

The Life of C.S. Lewis

This summary is indebted to many biographies of Lewis, but especially to George Sayer's *Jack* (2nd edition, Crossway, 1994).

I. His Parents

Albert was a successful lawyer in Belfast. Had been taught by W.T. Kirkpatrick. Albert was a practiced political speaker, author of some poems and short stories. Flora Hamilton was daughter of the vicar of Saint Mark's, Albert Lewis's local church in the Belfast suburb of Dundela. They were married August 29, 1894 at St. Mark's Church, Dundela.

II. Early Years (1898-1917)

Born Clive Staples Lewis, November 29, 1898, in Belfast, Ireland, Warren having been born on June 16, 1895.

Beatrix Potter published *Squirrel Nutkin*. The family always had animals. Jack acquired a lifelong love of them.

They moved to Little Lea on 21 April 1905, a home which Albert had had built.

Warren, at age 10, was sent to Wynyard School, Watford, Hertfordshire, England, for four years.

Jack began to make up stories before he could write, with his father acting as amanuensis.

Jack was well read by the age of 8. Read many books about animals, formed his idea of what children's stories should be like. At 10 he had acquired the habit of writing.

Flora died of cancer August 23, 1908. That same year Jack was sent to Wynyard with Warren. Jack left Wynyard when it closed in July 1910, for lack of pupils.

Jack acquired a love of the science fiction novels of H.G. Wells and other space-travel books at Wynyard.

His father sent Jack to Malvern to attend a prep school called Cherbourg (January 1911 to June 1913).

Warren entered the army at Sandhurst.

Jack stayed an extra year at Cherbourg to take the entrance scholarship examination. Won a second-rank scholarship based on an excellent English essay. At **Cherbourg** the discovery of German composer Richard Wagner. Norse mythology.

Spent a year at **Malvern College** (September 1913 to July 1914).

Lost his religious faith and regarded himself as **an atheist**.

Discovered W.B. Yeats. Smugly, or Harry Wakelyn Smith, was an instructor at Malvern whom Jack very much liked.

On September 9, 1914, Jack went to study with Kirkpatrick at Great Bookham in Surrey. Spent 2 ½ years there.

William T. Kirkpatrick (1848-1921), a rationalist, a logician, an atheist.

Arthur Greeves (1895-1968) a close friend. A romantic.

George MacDonald (1824-1905) most influenced Jack in his journey toward Christianity. In March 1916, he read his book *Phantastes* and called it "a great literary experience."

Read Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Milton, Keats, Shelley, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Chaucer.

On December 19, 1916, Albert received a letter, which said that **University College** had awarded him the second of their three open scholarships for classics.

He took Responsions on March 20 and 21, 1917. He received a letter from the college saying he could come up on April 26 for the start of the summer term.

III. Oxford

Arrived at University College, Oxford, April 26, 1917.

Met "**Paddy**" **Moore** (1898-1918), roommate, who, with his mother and sister, was to have a great influence on him.

Jack second lieutenant, the Third Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry. He was in the front line trenches on his **19th birthday**. Injured by shrapnel. He returned to Oxford in January, in time for the Lent term of 1919.

As a soldier who had served for more than six months, Jack was **excused from Responsions**. Published his first book during his first year at Oxford, *Spirits in Bondage*. The book was reviewed highly, but it was not received well by the public. Jack abandoned the thought of becoming a lyric poet.

IV. Mrs. Moore and Oxford

He lived with **Mrs. Moore** ("Minto") and daughter Maureen for 11 years in rented houses. They bought the Kilns in 1930.

Feelings towards his father were not good. But Albert agreed to support Jack for three years beyond graduation, knowing that teaching would best be Jack's life's work. So Jack was able to try for various fellowships and lecturing appointments. **Greats in June 1922. The exam for Greats lasted 6 days; he wrote two three-hour papers each day.**

Jack didn't get a fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford, so he decided to take a degree in English Language and Literature in one year. He was awarded a first-class honors degree. He now had **3 first-class honors**—in **Honour Mods, Greats, and English Language and Literature**—and two degrees.

