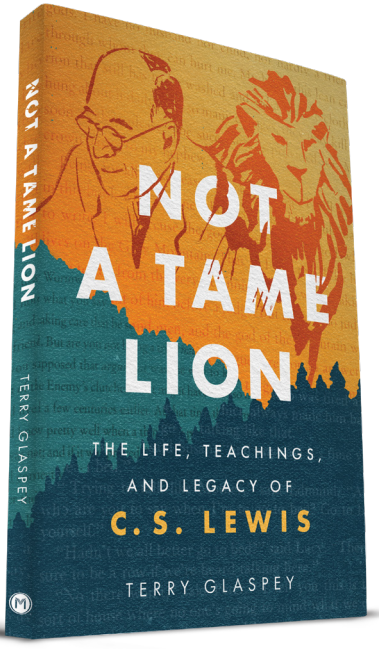

Lewis was an extraordinarily gifted man who believed that his sharp mind and rich imagination should be accompanied by a sense of responsibility to the wider world. If he were alive today, he'd see the trends he warned against. Lewis' life demonstrates the hope that endures, even in these shadowlands.

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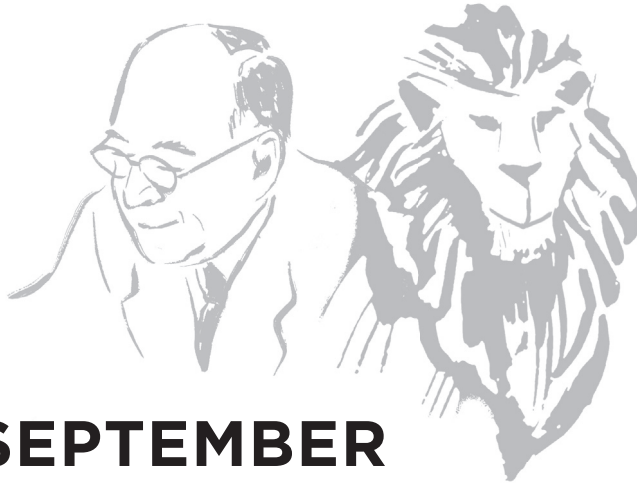
CONTENTS

PART TWO: C. S. LEWIS: HIS THOUGHT



SEPTEMBER 28, 1931

The morning was cold and a heavy fog hovered over the damp grass. It was causing some second thoughts at the Lewis home, just outside Oxford, about the planned trip to the Whipsnade Zoo, some forty miles away. C. S. Lewis (known to all his friends as "Jack") and his brother, Warren, were all for braving the elements, but their companions, Janie Moore and her daughter Maureen, hesitated. At last it was decided that the brothers would get a head start on Warren's motorcycle and the women would follow in the car. They planned to meet in the town of Whipsnade.

Warren mounted the motorcycle and Jack took his place in the low-slung sidecar. They fired up the cycle and disappeared into the thick mist, roaring into the cold morning air. Alone with his thoughts, Jack Lewis braced himself against the biting wind and considered the issue which had so dominated his thoughts lately: Who was Jesus Christ? Could he accept the claim that Christ was God incarnate?

Just beyond the small town of Thame, the fog lifted and the bright sunshine broke through the swirling mists. The air was crisp and fresh as the trees and towns zoomed past them.

Shortly before one o'clock they cruised into the town of Whipsnade and pulled off the road to await the arrival of the women. They spread themselves out on the grass and opened a bottle of dark English beer, which they shared.

They waited, growing anxious and hungry, because their lunch was in the car. Finally, at about 2:20, the car appeared, its passengers somewhat irritable and short-tempered. There had been problems with the car and their mechanic had overfilled the tires, making it impossible to drive any faster than 15 mph. Warren commiserated, saying that the same thing had happened to him recently. An abundant lunch, however, helped lift the level of stress and set a new tone for the day.

