

in the political situation, for instance, it is clearly unlikely that a no-use commitment would be given, so as not to create temptation, destabilize the delicate military balance, and so on. And, as President Kennedy once put it, referring to the other and equally unlikely extreme, "In some circumstances we must be prepared to use the nuclear weapon at the start, come what may—a clear attack on Western Europe, for example."

As for the indeterminate zone in between these extremes, and this is where the search for broader "options" has been carried on, de-

cision makers have been manifestly reluctant to be pinned down to precise definition of the circumstances that would call for a nuclear decision. Although this has doubtless lent ambiguity to the nuclear response that might follow some forms of aggression, deterrence thus far has not failed, despite the existence of uncertainty, or perhaps even because of it. Recognizing the tendency of governments to resolve their choices in favor of what seems to be working, one may therefore suspect that there will be no official stampede to heed Professor Brodie's plea for less ambiguity. «»

A Chap in His Place

ANDREW M. GREELEY

LETTERS OF C. S. LEWIS, Edited, with a memoir, by W. H. Lewis. Harcourt, Brace & World. \$5.95.

For most Americans, Oxbridge is much like a British detective story: one can never really understand what is going on or what half the people are talking about, but the whole thing is great fun and rather charming in a quaint sort of way, so we don't really mind. Long ago we gave up trying to figure out the distinctions between tutors, fellows, lecturers, masters, and professors (and C. P. Snow only makes things more complicated), the various examinations, the incomprehensible grading system, differences among the "colleges" (and what is a "college" anyhow?), and the strange vacation system in which both students and faculty are expected to master huge reading lists while wandering about the countryside on foot. We assume that the British understand how it works and that is all that matters, though I for one do wish that they would have the courtesy to admit that our system is not without its own quaint charms. What indeed would C. S. Lewis have thought of Michigan State?

IT is into the world of Oxford and later Cambridge that his collected letters bring us, but I fear that anyone looking for the romantic charm of the Oxbridge novel or

the wit of Lewis's books will be disappointed in his letters. He had a hard, lonely life: "I wish life and death were not the only alternatives, for I don't like either; one could imagine a via media." His stern and aloof father would not visit him in the hospital after he was wounded in the war; his surrogate mother (actually the mother of a friend killed in the war) was a stupid domestic tyrant; he married late in life a woman who was already dying of cancer and his three years of marriage were lived in the shadow of death; and even though financial success came eventually, the early years of poverty left him quite incapable of spending money on himself (though he was quite capable of spending it generously on others). If one knew Lewis only from his letters (and from the dreadfully understated memoir written as an introduction by his brother), one would have suspected that this Oxford don could not possibly have risen above the drab, dreary environment in which he found himself. Brilliant, yes; erudite, yes; but one would have expected him to be narrow, precious, and a little less than human.

But he was, after all, the creator of that unbelievably charming devil Screwtape and the author of *The Pilgrim's Regress*, *Perelandra*, *The Great Divorce*, and a score of books

that betrayed a wit, a warmth, a humanity, a goodness that will not soon be forgotten. He had an immense number of friends, was hugely popular with his students, corresponded with all sorts of important people, and will easily be remembered as one of the great dons of his time. The real Lewis may not appear in his letters, but that does not greatly matter, because he does appear in his books and is preserved in the memories of those who knew him well.

The puzzle remains: How could this mildly tragic figure enjoy life so much? The answer seems to be that Lewis never thought of himself as tragic, not even as unhappy. He had his books, his students, his walking trips through the countryside, his rides in the sidecar of his brother's motorcycle, and his Thursday evenings with the "Inklings." Life certainly must have had its moments when you could expect to spend one night a week with Tolkien and Charles Williams. One would dearly like to have tape recordings of the conversation among the authors of *War in Heaven*, *Out of the Silent Planet*, and *Hobbit*.

BUT ABOVE ALL he had his faith; and his letters make it quite clear how important that faith was. To the readers of *The Problem of Pain*, the faith of the letters may seem rather simple and to the agiornamento-ized Roman Catholic it may seem rather naïve; but it was the faith he needed and, one suspects, the faith without which he could not have survived.

One wonders what Lewis would think of the current developments in Christianity—the renewal in the Church of Rome and the emergence of the secular theologians. He may have found it hard to stomach either—at least in their more extreme manifestations. But he probably would have commented much the same way that he did when he was told that an American schoolgirl had been expelled for having in her possession a copy of *Screwtape*:

"I asked my informant whether it was a Communist school or a Fundamentalist school or an RC school, and got the shattering answer, 'No, it was a select school.' That puts a chap in his place, doesn't it?"

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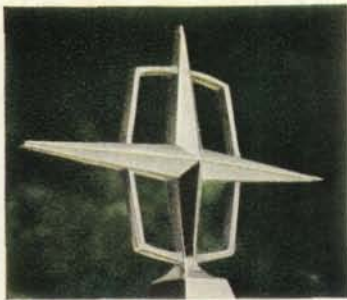
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