A READER ON THE COAST - 3

John Millar

> *He picked up cues and delivered his lines as they came. Relating all the conflicts of the age to himself and his work, he gave utterance to reaction and revolution, continuity and innovation, the real and the ideal.*
> ('The German spirit and the West. Richard Wagner'. Martin Gregor-Dellin)

The journey to Georgeham had brought us into the 'home' territory. The gloom of evening hardly mattered since we could picture the details of the passing scene. At the wheel was David Stokes who, like myself, was aware that we were approaching a memory lane that led off this road to our former place of work. And for the Whiteheads, Jack and Doris, it was a case of rediscovering their old allegiance to a stretch of coast, with Jack saying that in spite of the gulf of time, something of the old atmosphere could be felt already; and you guessed that not far from his thoughts were the sounds of surf and the prolonged sun of that '47 summer - its gleaming on the sea and sands at Croyde and their living in the family cottage set close to that natural world.

Though neither he nor the rest of us had tried to rediscover it after our moves to elsewhere. 'Don't come back', wrote a friend who had known the old halcyon days; he had recently come back during an August and he reported simply: 'It would break your heart'. You learnt of approach roads choked with traffic and of massive car parks set beside beaches: and of the Burrows being over-run with people and an ugly rash of bungalows lining the Saunton road.

But in wanting to experience the same scenes in the same way and to give rein to a nostalgic longing, were we denying the very forces we extolled, of creativity and vitality in life? One in our party, Elsa (David's wife), came here as an outsider who was not being nudged and guided by insistent memories, and her view provided a needed balance.

But memory still nudged. We had come to where the Braunton road ran close to the familiar stonework of Heanton Court. The place is featured in *The Pathway* as the site of a Saxon dwelling that was replaced by a medieval building - of which little remains - and how it was the old manor house of Heanton Punchardon. In the fictional world, Mr. Chychester decided to vacate this family home, and he mentioned the outer spoilation like the construction of the railway line that ran close to it - and certainly it surprised me when I first arrived here by train, to see how close the track passed to the Court. Yet the pace of change has retrieved the situation, for the line is now closed ... And so the Court is free to bask in its old privacy now? Yet the cutting down of its protecting foliage showed just the opposite, that fate had decreed, apparently, that it be converted into a hotel. If not bothered by the rail any more, its connection with the road had a new and neon-lit familiarity.

How easy to cavil and pronounce when we were content to drive in blithely, to contribute our mite of pollution to the scene and inject the leaded charge that issues from car exhausts, the totality of which is officially acknowledged to have a deleterious effect on the trees and hedges and streams in the vicinity. Perhaps the true *aficionado* of a Williamson Society would park the car in Taunton or Barnstaple and complete the journey on foot or by cycle or on Shank's pony. Certainly you feel that were HW able to exert an

influence now, he would be prominent in the environmental movement, and that his politics would be of the 'Green' variety, with primacy given to a stemming of the decline in our heritage of countryside and wildlife.

Beyond the series of bends was a past remnant that had a more personal link. "Those were the hangers of Atlantic Coast Airlines", I said. David pulled off the road and parked by a narrow lane that led down to them. We gazed at a line of dark sheds that were in various stages of neglect. The firm's title had a pompous sound even in its heyday: now it seemed merely amusing as we regarded the sheds and noted the housing estate that had spread across the old airfield. At one time David and I had worked there as boy apprentices in aircraft engineering; we had been concerned with light trainers like Tiger Moths and Avro Tutors (the sort of planes that are sometimes featured on the more nostalgic birthday cards). The airline became a repair unit for the RAF (1) on the advent of World War II, and it took on a mass of workers which resulted in an exceptionally charged work-effort in getting every possible machine repaired and airborne, in the days of the '40 invasion scare.

The period had, in the aftermath of war when the barbed wire was carted away from beaches and Burrows, and when the mines and wooden posts were dispensed with, a phantasmagoric quality like a nightmare hard to believe. It had even a note of comedy when the idea that those sheds had been a part of some grandiose war machine, struck you in all its incongruity. And yet ..... the farming out of such operations was an effective ploy in wartime, helping to avoid the risk of the production effort being disrupted through air raids. We were never bombed during my time there, though the Heinkels flew regularly at night over the Two Rivers country. It lay on their flight-path that led directly to the large industrial targets in South Wales.