Everyone enjoyed themselves thoroughly, though Warren complained that the zoo was a bit of a disappointment, as it housed too few animals. The consensus was that the bears were most definitely the highlight of the day, especially a bulky brown bear which Jack christened "Bultitude." He wanted to adopt it and take it home to Headington, he jested with a wry smile. (In fact, he would later give this name to a large bear that played a key role in his science fiction novel *That Hideous Strength.*) When it came time for the zoo to close, everyone packed up and headed home in high spirits.

To all outward appearances, this was a very ordinary day, a day like any other. And yet it would be remembered as a most momentous day in the life of C. S. Lewis, for it was a day of decision. As he later wrote in his autobiography: "When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we

reached the zoo I did."[1] Lewis's conversion, the culmination of a lifelong journey toward the truth, would give new direction and purpose to his life, resulting in the writing of many books which had a profound influence both on his own time and on generations to follow. By his words and his life, Lewis demonstrated the power of a life touched by a deep intellectual commitment to the truth of the gospel, and of an imagination energized by the glory of the Christian vision of reality.

HERITAGE

Clive Staples Lewis was born on a wintry day in Belfast, Ireland, on November 29, 1898, the second child of Albert and Florence Lewis. His mother, Florence Hamilton, or "Flora" as she was known to intimates, was a highly intelligent woman. She had earned an honors degree in mathematics at Queens University in Belfast, an uncommon achievement for a woman at that time. The Hamilton family tree was made up of a string of clergymen. Flora's grandfather and great-grandfather had both been clergymen, the latter attaining the office of bishop. Her father, Thomas Hamilton, followed in their footsteps, becoming a vicar in the Church of Ireland. Thomas was a memorable personality, who combined a gift for eloquence with a pugnacious and uncompromising spirit. He was a man of deep piety, though far from an ascetic, for he dearly enjoyed his food and drink. His other great love was his daughter Flora, who was the dearest thing to his heart, and his desire was for her to make the best of marriages.

In 1894, after a long courtship by a very determined Albert Lewis, she finally consented to marry him. He had persistently pursued her and finally won her favor. Probably his skill as an

orator and a debater did much to help him win her hand. Albert's grandfather had been a Welsh farmer, while Richard Lewis, Albert's father, was a self-made man, rising by stages through his profession until he became a partner in an engineering and manufacturing firm. An avid writer of theological essays, Richard would often read them to his coworkers during the evening shift. Sometimes he would make up fantastical stories for the amusement of his children. Clearly, storytelling was in the Lewis blood.

Albert inherited a great deal of his father's drive and creativity, but seemed destined to fail to realize his full potential. Educated at Lurgan College under the brilliant young headmaster W. T. Kirkpatrick (who would later tutor his sons), he showed great promise and dreamed of eventually taking a seat in the House of Commons. Instead, he spent most of his career as a prosecuting solicitor in the Belfast police courts. Here, his talents at debate and oratory came to full flower, and though he never achieved his full ambition, his skill and honesty won him respect in the judicial community. Albert had a rich sense of humor, and was known for his mastery of the anecdotal tale and for his seemingly inexhaustible fund of improbable stories, which he referred to as "wheezes."

Though Albert and Flora did not make the most romantic of attachments, they held in common a love of beauty and good books and found each other's companionship most agreeable. They settled in a house just outside of Belfast, where some of their sons' earliest memories would be formed.

A ROMANTIC TEMPERAMENT

As the slanting rain fell outside the windows of their home, Lewis and his brother, Warren (or "Warnie" as he was affectionately known), passed the long, wet Belfast days inside. The miserable weather and their mother's fear that her sons might contract an infectious disease from being caught in a rain shower meant that the two Lewis boys spent a disproportionate percentage of their youth indoors. With little to entertain them but their imaginations, they set to work with their pencils, chalk, paints, and paper.