V. Poverty

Jack was now in poverty. Had about £85 a year (about \$1,700) that his father paid him. In May 1924, he was offered a full-time job at Oxford for one year. The philosophy tutor at University College was to spend a year at the U of Michigan. Jack would replace him and earn £200 for the year (ca. \$4,000). Jack accepted. Jack applied for all fellowships in philosophy and English at any Oxford college. The very last one was to teach English at Magdalen College. And so he became an Oxford don. Telegram to his father on May 20: “**Elected fellow Magdalen. Jack.**” The appointment initially for 5 years from June 25, 1925. Started at £500. This ended his poverty.

VI. Fellow and Tutor

Jack spent 29 years at Oxford, a university with about 30 colleges. He began work at **Magdalen College** in October 1925. Magdalen is probably the loveliest of the 30. “The center of the college looks today much as it did at the time of its construction in the second half of the fifteenth century.”

During the term—one evening he had a class in Anglo-Saxon, another he would read a play with undergraduates, and on another he would join J.R.R. Tolkien and others in a meeting of **the Coalbiters** to read the Sagas and Eddas in Old Norse. Prepared lectures, read for tutorials and for pleasure, wrote the draft of **his first great academic work**, *The Allegory of Love*.

VII. Dymmer

In 1926 his long poem *Dymmer* was published. It was “the story of a man who, on some mysterious beast, begets a monster, which monster, as soon as it has killed its father, becomes a god.” Dymmer rebels against authoritarianism. Dymmer kills a lecturer and feels no guilt. Nature is not evil.

He searches for a mysterious bride. Dymmer must grow up, overcome his fault, and accept his destiny before he is ready for her. A story of sexual temptation. Dymmer finds a place with a belfry and a graveyard. Has the experience of a spiritual ascent. Must face and fight the monster. He does, is quickly crushed and killed, but his courage sets off a process of cosmic rebirth—plants blossom, the country is clothed with flowers. He becomes a god.

Was published under the pseudonym Clive Hamilton on Sept. 20, 1926. Reviewed well. But it failed.

VIII. The Pilgrim’s Regress (1926-1931)

Jack’s conversion to Christianity occurred over several years—from 1926 to 1931. Atheism to Realism to Idealism to Theism (1929) to Christianity (Sept. 22, 1931).

Phantastes mentioned earlier, 1916. “By 1926 he was a practicing theist who had no belief in the gospel story or in the doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Sayer, 222). T.D. Weldon, tutor and lecturer at Magdalen College, a cynic, once remarked that there was good evidence supporting the historicity of the Gospels. The effect on Jack was shattering. Jack reread the Gospels.

In 1929 he began to attend Sunday services regularly at his parish church or the college chapel. **In the Trinity term of 1929, he wrote, “I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed; perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”**

Albert died of cancer on September 24, 1929.

A conversation on Sept. 19, 1931 with J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson. Tolkien said that myths originate in God and that they preserve something of God’s truth, although often in distorted form.

Later, for Lewis, Christianity is a myth, but one that is also fact, ‘perfect myth and perfect fact.’ “Lewis derives fantasy from myth, and, as we have seen, he sees myth as appealing directly to our imaginations, and releasing powerful feelings which cannot necessarily be expressed intellectually.”

Dyson stated that Christianity works for the believer . . . peace, freedom from sins.

Jack wrote to Arthur Greeves, “I have just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ . . . My long night talk with Dyson and Tolkien had a great deal to do with it.” **The conversion occurred on Sept. 22, 1931**, while Jack was sitting in the sidecar of Warren’s motorcycle en route to the zoo.

In December he told the vicar of his parish church in Headington Quarry and Adam Fox, Magdalen’s Dean of Divinity, that he wanted to become a practicing Christian. Received communion for the first time since boyhood on Christmas Day at the church in Headington. Warren, in Shanghai, received communion on that same Christmas Day in 1931.

Wrote *The Pilgrim’s Regress* in two weeks during August 1932. A witty allegory based on the work of Bunyan. Published in May 1933. Sold poorly. It showed his ability to demolish opposition, especially liberal theology. Sheed and Ward, the Roman Catholic publishing house, had Dent print an additional 1,500 copies for them, and Sheed issued this second edition in 1935. Sheed and Ward reissued the book in 1944.