On rare occasions a Heinkel might detach itself from a group and drop its load on the coast somewhere. Once a plane dropped a sea-mine at night whose parachute took it inland to where it exploded harmlesssly on some open ground; and though closest to Saunton, it shook up every property in Braunton where we lived on East Hill. The contradiction between the glorious harmony of the view from our windows - of the Two Rivers estuary and the Burrows and the long Atlantic coastline - and the noise and ugliness of war, was a daily phenomenon that could not be reconciled. The noise of planes seemed to fill the air, by day on training flights during incessant circuits and bumps, and by night with a lower reverberation that played on the imagination with a routine intrusion of menace.

In H.W.'s Chronicle novel *A Solitary War*, a night observation of Phillip's takes place in Norfolk; but it could have been in the Two Rivers country in its conveying an opaqueness of feeling as he listens to the reverberation above him -

> *The night was warm and quiet. He climbed to the crest of the Home Hills and lay on his back, seeing the stain of the Milky Way high above him, and its dark patch of the Coalsack. He looked for the stars once known as faithful friends of many a summer night; but there was no feeling in those silver sentinels as of old: there was no feeling to spare within himself, he was no longer a vessel of his own personal feeling. The stars were void, their only message a high and remote brrr-brrr as aircraft flew from west to east, sought by the pale rays of searchlights...*

My reading of H.W.'s work then was of a fitful enquiring nature, and although his name would crop up when I called on David at his parent's cottage in Georgeham, the tone had something of a past flavour when so much current drama was around us with its jolts and shocks. I thoroughly enjoyed those visits, for it amounted to stepping into an old-style friendliness and tradition of community: the villagers were members of a corporate family and though the scandals and disputes were no less a feature there, they were contained and seen within the gentle toleration of that wholeness of society. Listening to the shrewd observations and anecdotes of Mrs. Caroline Stokes (David's mother) was to see villagers and their doings in a gentle, humerous light that was the more effective in her portraying points of character and gesture in small, unforced ways: the village seen more in the quiet tone of a Henry James commentary.

Yet when I browsed through the village writings of Williamson, instances of such wry, detached observation were there, with the drollery almost whispered in confidence, and the description even-toned and seeming always to have the aim of clarity and truthfulness. In G.W.'s novel *Lucifer Before Sunrise*, there is a reference to Phillip giving his press articles a lighthearted flavour at the crisis time, a reaction to the growing gloom of the war then; but for me this flavour was most felt in the earlier village writing. And as with the novels of Graham Greene, (2) I wondered in coming on a passage that was intriguingly laced with light humour, whether a talent for comedy was there that was not mined to its fullest in later work - perhaps owing to the pressures of post-war modernism acting on a writer, especially on one like H.W. who had gone through the utter life-negation of the Flanders experience.

I particularly liked the deft footwork in which H.W. set out a delicious incident that was both lightly treated and yet caught the full ruefulness of Mrs. Brooking's discomfiture, as in the following: (3)

> *The wife of a well-to-do farmer, a devout member of the Wesleyan Chapel who, probably through shyness becoming a bad habit, coupled with the superiority of her fixed ideas, spoke seldom to others in the village, and whose lips moved with the least movement in returning a good morning, found that her sugar jar was empty one Sunday afternoon. She went down to the grocer's shop, and asked the grocer's wife if she minded serving her on the Sabbath.*
> *"Of course I won't pay now, as it is the Sabbath."*
> *"No, I don't object, ma'am", replied the grocer's wife, as she unlocked the back door of the shop. "Us don't make a practice of Sunday selling, but to oblige anyone, do them a good turn if they'm caught on the hop like, then us don't mind. How much sugar would you be wanting, please?"*
> *When it was weighed, packed up and handed over the religious woman said, to satisfy her conscience. "Well, the Lord will pay, as it is the Sabbath, Mrs. Brooking". She added, "But even so, the scales have been used on the Day of Rest, Mrs. Brooking." She stared intently at the blue packet in her hands. "It would be better to seek divine forgiveness, Mrs. Brooking." As she went out of the side entrance. "Yes, when I get home, Mrs. Brooking, I will offer up a prayer - for you, Mrs. Brooking."*

Or I was to learn of the delightful notions provided by H.W.'s neighbour, Revvy, and not least the interesting indications that showed that his cat was a proper weather prophet. (4)

> *When the cat sneezed as it sat before the fire, it meant that the frost was coming; when the cat put its head between its legs, "us be going to have rough weather." When it washed its face and sat with its left flank to the hearth, the weather, surenuff, would improve.*

H.W. added a wry coda to this.