Though separated by three years of age, the two boys became and remained the very best of friends, even into adulthood. They found immense pleasure in each other's company and in the creative pursuits which they shared in common. Lewis's brilliance and intellectual acuity were obvious from an early age, sometimes taking the form of precociousness. When he was four years old, Lewis decided, as many children do, that he did not like his given name, Clive. One day, he simply announced that his name was

"Jacksie" and refused to answer to any other. The name stuck, soon shortened to "Jack," by which he was known to all his close friends for the rest of his life.

Lewis was, by his own admission, of a romantic temperament from his earliest days. The green hills of Castlereagh, visible from the nursery window, were only the first in a series of sights and events that inspired the romantic vision. "They were not very far off but they were, to children, quite unobtainable. They taught me longing—*Sehnsucht*; made me for good or ill, and before I was six years old, a votary of the Blue Flower."[1] The "blue flower" image is drawn from a book by the German romantic poet and novelist Novalis, who used it as a symbol for a sort of transcendent inkling of supernatural joy, a longing to be merged into the very mystery of things. Though he could not yet express it in words, these are the kinds of feelings that haunted the young Lewis.

That same sense of inconsolable longing was activated by the memory, while standing one morning in the garden, of a toy garden his brother had given to him in the nursery; a garden in a biscuit tin, filled with moss, stones, twigs, and small flowers. It also surfaced while reading a Beatrix Potter story, *Squirrel Nutkin*, and in the reading of a translation of an old Icelandic epic. Analyzing these experiences, Lewis found that their common quality was "an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction."[2] At the time, this was the closest thing to a religious experience he was to have, since the family religion of his childhood meant little to him. This experience, similar to that described by William Wordsworth and Thomas Traherne, was in reality a desire for, and a sense of, the presence of God, though only later in life would this realization dawn on him.

Interestingly, little of this romantic sense can be found in Lewis's childhood writing. In those long hours in their rooms, Jack and Warnie imagined a land called "Boxen," where chivalrous frogs came to the aid of King Bunny of Animal-Land or engaged in various political machinations. The numerous stories the brothers wrote and illustrated about the history of Boxen are surprisingly prosaic, lacking in the poetry, romance, and invention that mark Jack's adult work.

Instead, the stories became part of a mammoth game of creating an entire integrated history of this imaginary place, complete with chronologies, maps, and lists of rulers.

As other boys did, Jack and Warnie loved the outdoors and made full use of the days they were allowed outside. They would ride their bikes and explore the neighborhood. They also treasured the frequent trips by train to the sea and enjoyed splashing about in the waves. These holidays at the beach were fondly remembered, but also reveal something about the nature of Albert Lewis. Their father was a man totally immersed in his job, sometimes to the detriment of his family. He could be cold and remote, often distracted and morose, and easily bored when away from the routines of his office. Warren recalls: "I can still see him on his occasional visits to the seaside, walking moodily up and down the beach . . . every now and then giving a heartrending yawn and pulling out his watch."[3] His father's emotional ups and downs taught Jack a distrust of emotions that would stay with him throughout his life.

In 1907, the family moved a short distance to a grand old house called "Little Lea." Though not in the best of repair, it was full of charm and mystery. It was a huge, sprawling edifice, with an attic running nearly the full length of the house and tunnels running along under the ridge tiles on the roof. This immense

attic expanse became a private place of refuge for the boys. Here, in secret, they could write, draw, and add to the fund of their Boxen legends. It was a place where their imaginations could flourish. As Lewis wrote in his autobiography: "I am a product of long corridors, empty sunlit rooms, upstairs indoor silences, attics explored in solitude, distant noises of gurgling cisterns and pipes, and the noise of wind under the tiles."[4]

But immense changes were to occur over the next few years which would destroy this idyllic existence.