Jack’s search was over, so he had a strong platform on which to stand. “Almost from the year of his conversion, he wanted to become an evangelist for the Christian faith.” Would have to learn to write simply. He always wrote as a layman to laymen. Was a supremely confident writer, also a fighter.

IX. The Kilns

When Warren returned to England in April **1930**, he and Jack went through their father's belongings at Little Lea. Warren later collected family letters in eleven volumes named *The Lewis Papers*. They used the money from the sale of the house to buy a house. **In July they purchased the Kilns**, a house in Headington Quarry, 3 miles from Oxford.

Until 1939, the household had Mrs. Moore, Maureen, Jack, Warren, Fred Paxford (their handyman and gardener), one or two maids, and some dogs and cats. Fred Paxford probably provided the model for Puddleglum in *The Silver Chair*.

His early research resulted in a series of lectures on medieval thought and the first of his two great works of literary history and criticism, *The Allegory of Love*. *The Allegory of Love* made Oxford scholars realize that Lewis was a great literary critic. Published on May 21, 1936. It dealt with the origins of courtly or romantic love, contained a summary of the attitudes of the church fathers on sex and passion. On Spenser, Lewis writes, "In the history of sentiment his is the greatest among the founders of that romantic conception of marriage which is the basis of all our love literature from Shakespeare to Meredith." Studied Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Almost all later writers on Spenser make use of *The Allegory of Love*. It remains the number one book on the subject. That and his *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* show Jack's greatness as a literary historian. "Thanks very largely to Lewis, Spenser is now once more regarded as one of the greatest English poets, having sunk into almost total obscurity before *The Allegory of Love* was written."

The next year Warren was in Shanghai in command of the Royal Army Service Corps depot. Retired in 1932.

X. The Inklings (cf. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings*)

"For years no regular event delighted Jack more than the **Thursday evening meetings** of the little group of friends called the Inklings. Members met in each other's rooms to read aloud their poems and other work."

First member was J.R.R. **Tolkien**, elected Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in 1925. Tolkien was Roman Catholic. Invented languages and peoples for *The Silmarillion*.

This was the beginning of one of the most important literary friendships of the twentieth century. The duo became a trio in 1933 with **Warren**. In 1934 **Hugo Dyson** and **Dr. Robert E. Havard** made it a group. Dr. Havard was Jack and Warren's doctor beginning in 1934. Havard encouraged Jack in the writing of the Narnia stories. **Nevill Coghill** and **Charles Wrenn** sometimes came to the group, as did **Owen Barfield** and other friends of Jack who happened to be in Oxford on Thursday evenings. **Charles Williams** joined. Membership required the group's general agreement.

Jack wrote his first **space-travel novel** in 1937—*Out of the Silent Planet*. Favorable reviews did not help *Out of the Silent Planet* until a few years later, when Jack became famous through *The Screwtape Letters* and his broadcast talks. *Out of the Silent Planet* is now established on both sides of the Atlantic as a modern classic, used in high school and college classes. The scientific hope of conquering death was a real rival to Christianity, so *Out of the Silent Planet*.

"The Second World War broke out within a few months of the publication of *Rehabilitations* and *The Personal Heresy*. Jack was then a man of forty. He had published seven books, of which only two were moderately successful. No one could have guessed that within a few years his would become a household name."

XI. World War II

He decided to join the **Oxford City Home Guard Battalion**. 3 hours every Saturday morning at 1:30 a.m. **Jack and Mrs. Moore put their house at the disposal of children evacuated from London** and other cities because of German bombing. This helped Jack learn about children and enjoy them, thus opening the way for the Narnia books. "Lewis once remarked that he did not enjoy the company of small children." Unusual for him to write for children, since he had no children, no nephews or nieces, and no children around.

He wrote *The Problem of Pain* during the first autumn and winter of the war. Published in October 1940. A best seller from the start. To this day, one of his most popular books.