> *The cat's behaviour, to me, indicated another set of terrestrial phenomena. Thus, when it washed its face contentedly before Revvy's fire, the milk-level in my jug would probably have been lowered recently. When the weather was fine, the door was open, for it was the main window of my kitchen, but when the weather was dirty, the door was closed, and the only ventilation came from the draught along the floor, felt most by the cat, who turned its back to it.*

One of the authors whose books were read by us and who lived in the vicinity, was Negley Farson. The Stokes' were friends of his, and Mrs. Stokes went on occasional visits to the delightful grey house overlooking Putsborough Sands where she and Farson's wife, Eve, got on particularly well. His books were not locally-oriented, being usually taken up with lively accounts of his rumbustious trail through a host of countries, and he related these experiences with an eye to journalistic brightness and narrative readability. His style had an abrupt, stabbing directness that made for congenial reading in an era of heightened tension, and titles (5) like *The Way of a Transgressor* (a pre-war best-seller), *The Story of a Lake, Sailing Across Europe* and *Behind God's Back* (with its absorbing African locale), were well-conceived to hold the interest of readers. I sometimes felt that there were emotional resonances beneath the surface of the prose that evoked some deeper, unrealised chords, a realm of natural artistry that was lurking in the wings.

Specially dismaying was the rift that arose between Farson and Williamson, after an initial period of friendship and respect. To those who were readers of both writers and had met them on the coast, there was a ready appreciation of how different they were in background and temperament. H.W. with a deep-felt intuitive creativeness seemed poles away from Farson, and especially when Farson's 'men of the world' role was in the ascendant - when he might plunge into one of his alcoholic benders.

But there was the other, more contemplative side to Farson. As a fisherman whose book *Going Fishing* is a classic in that genre, his lonely brooding was given plenty of scope. Whether his eventual battle with alcoholism was a reflection of some writing aim and ideal not being fulfilled, is a matter for speculation; but in other ways there were enough hints to show that more than suspected, perhaps, H.W. and Farson had certain interests in common. H.W.'s subsequent insertion of a pastiche character (Osgood Nilsson) who is given some Farson-like traits in *The Gale of the World*, is an unfortunate aberration and a painful legacy, but is presumably the result of H.W. being sorely tried over the years.

Thus you think of Farson reclining on his hearthrug during a wartime winter, and his warm anticipation as he starts reading of the old Russia that he loved, delving into Tolstoy's *War and Peace* again. And you think of H.W. taking up this same work and commenting with shrewd sense on its construction and presentation before he starts on the composition of his own chronicle of war and peace, of a literary creation extending out in time like

the endless impressionism of some Tolstoyian traverse of a Russian landscape.

And finally and fundamentally, of Farson being drawn to this Atlantic coast as a sanctuary of Nature's harmony and wild beauty. In the preface to *A Mirror for Narcissus*, the book of his further adventures in which he spelled out the traumas and agonies of his battle with alcoholism, he recorded his feeling about the place he had come to settle in ultimately, a piece of reflective writing about the same sands and coastline that provided a sanctuary and inspiration for H.W. after he emerged from the horrors and hopelessness of the Western Front.

Farson wrote out his testimony in a single paragraph that stayed with you after you's finished reading his book:

> *"When I looked out on the beach this morning I saw that the curlew had paired off. There were only a few couples of them probing about sedately among the sitting gulls. The great mass flights of autumn and dead winter are over, when I could look out of my bedroom window on almost any dawn and watch from fifty to a hundred of them come over and whiffle down to the wet sands. In a few days, I know, even these mated curlew will be gone; they will be back among their nests on the uplands, raising their young. I could want no finer sign that spring is here. I love their cry. That lovely haunting call brings back memories of early New Jersey days: surf-casting along the Atlantic when the September sands were empty; duck-shooting down the Delaware and the smell of a salt-marsh in raw weather; halcyon days sailing a sneak box around Barnegat Bay, when all the world that lay ahead of me still seemed so wonderful. In those days, before the clean instinctive vision of youth became plastered over by the muddy self-deceptions we accept in adult life, I knew that that cry, with such a note of reproach in it, came from the very pattern of life: of life as it should be lived, with the full recognition of the essential oneness of us all. And I was right. Destroy me, cried the curlew, and you destroy yourself."*