The first was when Warren was sent off to school at Wynyard House, leaving Jack alone in his secret world. Although he continued to develop the Boxen stories, Jack began to spend an increasing amount of time reading. The book-lined corridors of "Little Lea" offered many volumes to feed his imagination and satisfy his ever-growing desire to read. Many of the books he read at this time would be considered very advanced for his age, but he digested and enjoyed such books as *Gulliver's Travels,* the E. Nesbit stories, and even *Paradise Lost.*

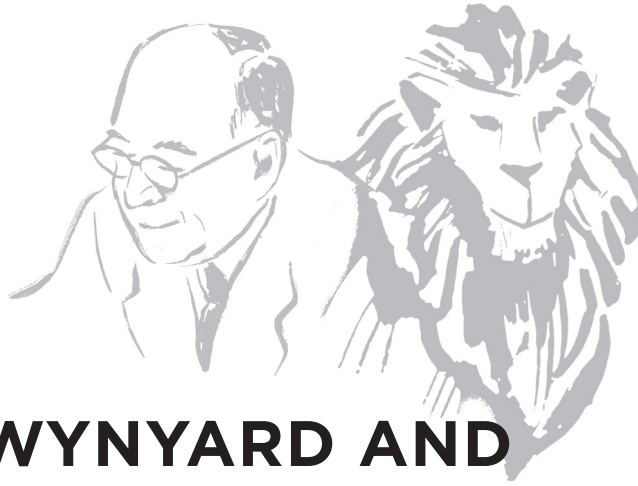
A more cataclysmic change was to occur in early 1908 when Flora Lewis consulted with doctors about the tiredness, headaches, and loss of appetite which she was experiencing. The doctors diagnosed it as abdominal cancer and operated on her. Living under a regimen of nurses, medications, and the emotional convulsions of his father, Jack felt the pain of oncoming tragedy:

> We lost her gradually as she was gradually withdrawn from our life into the hands of nurses and delirium and morphia, and as our whole existence changed into something alien and menacing, as the house became

> full of strange smells and midnight noises and sinister whispered conversations.[5]

She died on August 23, 1908. This was one of a series of tragedies that Albert experienced that year. Earlier in the year, his father had died, and ten days after Flora's death, his beloved brother Joseph died. By this time, Albert Lewis had already withdrawn deeply into his own grief, becoming moody and distant. Lacking the confidence that he could raise the boys on his own, he determined to send Jack to Wynyard, where he could join Warnie. It marked the end of an era in Jack's life:

> With my mother's death all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life. There was to be much fun, many pleasures, many stabs of Joy; but no more of the old security. It was sea and islands now; the great continent had sunk like Atlantis.[6]



WYNYARD AND CHERBOURG

Following his mother's death, Jack was abruptly sent off to boarding school in England. It was, according to Lewis, a nightmarish experience, so much so that in his autobiography he referred to the school as "Belsen." As Warren later put it, "With his uncanny flair for making the wrong decision, my father had given us helpless children into the hands of a madman."[1]

It seems almost unthinkable that within two weeks of their mother's death, the two boys were sent away, not just to a new school, but a school that was in another country. Worst of all, the school to which they were sent was marked by cruelty and lack of feeling. Wanting to give his sons the advantage of a good public school education, one that would help them go on to Oxford or Cambridge, Albert took the worst of the advice he was given and sent the boys to Wynyard School in Watford. He never bothered to visit the school to see if was a good choice. If he had, he would surely have been taken aback by what he would have seen.

Wynyard was an unsanitary facility, with only one bathroom and a single washbasin for the entire student body. Because of the limited facilities, each boy was allowed only one bath per week. The school had no playing fields and no library, the sick room was in a junk-strewn attic, and the playground was a patch of gravel. One of Warren's clearest memories was of the ever-present stench of the outdoor lavatory. He said that any sanitary inspector would unhesitatingly have condemned these places.

