

1963 - Going Hence

On 15 July Lewis suffers a heart attack and falls into a coma; he receives the last rites on 16 July and wakes. He resigns his Cambridge chair in August. He dies at the Kilns on 22 November, a week before his sixty-fifth birthday, and is buried at Holy Trinity, Headington Quarry, on 26 November.

1964 - Posthumous Books

Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer and *The Discarded Image* are published.

1973 - Warnie

Warren Lewis dies on 9 April and is buried in his brother's grave.

2013 - Poets' Corner

On 22 November, the fiftieth anniversary of his death, a memorial to C. S. Lewis is dedicated in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey.

Appendix D: Notes on Sources and Method

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."
— 1 Thessalonians 5:21, KJV

About This Work

This book is an independent biography written by Ochorus. It is not published by, affiliated with, or endorsed by the C. S. Lewis estate, or by any publisher, company or organisation that holds rights in the writings of C. S. Lewis. Lewis's books, letters and other writings remain in copyright, and they should be obtained from their publishers or borrowed from a library. Readers are warmly encouraged to do so.

The book tells his life in its own words. It quotes Lewis directly only three times, each in a single short sentence from a published book:

Surprised by Joy (1955), chapter 14. His description of himself, on the night he acknowledged God, as "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."

Surprised by Joy (1955), chapter 15. His account of the ride to Whipsnade: "When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did."

A Grief Observed (1961), opening sentence. "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear."

Everything else attributed to Lewis, whether from his books, his letters or the memories of others, is paraphrased. The only other words quoted are those of Scripture and one line of Shakespeare, from *King Lear*, which is in the public domain. No letter, poem or story of Lewis's is reproduced, and the plots of his stories are mentioned only in a sentence where the life requires it.

Primary Sources

Lewis's own account of his early life is *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (1955). His diary for 1922 to 1927 was published as *All My Road Before Me* (1991). His letters were collected and edited by Walter Hooper as *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* (three volumes, 2000 to 2006), and his letters to Arthur Greeves had earlier appeared as *They Stand Together* (1979). Warren Lewis's memoir of his brother was printed in *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (1966), and a selection from his diaries was published as *Brothers and Friends* (1982). Joy Davidman's letters were collected in *Out of My Bone* (2009). Her account of her conversion appeared in the collection *These Found the Way* (1951).

Biographies and Studies

This book is particularly indebted to the following, which readers who want to go further will find rewarding:

Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (1974; revised 2002). The first full life, written by two friends.

George Sayer, *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times* (1988; revised 1994). The portrait of a former pupil and close friend.

Alan Jacobs, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (2005). A sympathetic study of the man and his imagination.

Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (2013). A biography based on a fresh reading of the letters, which revised the date of his conversion to theism.

Philip and Carol Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings* (2015). Lewis among Tolkien, Barfield and Williams.

Also consulted: A. N. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (1990); Lyle W. Dorsett, *And God Came In* (1983) and Abigail Santamaria, *Joy: Poet, Seeker, and the Woman Who Captivated C. S. Lewis* (2015), on Joy Davidman; Douglas Gresham, *Lenten Lands* (1988), a stepson's memoir; and Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (1978).

Corrections and Disputed Points

The date of his conversion to theism. Lewis gave the summer term of 1929. This book follows McGrath and most later scholars in preferring the summer of 1930, which places it after his father's death, while noting that some still defend 1929.

The ride to Whipsnade. Most accounts date it to 28 September 1931, nine days after the night on Addison's Walk. A few give an earlier date in the same month.

Janie Moore. Whether Lewis and Mrs Moore were lovers in the early years is disputed. Wilson and McGrath think it likely, and Sayer came to think so; Hooper and others denied it. Lewis never explained the relationship, and no document settles it. This book does not claim to know.

The Anscombe debate. The story that Lewis was so humiliated by Elizabeth Anscombe in 1948 that he gave up apologetics is not supported

by the evidence. He revised the chapter she criticised and went on writing Christian books of many kinds; Anscombe herself rejected the legend.

The marriage. Films and plays, especially *Shadowlands*, have changed the ages of Joy's sons, left one of them out, and invented scenes. The account here follows the letters, Warnie's diaries and the biographies.

Quotations attributed to Lewis. Many sayings circulated under his name are not his. Readers who wish to quote him should check the words against his own books.

The Library He Loved

Lewis believed that every reader should go back to the old books, and many of the writers who shaped his faith are in the public domain and in the Ochorus library. Athanasius's *On the Incarnation* was a book he loved and commended to others. Augustine's *Confessions* is the great ancestor of every story of a reluctant convert, including his own. John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* gave him the pattern for his first Christian book. Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* was among the devotional books he read for years. And William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* was a book he valued for its searching seriousness. All of these can be read freely on Ochorus, alongside the companion volume *Key Teachings of C. S. Lewis*.

Scripture

All Scripture quotations are from the Authorised (King James) Version, which is in the public domain.

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