A writer who was also regarded as belonging to the local group was Ronald Duncan, and this in spite of his seeming to stand apart a little (he was described by Ezra Pound as 'the lone wolf of English letters'). Like H.W. his way of approach gave scope for the pursuit of his practical streak, since in addition to literary work he took part in running his own farm at Hartland. He had travelled abroad a lot, and in India he lived in the Ashram of Gandhi for some years; later he collaborated with leading artists like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot and wrote the libretto for Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*. His style in his poems and plays was couched in strongly-defined forms, for as he stated in his book of collected plays, he was interested in writing that kept within these defined limits, rather than in a freedom of expression.

This was a literary goal that belonged to a different league to H.W.'s; but the two of them had remained friends for over forty years. They were sharers in a common pursuit in which there was the total dedication to the writer's art; and catching the eye in the Symposium volume on Williamson (with his variety of personal reminiscences and views) was the introduction by Ronald Duncan. In it was his tribute to H.W.'s artistry:

> *I admired Henry as a writer because he had an internal vision, was dedicated to the craft, and was not a pot-boiling journalist. And, more importantly, because he had a microscopic eye and could produce the accurate image. For example, his observation that the salmon's skin was like 'new-cut pewter' to my mind placed him with Hudson.*

Duncan wrote regularly for a London evening paper in the 50's, providing glimpses of his farming scene beside the Atlantic: and as I remember, it made for refreshing copy for the metropolitan reader. Also his book *Where I Live* covered his experiences there: and was another for the coastal reader's collection that took in writers of different kinds and styles who were each contributing their thoughts and impressions of this Devon world. And the version projected in *Where I Live* concerned the lure that resulted in Duncan's owning a derelict watermill that stood in the Marsland Valley in the Hartland area.

> *It did not attract me in the way that parkland satisfies me with its ordered elegance and suggestions of social, almost emotional, security. Perhaps it did not attract me at all, but challenged me; and at twenty, one is not sufficiently wise to ignore such challenges. Consequently I spent the next few years trying to reclaim this old mill until the wheel turned again, giving the house electricity; and yet immediately this was done, I moved from there to a farm overlooking the valley, where I still live ...*

In making for the beach after arriving on the coast, he discovered a new hobby that became an addiction. For he pulled from the sea a wooden keg that was full of fresh butter, and thus began his beachcoming that went on for seven years - "the tide never turned but I was there to meet it".

One of the challenges was in finding the balance between literary work and practical activity - which reminds you of H.W.'s seeking that goal - and it was one agreeably distanced from the metropolitan literary world:

> *... I am surrounded with doors that need mending, trees that need pruning, animals that need fencing - endless practicalities which have a knack of interrupting one's work; and though I curse these distractions, they are something I cannot do without ...*

Malcolm Elwin was another in the local group. He had settled in Vention Cottage which lies at the foot of the downland as it slopes in natural harmony to the sands at Pursborough, an idyllic retreat for a literary artist. Elwin a noted editor and critic, was influential in his literary preferences: and he was the author of biographies on Landor, Thackeray, Charles Reade, Llewelyn Powys, etc. An interesting book he edited (lent me by Jack Whitehead was called *The Pleasure Ground* (1947) (6) and it included a piece by H.W. that had the title 'The Winter of 1941'. It is a vividly exact account set in Norfolk, a steely expression of a farmer's fractious dealing with the Army and the infiltration of his farmland in wartime. The material is reproduced in the Chronicle's *Lucifer Before Sunrise* (Chapter II - 'Narthin' but Trouble') though the copy has been scrupulously amended and given a tightened narrative line. There is a different ending to the earlier version; this had slipped into an expression of the farmer's (H.W.'s) wartime exhaustion, with its anguish sharply felt. Instead, in the Chronicle, there is a move away from self, and an equally anguished encounter between Phillip and Boy Billy.