The headmaster of the school was a cruel tyrant named Robert Capron, who gave ready evidence of mental instability. He practiced discipline and enforced teaching by humiliating the boys and caning them in public. A boy could earn such dire punishment for as small an infraction as refusing to consume the infamously inedible food. Capron's teaching method was simple: memorization. His classes, therefore, were stultifyingly dull, emphasizing the rote acquisition of facts. Jack and Warren pleaded with their father to remove them. Jack later said that he learned absolutely nothing during his time there. "If I had been left there two years more, it would probably have sealed my fate as a scholar for good."[2]

Eventually their father listened to their pleas for help and transferred Jack to Campbell College in Belfast for half a term, after which he went on to Cherbourg in Malvern. Shortly thereafter, Wynyard was closed down.

While at Cherbourg, Lewis, like all young men, struggled with sexual thoughts and temptations and the attendant guilt. His method for overcoming this guilt was by a rejection of Christianity and its moral beliefs. He was using, of course, the well-traveled ploy of dealing with guilt by denying its reality. At this same time he came to develop a sophisticated taste for

the arts and good writing. He also discovered the music of the great romantic composer Richard Wagner and grew to love its transporting power and its "northernness," the quality of intense longing for the unknown which it evoked. In fact, one of his great lifelong friendships was forged when he learned that Arthur Greeves, a neighbor boy of his own age, shared his delight in things "northern." Although they had been casual friends since childhood, it was the discovery of a shared love of Norse mythology that first drew them into close friendship.

In 1933, Lewis was to refer to Arthur as "after my brother, my oldest and most intimate friend."[3] Over the years their correspondence was sufficient to fill a stout volume,[4] as they wrote lengthy letters on their shared love of books, the sexual temptations of adolescence, matters of faith, and the joys and struggles of family. Arthur was one of Jack's confidants throughout his life.

Jack was a precocious, if not a particularly great, student. He ranked in the lower half of his class, for although he was quite gifted in literature and poetry, he was only mediocre in Greek and Latin and very poor in mathematics. The school had an excellent library, which he made use of at every opportunity, but he found little time for the reading and writing he had so come to love. His fellow students were more interested in games and cricket and eating than in actually learning anything.

Jack became increasingly disappointed with his school, with its bullying prefects, and with the education he was receiving. He begged his father to let him study with William Kirkpatrick, his father's old tutor, a man who had once helped Warnie at a time when his grades were plummeting.

LEARNING TO LEARN

As the train pulled up into the Great Bookham station, Jack prepared himself to meet his new tutor. His father often called him "dear Old Knock," and remembered him with great fondness. Jack expected a gentle and embarrassingly sentimental old man. What he met instead was a tall, muscular, and shabbily dressed gentleman with a mustache and sideburns on his wrinkled face. As they made their way to the tutor's house, Jack tried to make conversation by commenting on the countryside, saying that the scenery was much "wilder" than he had expected.

"Stop!" shouted Kirkpatrick with a vigor which caught Lewis by surprise. "What do you mean by wildness and what grounds had you for not expecting it?" When Jack replied that he did not know, Kirkpatrick told him that that was an unacceptable answer. Through vigorous questioning, Kirkpatrick demanded to know precisely what Lewis meant by his use of the word "wildness," and on what previous knowledge he had based his incorrect expectations. Fumbling for explanations, Jack only dug himself deeper

into confusion, until Kirkpatrick was satisfied that he had uncovered Jack's ignorance. "Do you not see, then, that you had no right to have any opinion whatever on the subject?"[1]

Such was the teaching style of William T. Kirkpatrick, who was to have such a profound influence on the life of C. S. Lewis. He was a convinced rationalist, who loved to ferret out inconsistencies and logical shortcomings. As Warren Lewis once said, "You could not say something about the weather without being pounced on."[2]

Kirkpatrick taught Lewis a love of argument, intellectual disputation, the search for facts, and logical thinking. For Kirkpatrick, opinions were of no use whatsoever; all that mattered was deriving conclusions that were based on solid reasoning. Lewis's time of study with the "Great Knock" would be treasured throughout his life, for Kirkpatrick opened fully the door to appreciation of the classics, to the philosophy of the ancient world, and to the necessity of engaging the mind fully in the pursuit of truth. The downside of Kirkpatrick's influence was that it took Jack some years to learn to use his analytical skills in a gentler manner. "The Christian virtue that he found hardest to acquire was to suffer fools gladly; for years he failed to realize that the Kirk treatment might upset or offend."[3] In his early years, Lewis seemed to relish the opportunity to thoroughly discredit the arguments of an opponent. In later years, he learned the talent of more gently challenging false notions.