The Screwtape Letters. In February 1941, after all thirty-one letters had been written, he sent them to *The Guardian*, a Church of England weekly. Gave to charity the money from the writing of religious books. The book came out in February 1942. Letters of appreciation poured in. Jack enlisted Warren to handle routine correspondence. After the publication of *Screwtape*, Jack became much more dependent upon Warren. First edition of 2,000 copies sold out before publication. Has sold at least two million copies worldwide.

XII. Preacher and Broadcaster

Dr. James Welch, director of religious broadcasting for **BBC**, asked Jack to help in the work of religious broadcasting. It came because of the success of *The Problem of Pain*, which he had written because someone at Geoffrey Bles had liked *The Pilgrim's Regress*. "Jack detested the radio, as later on he would detest television, but because he realized that through radio he would be able to reach people who would never think of reading his books, he accepted." **Welch engaged Jack for four fifteen-minute talks every Wednesday during August 1941.**

Entitled "Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe?" Rich voice, educated, earthy, and full of vitality. Jack received many letters about the series. Gave another talk to answer some of his listeners' questions, but more letters than ever arrived. He received much correspondence for the rest of his life.

BBC asked Jack to do **another series**, entitled “What Christians Believe.” The first two series were published under the title *Broadcast Talks*. Then asked to do a third series, entitled “Christian Behaviour.” Gave practical advice, such as on mood changes. Gave seven talks in this final series, broadcast in February, March, and April 1944.

“The final series was published in *Beyond Personality*, and **all the talks were later published together in a single volume entitled *Mere Christianity***.” These talks did a great deal for the war effort without meaning to. The term came from the 17th-century Christian writer, **Richard Baxter**, and it means the basic form and beliefs of Christianity that all traditions and denominations accept. In it and in other writings, “he attacks the spirit of the times as ‘temporal provincialism’—the contradiction of our age that says truth is all relative, and yet our relativism is absolutely right.”

“From January 1942, his Monday evenings were devoted to meetings of **the Oxford Socratic Club**, of which he was president and for which he was responsible to the university.” It arose because of a student who complained that there was no one with whom to discuss the sort of doubts and difficulties agnostics raise about God. It became the second largest society of the university and attracted some of the best and best-known speakers in the country, including Charles William and Dorothy Sayers.

Jack’s policy of counterattack used at the Socratic Club and at dinner and in the Senior Common Room afterward, made him many enemies. Harry Weldon, a philosophy professor, and others felt that a man’s belief was a private affair and not to be written about. Opposed the writing of *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, which satirized some philosophies and divisions of the Christian church. Negative anti-Christian machinations of some colleagues developed into an obsession that led to the publication of *That Hideous Strength*.

After Jack accepted a position at Cambridge in 1954, membership declined until it was disbanded in the summer of 1972.

XIII. Writing

Between 1942 and 1946 C.S. Lewis published *A Preface to Paradise Lost, That Hideous Strength, Beyond Personality, The Abolition of Man, Perelandra, and The Great Divorce*. He also wrote a draft of *Miracles* and contributed articles to such publications as *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, and *Time and Tide*. He wrote letters to the editors of *Theology*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Listener*, other papers and individuals.

Most influenced by Tolkien and **Charles Williams**. Since 1908, Charles Williams had worked at **Oxford University Press**, for sixteen years as a proofreader, and then as an editor. He was as fluent and industrious as Jack; he wrote poetry, plays, novels, biographies, and literary criticism, but only his novels achieved even modest success.” His finest book, *All Hallow’s Eve*. He died in May 1945. A real blow to C.S. Lewis. Dedicated *A Preface to Paradise Lost* to Williams, a book that eventually caused a revolution in the teaching and interpretation of Milton. Williams influenced Jack most deeply in *That Hideous Strength*, which deals with the evil in the psyche.

Jack wrote *Perelandra*. The story is very much like Genesis or *Paradise Lost*. Probably based on his studies for lectures on *Paradise Lost* between 1939 and 1941. The book describes a beautiful, Edenic world and an unfallen woman who faces temptations subtler (but the same basic ones: pride, questioning God’s decree, rebellion against hierarchy, and vanity) than those of Milton’s Eve. She is contrasted with an evil tempter.