In all, an instructive example of the amount of care H.W. put into re-using material on the wider canvas - of adapting it after it had been published some twenty years previously.

Elwin included his own essay in the '47 book and called it *A Critic's Pilgrimage*. It was an outline of his views and experiences as a literary critic during a fraught period. It can evoke reflective thoughts for the modern reader of H.W. - on the question, for instance, of how far the absence of probing interpretations of H.W.'s art has left a vacuum to be filled by fashionable presumptions and unexamined premises (a tantilising glimpse of what might have been was given by T.E. Lawrence before his early death), and a vacuum that thus left a whole stratum of readers to grapple with their confusion and puzzlement over things like the later Chronicle writing.

Elwin wrote with the natural feeling of being at a crossroads in 1947. He wished to put the dross element of the literary Thirties behind him - seeing it as having been marked by a critical trough - and he pointed to the decline in the quality and quantity of literary periodicals as an important factor, and noted that the golden age of criticism had coincided with the flowering of such reviews and quarterly magazines, that among those who sharpened their talents thereby were Coleridge, De Quincy, Lamb, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Southey, Jeffrey and Carlyle. The modern replacement, mostly by way of the literary pages in weekly magazines and daily newspapers, was no real substitute.

The essay was a frank, personal testimony, and showed his passionate belief in the value of balanced, well-informed criticism to maintain a good cultural standard. Of course he was writing in the throes of the post-war optimism and it is interesting to find him searching for a new naturalism in literary creation, a turning away from the past with its urban artificiality and cultivated artiness - and more faithfully following the senses that were endowed by nature (D.H. Lawrence had yet to be rediscovered) and seeking the truth open to 'every honest pilgrim'. Could you detect a common influence here, an Atlantic atmosphere that was on the same intuitive level that influenced H.W. in his powerful creation of the naturalism and clarity of *The Pathway*? Be that as it may, the literary encouragement flowing from Elwin's acceptance, as the reader for Macdonald, of H.W.'s first Chronicle novel *The Dark Lantern* did constitute a milestone on the way, like releasing a tidal surge as H.W. continued to find inspiration to meet the degree of creativeness needed. Ultimately there was rift in their relations; but the literary pluses are there and they accrue to the advantage of the interested reader. (7)

We resumed our journey. The car went by the entrance to Chivenor (the RAF station), and we were on the old broad road, which was like entering the home straight to Braunton. The actual moment of passing Wrafton was easily missed in the gloom, though even in daylight it was not that noticeable from the road. I pictured a time when the village retained its old-style unity, seeming more aware than when I had lived on the coast of the arrogance of pre-war road planners, their allowing this swathe of road to thrust through and leave the village in its two disconnected halves.

And then our entry into Braunton, passing an ordinary collection of shops and pubs, and coming to a central cross-roads (Cross Tree) where a famous elm-tree stood before the modern leviathans had found it too inconvenient to tolerate. I thought of the village's coastal side and the old lane that wound down to Velator, where the atmosphere of open country with a tiny channel of water leading to the estuary, made it a place of repose and charm - you were already in a naturalists' mecca there. At Velator were the idyllic fishermen's cottages and old Jan Crick and young Jan Crick lived

there, David mentioning that he used to go salmon fishing with them after the war, and that H.W. went with them pre-war and gathered material about the fish - old Jan saying "I taught old Williamson all about the life of a salmon before the writing of his *Salar the Salmon*."

But I often walked beyond Velator and followed a route beside the Pill (the waterway joining with the Taw), and paced along the raised dykes between luxuriant marshes, making for the mysterious lone presence of the White House and usually finding it empty and forlorn - a place to be peopled in imagination with a family like the Ogilvies. And, in peacetime, I would leave the house and follow the shore round to the estuary mouth, but sometimes keep away from the curving tideline with its sands and gravel shaped by swirling tides into an uncanny crisp sculpturing, being loath to mark it with my footsteps. And finally to the lighthouse and Crow Point, lingering at the Point and basking in its raw openness to the elements and its air of a detached finale of land, with a sluicing sea thrusting by me with rampant power. And that is how I remember it, as exclusive and remote as a mountain top.