Kirkpatrick had high expectations and Jack found the challenge inviting. Two days after his arrival at Bookham, he was put straight to work translating Homer, though he had had no previous experience with the Epic dialect of the Greek language. Kirkpatrick would read a few lines aloud and translate them with a few comments, then leave Lewis with a lexicon to continue

the process. Lewis was a fast learner and quickly memorized the necessary vocabulary. He worked at translating Homer and other Greek classics until he could quite literally *think* in Greek. Kirkpatrick believed him to have the potential to be a brilliant translator. Jack also learned Italian and French, closely studied the classic works of the ancient world, and developed a taste for such writers as Milton, Spenser, Shelley, Bunyan, Chaucer, Swinburne, and William Morris. "After a week's trial," he wrote to Arthur Greeves, "I have come to the conclusion that I am going to have the time of my life."[4] Probably the greatest gift which Kirkpatrick bestowed on Lewis was that of helping him learn how to teach himself. Throughout his life he never ceased to continue his education, exploring and mastering new ideas and subjects.

Kirkpatrick was a convinced atheist, and no doubt his influence on Lewis extended to the weakening of Lewis's already tenuous beliefs. Reading Frazer's *The Golden Bough* convinced Jack that all religion should be placed in the category of mythology. As he wrote to his close friend Arthur Greeves,

> You ask me my religious views: you know, I think, that I believe in no religion. There is absolutely no proof for any of them, and from a philosophical standpoint Christianity is not even the best. All religions, that is all mythologies to give them their proper name are merely man's own invention.[5]

Interestingly, at the same time that Lewis was becoming more convinced of the falsity of religion, his fascination with romanticism was growing. His letters to Arthur Greeves were filled

with an enthusiasm for Norse mythology—the tales of Odin, Thor, and the other gods. During the time he lived and studied with Kirkpatrick, he kept up an elaborate correspondence with Greeves, the two sharing with each other their interests and adventures in reading.

A letter of March 7, 1916, documents an important moment in Lewis's life. In a bookstall in the train station at Great Bookham, he purchased a volume entitled *Phantastes* by the Scottish writer George MacDonald. He devoured the book, completely entranced by the adventures of Anodos in a spiritual fairyland. He wrote to Greeves that it was "a great literary experience" and that Greeves must find and read it.[6] Later in life, Lewis recalled the reading of this book as not only a literary experience but a spiritual one as well. At the time, however, Lewis sensed a certain quality that drew him to the book, though he could not define precisely what it was. Reflecting later, he wrote, "I did not yet know (and I was long in learning) the name of the new quality, the bright shadow . . . I do now. It was Holiness."[7]

The young atheist, so confident in the world of materialism, could not suppress the longings that welled up in his heart and caused him to value things which his rationalism could not explain. "Such, then, was my position: to care for almost nothing but the gods and heroes, the garden of the Hesperides, Launcelot and the Grail, and to believe in nothing but atoms and evolution and military service."[8] But the first beginnings of a new view of life were birthed in his heart by MacDonald's strange and otherworldly tale. It prepared him for his eventual embrace of the Christian vision of existence. "That night my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized; the rest of me, not unnaturally, took longer."[9]

THE WOES OF WAR

As the train pulled into the station, Jack's hopes rose. He had finally arrived at Oxford to embark on his new life as a student. He had long looked forward to the day when he would glimpse the dreaming spires of historic Oxford. Leaving the station, he was profoundly disappointed to find a series of rather run-down shops. This was nothing like the enchantment he had expected. As he walked on, his disappointment grew. This was not what he had imagined. He stopped to ponder why this squalid town had such a reputation. Scratching his head, he chanced to look back over his shoulder.