At the Socratic Club, Jack often fought two erroneous views: (1) that there was no objective morality, and (2) that Christianity was fundamentally a moral or ethical system. Fought the latter by saying that Christian ethics were far from unusual and were common to most religions and civilized people.

***The Abolition of Man* was his most important pamphlet and the best existing defense of objective values and the natural law.** *That Hideous Strength* was the last of his space-travel novels. He wrote it out of the vision of the prospect of civilization dominated by scientists intent on conquering nature, which horrified him. It contains many of his likes and dislikes. Most critics panned it. The public did not. *That Hideous Strength* has been the most popular of his four novels.

Began to write ***The Great Divorce***, a story of a dream vision of Heaven in which the narrator meets several people who are on holiday from Hell. “Perhaps the most profound and nearly perfect of all his works.” In it, he writes, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, ‘thy will be done.’” *The Great Divorce* is Jack’s tribute to his master, George MacDonald, who was actually a Universalist, or nearly so.

Miracles was published by Bles in 1947. The most philosophical of his books, one of the least successful, its main argument is suspect.

Socratic Club, February 2, 1948, **Elizabeth Anscombe** read a criticism of Jack’s argument that naturalism is self-refuting. Jack replied, debate followed, Jack thought he had lost. Years later Anscombe didn’t think she won. But Jack now humbled. Jack realized he had underrated the challenge of taking on the new Oxford philosophers, who were logical positivists, not the Hegelians of his youth. He never wrote another theological book or philosophical book of the sort as *Miracles*.

Evacuees of WWII had gone, leaving Mrs. Moore in broken health. She spent most of 1947 in her bedroom. Two maids in the house, but they quarreled with each other and sometimes with Mrs. Moore. Jack tried to keep peace. “Under these conditions, he began to write the best-known and most widely loved of all his books.”

XIV. Narnia

Idea came to him in September 1939, but did not complete his first, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, until nearly ten years later. **The evacuated children at the Kilns provided his original inspiration.** One showed interest in an old wardrobe, asking if she could go inside and if there were anything behind it.

As a child, Jack had read *The Aunt and Amabel*, by Edith Nesbitt, in which a magic world is entered through a wardrobe in a spare room. A pupil and friend, Roger Green, had written *The Wood That Time Forgot*, from which Jack took elements. Since age 16, Jack had had a picture in his mind of a faun carrying parcels and an umbrella in a snowy forest. Started putting the pieces together. Largely finished by end of Christmas vacation, 1948. Read it to Tolkien two months later. Tolkien thought it worthless.

Most who knew Jack were astonished that he had written a children's story. The publisher doubted that it would sell, feared it might damage his reputation and the sales of his other books. Advised that it be the first of a series of children's stories. Jack began a second story about the beginnings of Narnia and how the lamppost came to be standing at its edge. *Prince Caspian* was finished by the end of 1949. ***The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* was published in 1950**, in time for the Christmas gift market. One Narnia book was published each year until 1956. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* in two months by the end of February 1950; *The Horse and His Boy* by the end of July; *The Silver Chair*, finished by the beginning of March 1951; *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Last Battle* were written more slowly.

Most reviews were cautious, occasionally hostile. But **the children loved the stories**. Interpenetration of the natural by the supernatural runs throughout the whole series. Contains a hierarchical society, even though the children are thought of as rebellious.

The theological content of *The Magician's Nephew* is the story of creation, the temptation in Eden, and the fall. Other stories have death, judgment, hell, and heaven. Lewis didn't want people to notice the resemblance of Narnian theology to Christian theology. "His idea, as he once explained to me, was to make it easier for children to accept Christianity when they met it later in life. He hoped that they would be vaguely reminded of the somewhat similar stories that they had read and enjoyed years before. 'I am aiming at a sort of pre-baptism of the child's imagination.'"

Adults usually prefer the last two, *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Last Battle*, the latter receiving the Carnegie Medal, an English award for the best children's book of 1956. Children usually like *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. But all are bestsellers.