Thus I lived at Braunton within sight of this feast of scenery and wildlife, with the bulb farm (now no more) a riot of varying colour. With the literary side lavishly catered for through H.W.'s prose, and its impact all the more through his transparency of stile, as if the words were being treated as notes in a musical tone-poem. What was the line in *The Pathway* that came after the description of Maddison and Mary alone 'on the sand-sweeping waste', as they strolled along Saunton Sands? Yes, a line or two later, my recalling the use of a musical symbol as a descriptive pointer -'The pied oyster-catchers had settled two hundred yards along the coast, looking like music notes on the sand ...'

Though, when the sense of music floated through the consciousness - when, later in Braunton, I would get out a record of, say, Delius's Intermezzo in *Fennimore and Gerda* and listen to the curling in of the lyrical flute-sound, like a glistening wave curling in over Saunton beach. The impact of H.W.'s prose was like a confirming voice that offered a lead-in to the musical atmosphere. Which seemed something of a puzzle, since it was not the impression I drew from other writers that I cared about - not from Hardy's fiction, for example. Like the opening chapter in *The Return of the Native* which was taken up with inspired scene-painting of Egdon Heath - which was an esteemed prose-passage in my sight. But it did not engender a musical mood in the same way (87) that - for me - H.W.'s coastal pages did in sections that were favoured. So a puzzle. Of course, there came a realisation that H.W.'s way of writing was marked by sensitive renderings of aural impressions as part of the whole. Whereas, with Hardy, you may be dazzled and humbled by the poetic fluency of his literary rendering of landscape, yet it can seem applied like a creator building memorable word-pictures that are more exclusive on that account. So in my sensing an inducement towards a musical effect in reading H.W.'s pages, it was like the inducement felt in strolling on a Devon beach and hearing the sounds of waves and wind and rasping of feet on sand. I wondered if the constant battle-sounds that afflicted H.W. in 1914-18 accentuated his aural sense, and had led to the sharp awareness of sounds that his prose communicates to a reader. There is all that finely-rendered sound-detail in his writing about the Western Front ... One of the pinnacles of Chronicle novel-writing, *The Golden Virgin*, has a remarkable description of Phillip waiting in a trench amid a cacophony of sound: and there goes through his mind the assuring noises of home as he tries to counteract natural fear, and to pit one set of noises against another -

He tried to fix his mind on the starling on Grandpa's red chimney-pot. Now it would be singing into the freshness of the morning air, just as he had seen it a hundred times on awakening. There it was, turning its head first one way, then the other, like a speaker by the Socialist Oak on the Hill; and as it turned it sqeezed out a sort of one-bird-band music - concertina, mouth organ, jew's harp, and penny whistle - head thrown one way, then another. From its quivering throat, surrounded by its own feather boa, the starling uttered every kind of noise and call to be heard in the streets and gardens; errand-boy's whistle; milko of milkman with clank of milk-cans; cat's wail, dog's bark, blackbird, thrush, tomtit, even Grandpa clearing his throat in the bathroom, and gargling. Think of the starling, of the sky above the red chimney pot, which was red because Grandpa used a gas-fire in his bedroom, think of the silky blue sky of early summer morning at home. Would they be getting up yet? Father sometimes went on the Hill, to walk alone in the fresh air of morning. Think! Think! But his mind seemed to break like glass, his being to leap out of his body, as he saw the chalk lip of the trench jumping in spits and splatters. There was a machine-gun playing on it, and thirty more minutes to go to Zero hour!

To switch from that extremity of situation to the coastal world of Devon, suggests a vast gulf, but there is the underlying artistic link in noting how his descriptive passages have the same vivid sound-consciousness. In the following from *The Dream of Fair Women*, the words used to build up the sound impressions are exact rather than exceptionable, making their telling contribution to the organic whole. In a setting of scenic harmony, of sea and shore being in consonance with your musical thoughts and moods, his writing carries you along towards the same goal, which is one aspiring to unity with sound and vision and an identity with place.

Swiftly he climbed the hill, and crossed the lane and the fields, and so came to the down. Somewhere in the towns and cities the clocks ticked off tame hours of an artificial life, but here no time existed. He strode on, treading fields of starved oats that waged a continual war with thistles, fern, vetch, and bindweed. Sometimes he paused to hear the sounds of the quiet night: the hum of a beetle, the purring rattle of a far eve-jar perched on a dead stump in the bracken, the snuffling of the puppies and sometimes a thin whine of enquiry at a rabbit bury. In the west over a steely sea the horizon lifted with sunset-dark hoverings, the glow of the great conflagration beyond the world.