At some distance he glimpsed the towers and spires, the beautiful magic of the architecture of the city of Oxford. He had inadvertently left the train station by the wrong exit and had found himself in the sprawling suburbs of Botley. Oxford lay in the other direction!

On finally arriving, Jack found Oxford all he had hoped it would be and settled down to his studies. This was a new world,

full of intellectual challenge, history, and the beauties of architecture. It was a world for which young Jack seemed particularly suited, and he entered it with relish. He enjoyed visiting the abundant bookshops, the magnificent libraries, and the well-groomed grounds. It seemed almost a paradise on earth. To Arthur Greeves he enthused, "The place is on the whole absolutely ripping. If only you saw the quad on these moonlit nights with the long shadows lying half across the level, perfect grass and the tangle of spires and towers rising beyond in the dark!"[1]

This blissful time was cut short when Jack was called into service to fight in the First World War. He had spent fewer than eight weeks at Oxford, and the way the war was going, the odds were very strong that he might not return to England alive. Lewis was made a second lieutenant and attached to the Third Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry. Before his posting to active duty, he was given one month's leave. He spent most of this time in the company of his roommate, Edward "Paddy" Moore. Moore's mother, Janie, knew that the casualty rate at the front was very high, so she had moved to Oxford temporarily so that she could spend time with her son before he was sent to France. Rather than returning home, Jack spent his time with Paddy and Janie. He was immediately made to feel a part of the Moore family and quickly came to love Janie as a substitute mother. It was not long before his feelings were stirred to deeper levels. It became obvious to those who knew Jack at the time that he had become infatuated with her and fallen in love, despite the difference in their ages; she was forty-five, he only just shy of nineteen. This idyllic month came to an end when Lewis and Paddy Moore were sent to France for four short weeks of training and then shipped to the trenches.

November 29, 1917. It was an inauspicious way to spend one's nineteenth birthday: arriving on the battlefields of France where already so many of his generation had had their lives cut short by German bullets or bombs. The war effort had not gone well and Lewis joined his comrades in the cold and muddy trenches at the front lines. There they lived in constant fear of ammunition fire, disease, and the ever-present rats. The death toll mounted as useless attacks upon the entrenched Germans were repulsed and young men breathed their last among the barbed wire in the no man's land between the two combatants' territories.

On April 15, 1918, Lewis was wounded during the Battle of Bernenchon by an English shell that exploded. Flying shrapnel pierced his body in three places. Warren, stationed in another part of France, got wind of Jack's trouble and borrowed a bicycle to pedal fifty miles to be at his brother's side. As Warren reported to his father in a letter: "[A] shell burst close to where he was standing, killing a Sergeant and lucky for 'IT' [Lewis] he only stopped three bits; one in the chest and two in the hands."[2]

In a way, Jack saw the fact that he had been wounded as something of a blessing. It may have been what preserved his life. As he wrote to his father from the hospital: "If I had not been wounded when I was, I should have gone through a terrible time. Nearly all my friends in the Battalion are gone."[3] His recovery was slow and he wrote to his father, asking him to come to visit him when he was transferred to a hospital in London. Although his father failed to materialize, he did receive a welcome visitor, Janie Moore.

Paddy Moore, like so many others, had died at the front. In fact, of the five boys who had visited the Moore residence in Oxford, only Jack remained. Jack had made a promise to Paddy

to look after his mother in case anything happened to him on the battlefield. He was now only too glad to fulfill his pledge. For many years following, Jack lived with Janie and her daughter, Maureen. Warren speaks of it as a mother and son relationship, but some biographers have suggested that it was a more intimate attachment. The exact nature of their relationship will probably never be entirely understood, but it seems clear that a deep affection between Jack and Janie lasted until her death.

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