XV. Problems

Mrs. Moore's illness and Warren's alcoholism. Finances. Fires rarely lit. Jack rarely had a hot bath.

In 1944 Jack was engaged to write *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, one volume of *The Oxford History of English Literature*. Did much reading, not wanting to express an opinion over a book he had not read.

In it he crusaded against the humanist. Talked about the Puritans, Calvin, Tyndale, More, Richard Hooker, Gavin Douglas, William Dunbar, John Donne, Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, Shakespeare's poems. Has wit and humor on every page. Clarendon Press published it in the autumn of 1954. It outsells all the other volumes in the series.

In 1955, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* was published. Contains nothing about Mrs. Moore or the part that writing played in his childhood. The account of his misery at school takes up a third of the book.

His workload at Oxford was becoming excessive. "When a Merton professorship of modern English literature became available, Tolkien, who was a Merton Professor of English and, therefore, an elector, rallied to Jack's support, hoping to achieve what had been a prewar ambition, of having Jack and himself installed as the two Merton Professors."

Impossible for Jack to be elected. His former tutor, F.P. Wilson, was eventually elected to the professorship. The election for the Goldsmiths' Professor of English Literature was made soon afterward, going to Lord David Cecil.

Summer of 1949, an ambulance took Jack to the Acland Nursing Home. High temperature, delirium, headache, sore throat, and swollen glands.

In late April, **Mrs. Moore** was taken by ambulance to Restholme, a north Oxford rest and nursing home. Jack visited her almost every day. She **died of influenza on January 12, 1951**. Even before her death, Jack asked people to stay at the Kilns. After her death he began again to take regular walks and sometimes went swimming. His health improved immensely.

Professorship of poetry was to be filled. Jack was nominated, Cecil Day Lewis was promoted.

End of January, planning a spring holiday in Ireland with Arthur. He stayed at the seventeenth-century inn in Crawfordsburn, the village where Arthur had a cottage. The walks were his main activity on such trips. No sooner back than he was planning another. The following year he went for two summer trips in Ireland. Happy years. In 1954 and 1955 he was much bothered by ill health and by worry about Warren's drinking. On trips, if no Bible in his room, he asked for one and said his prayers in the evening. Regaled his hosts with brilliant talk. Read a lot. Enjoyed reading aloud in groups.

XVI. Joy

"The death of Mrs. Moore gave Jack the freedom to do many things. Not only could he go away for holidays, but it was also now possible for him to be on terms of close friendship with women, to marry, and to accept a professorship in another university."

The death of Mrs. Moore encouraged Joy to cross the Atlantic in September 1952, in the hopes of getting to know Jack. Born **Joy Davidman** in New York City in 1915, her parents were Jews from Eastern Europe, but both had lost their faith. She became an atheist at the age of 8 from reading Wells's *Outline of History*. Wrote poetry in her teens and enjoyed stories of the supernatural. Took her B.A. degree at Hunter College, New York, in 1934, M.A. in English literature at Columbia University at the

age of 20. Taught English in various New York high schools, joined the Communist Party, became an energetic party worker, and continued to write poetry.

In 1942 at a Communist Party meeting, she met William Lindsay Gresham. They married. Had David, born in 1944, and Douglas, born in 1945. Joy & William became disillusioned with communism. William left her. Later, in an article about her conversion, she wrote, "All my defenses—the walls of arrogance and cocksureness and self-love behind which I had hid from God—went down momentarily. **And God came in.**"

Bill eventually came home. The two began to study theology together. Began to attend the Presbyterian Church. For the rest of her life, Joy was a strong Christian. A friend, Chad Walsh, who had published *C.S. Lewis: Apostle of the Sceptics*, suggested Joy write to Lewis. Her first letter arrived at the Kilns in January 1950. She began to consider how she could visit Oxford without much expense and without making her main motive crudely obvious. She received an invitation to stay with a pen pal she acquired, Phyllis Williams, who lived in London.