NOTES

1. But it was under civilian control and was linked with the huge organisation that was involved in aircraft production under Lord Beaverbrook. Recently, in a book *The Audit of War*, Correlli Barnett traces this country's industrial decline to a period before the last war, and he saw this aircraft endeavour as gaining success through the throwing of massive resources pell-mell into the struggle. It is thought-provoking to read the versions by distinguished historians on 'the way it was'.

   In an earlier book *The Collapse of British Power*, 1972, Barnett quoted from H.W.'s *The Patriot's Progress* as an illustration in the general argument he developes. He alludes to the 'great bull market' for Flanders memoirs and novels of 1928 - 31, contending that they made a decisive impression on the British public and contributed to their idealistic unworldliness in assessing things like re-armament in the 30's. The subject of H.W.'s writing and World War I was featured in Journal No.9 ('Henry Williamson and the Generation of 1914')/Nigel Jones) but certain points were open to question. One worth exploring concerns a modern interpretation put over in Barnett's books, and the fact that use is made of this H.W. description suggests that his solid literary power is being duly acknowledged:

   > *... Men, single and in couples, shuffling past them, answering no questions. Tin hats on the back of heads, and no tin hats, tin hats with splinter - ragged sandbag-coverings; men without rifles, haggard, blood-shot eyes, slouching past in loose file, slouching on anyhow, staggering under rifles and equipment, some jaws sagging, puttees coiled mud-balled around the angkles, feet in shapeless mud boots swelled beyond feeling, men slouching on beyond fatigue and hope, on and on and on. GS waggons with loads of sleeping bodies. Stretcher-bearers plodding desperate-faced. Men slavering and rolling their bared-teeth heads, slobbering and blowing, blasting brightness beyond their eye-balls, supported by listless cripples.*

2. Not being overlooked is Greene's division of his works into 'entertainments' and 'novels', implying that some of his writing was meant to be treated as lighthearted. But there are characters and situations in the 'serious' novels that can seem to have overtones of comedy too: and in a later collected edition he placed all the fiction under the single heading of novels.

3. An extract taken from *Life in a Devon Village* (Chapter 6 - "On Scandal, Gossip, Hypocrisy, etc.").

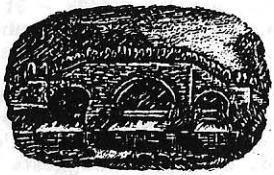
4. A further extract from *Life in a Devon Village* (Chapter 1 - "My Neighbour 'Revvy'").

5. Farson's *The Way of a Transgressor* is available as a Zenith paperback and more recently in the series - *Behind God's Back* which has a new foreward by Colin Wilson. However, I think it is the account by Farson of a Russian journey to the Caucasus Mountains, an odyssey undertaken in the company of an eccentric teacher of Russian students, that contains his most fluent, writing.

6. The title was taken from Wordsworth - "Truth has her pleasure-grounds, her haunts of ease and easy contemplation."

7. Among other writers whom H.W. met at occasional gatherings in the West were S.P.B. Mais and Denys Val Baker, whose works might be spotted in a local bookshop. Clearly, H.W.'s reading was on a considerable scale, and it would be interesting to know more about the literary influence of others on him.

8. Though the Hardy work led to Gustav Holst's musical piece, which has the title of *Egdon Heath*.



H.W. COMMEMORATIVE DINNERS

A proposal that members should gather to celebrate Henry's birthday on or about 1st December annually seems to meet with support from those to whom it has been suggested.

Organised regionally to suit the travelling convenience of members, such occasions would serve to keep us in touch and may help recruitment too.

In the Wessex area, Tim Morley is prepared to be the focus, and will canvass Society members within a sensible radius. Other members living further afield may care to develop similar parties. There are a number of itematic possibilities for such events, based on various suppers, dances, dietary references (corned beef and applies?)

Ideas at the A.G.M. perhaps?

OR TO:

TIM MORLEY, Rosehill Lodge, Middle Wallop, Nr.Stockbridge, Hants,SO20 8HW.