Joy wanted advice from Jack about her marriage, wanted to discuss with Jack the book she was writing on the Ten Commandments. **He invited her and pen pal to lunch in his Magdalen College rooms.** Jack asked Joy to stay at the Kilns. Her ability to make him laugh was one thing he enjoyed about her. Another was her flow of sharp, almost outrageous comments. They did not meet again until December 6, 1952, in London.

At that meeting, he invited her to spend Christmas at the Kilns. She read some of his unpublished work, and he read the draft of her newest book, *Smoke on the Mountain*, told her how to improve it, and wrote an introduction that ensured its success. Just before she left, she received a letter from Bill, which suggested a divorce. By the end of February she came to agree with Bill that they should be **divorced** and she should have custody of the boys. Problem now was money. Returned to the U.S.

She returned to London and secured lodging for herself and the boys and a place at Dane Court, a prep school in Surrey. A charitable trust that Jack had set up probably paid for Dane Court. Jack invited the 3 to spend four days at the Kilns in the middle of December 1953. "Before they left, Jack gave the boys a typescript of *The Horse and His Boy* and told them that he was going to dedicate the printed version to them."

XVII. Cambridge

In 1954 Jack accepted a teaching position at Cambridge. He disliked the way in which the syllabus of the English School at Oxford seemed to be developing. Friends and admirers at Cambridge had learned of his dissatisfaction at Oxford, raised the matter at a meeting of the university English faculty. They created the professorship of medieval and Renaissance studies just for him.

Jack's friends at Cambridge suggested he reside at Cambridge during weekdays and weekends, including Monday mornings, and vacation at Oxford or wherever he wished. He moved to Cambridge in January of 1955. Gave **his inaugural lecture** as professor on November 29, 1954. A brilliant performance acknowledged by an ovation. Title: '*De Descriptione Temporum*' (On Describing the Times), alternatively titled "The Last of the Dinosaurs." Overstated the idea that little is left of an earlier age, the enjoyment of being an embattled minority, as Owen Barfield and J.A.W. Bennett suggest in *Light on C.S. Lewis*.

Jack was given rooms at Magdalene College, Cambridge, richly paneled but less spacious than his rooms at Magdalen College, Oxford. He liked the town of Cambridge, smaller, quieter, less industrial than Oxford. The fellows of his new college were more friendly and courteous, the atmosphere more relaxed. For the first time in his life, he had no ideas for books. Joy helped him kick around a few ideas.

XVIII. More Joy

Joy and the boys stayed at the Kilns in the summer and Christmas holidays of 1954. In 1955 the 3 moved into a three-bedroom, semidetached house at 10 Old High Street in Headington, not far from the Kilns. They were now meeting nearly every day that he was in Oxford. **During his holiday in Ireland, September 1955, Jack was considering whether to marry her in a civil ceremony, just to allow them to stay permanently in England.**

April 1956, Jack told Sayers that Joy's permit to live and work in England would not be renewed. Only way to stay was to marry an Englishman. He was not in love with her. When Jack met Sayers over the summer holidays, he told Sayers that the marriage had taken place. Jack was very kind to the boys, but he didn't enjoy their company.

In June 1956, Joy began to suffer from severe pains. Fell in her house, unable to get up. X-rays showed she had **cancer** of the left femur and a malignant tumor in her breast, right leg, and one shoulder. Underwent three operations. "Her illness intensified Jack's affection for her. From this time onward, he was certainly aware of loving her." Jack wrote to a friend, ". . . so she must come and live here . . . our marriage must shortly be published." Christmas Eve, 1956, *The Times* ran this notice:

A marriage has taken place between Professor C.S. Lewis of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and Mrs. Joy Gresham, now a patient in the Churchill Hospital, Oxford. It is requested that no letters be sent.

Jack now agreed that the marriage should be solemnized by an ecclesiastical ceremony. The Church of England would not allow marriage by a divorcee, so an old pupil of Jack's, **the Reverend Peter Bide did the wedding.** They enjoyed 3 years and 4 months of married life together. "It was the happiest period of their lives." Jack was found to be suffering from osteoporosis, a weakening of the bones by lack of calcium content.

In early April, Joy received a letter from Bill, who wanted the boys if she died. Jack then wrote two of the strongest letters he ever wrote. Bill relented. "Jack was sustained at this time by the marvelous improvement in Joy's health." Throughout 1958 Joy was well. She also made improvements in the house. Jack had been accustomed to living economically.

By the end of April, Jack's osteoporosis was improved, so he could walk a mile without tiring. That summer they flew on his first airplane flight to vacation in Ireland. Joy returned to the hospital in November of 1959 for a routine check. The cancer had returned. She carried on with life with much courage and cheerfulness.

They went on **an eleven-day holiday to Greece** during the Easter vacation of 1960. Jack enjoyed seeing places about which he had been reading for fifty years. Reappearance of cancer in her breast, breast surgery, she returned home from the hospital on May 2. She could only move about by means of a wheelchair. On June 20, she was taken to the Acland Nursing Home, vomiting, cancer now in her liver and gallbladder. Back to the Kilns on June 27. **The end came suddenly on July 13.** Died peacefully about 10:15 that same night. "Few marriages can have been more Christian."

"The books inspired by Joy are four, the novel *Till We Have Faces*, *The Four Loves*, *Reflections on the Psalms*, and *A Grief Observed*, the heart-rending little book that Joy never knew."

Till We Have Faces is based on the myth of Cupid and Psyche. Orual, queen of Glome, is ugly but passionate, unloved, longing to love and be loved. Jealous and possessive. The story is largely of her redemption. Released in September 1956 in England. The subject is love. Sometimes Jack thought it was his best novel, sometimes *Perelandra*. The two are two of the most profound novels of this century.

The Four Loves analyzes Affection, Friendship, Eros, and Charity, while *Till We Have Faces* depicts them in action. Originated with some tape recordings for broadcasting in the U.S. He chose the four loves as his topic, but did not finish the talks until the summer of 1958. Never broadcast widely, but 12 years later *Four Talks on Love*, an album by C.S. Lewis, was put on sale. Agreed that he could use the radio script as the basis for a book. *The Four Loves* was published in March 1960.

Reflections on the Psalms, published in autumn of 1958. Over 11,000 copies were sold before publication. Subsequently asked to join the committee of seven to revise the translation of the Psalms that appeared in the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer*. The complete version was published in 1963 as *The Revised Psalter*.

A Grief Observed is the most personal; it tells us most about his relationship with Joy. "To liberate himself, he did what he had done in the past—he wrote a book about it, a book that is very short and desperately truthful." Cathartic.

Lewis—"We must learn still to be taken out of ourselves though the bodily presence is withdrawn, to love the very Her" Sayers—"This mystical experience of knowing and loving the Her, the essence of Joy, was his on and off for the rest of his life. The book is so personal and intimate that it had to be published pseudonymously or anonymously. Few copies were sold until it was reissued under his own name in 1964 after his death.

For example, **"Go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence."**

Joy also directly inspired a handful of poems. Published a year after his death in a volume edited by Walter Hooper, entitled *Poems*. Some titles Hooper gave them: "Joys That Sting," "Old Poet Remembered," "As the Ruin Falls." *Christianity Today's* Thomas Howard called these three poems "the glorious best of Lewis."

XIX. Last Years

In the months after Joy's death, he wrote **one of his best books on literary criticism, *An Experiment in Criticism***. Was not well reviewed in 1961, the year it was published, but within five years it was referred to as "a now classic broadside." The most influential of Jack's critical books, also the least combative (He became notably gentler after Joy's death.)

June 1961 he experienced slight discomfort, a seriously enlarged prostate. Improvement in his condition came in January 1962 and seemed to continue until July 1963. Warren handled most of his correspondence during this time.

Jack seemed almost fully himself by the spring of 1963. Jack had permanently damaged his kidneys by sitting on a prostate two years before. July 16 he had a heart attack and went into a coma. Anointed with oil by the curate of the Church of Saint Mary Magdalen and immediately awoke from the coma.

Resigned his position early in August as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature and his fellowship at Magdalene College. Spent his last days rereading some of his favorites.

Died Nov. 22, 1963.