

## Reviews

*Pen and Plough –Further broadcasts*, Henry Williamson, with an introduction by John Gregory. Ed. by John Gregory. The Henry Williamson Society, 1993; standard edition, £7.50; limited edition, 50 copies, ¼ morocco, £30.00.

Pen and Plough completes the collection of my father's broadcast essays, once more put together by the indefatigable John Gregory and dedicated to the late and equally hard working John Homan. Most of these short stories, sharp and brilliant enough to make the BBC's Empire Service look for more and yet more, were put out to distant Anglophiles homesick for the green land, on the series 'Green Fields and Pavements', in 1938 and '39. At this time Henry was looking for ways to help pay for the Norfolk farm. Radio talks were useful extra income. First listeners, and now after half a century, readers, are led on the familiar old Pied Piper path across the Forests of Exmoor and the fields of a Norfolk farm. The pictures he makes with his sometimes inventive vocabulary, idiosyncratic thoughts, and sharp eye for speech and colour, are compelling. Devon lanes, Norfolk farm workers, and then, even Marilyn Monroe in an Ilfracombe cinema, are with us as we listened once, or read now.

Then came the literary broadcasts of the 1960s and '70s. One, 'On Writing a Novel Series' in 1961 was re-broadcast on 'Pick of the Week' as I remember. It was beautiful – the simple magic of that first walk down to Putsborough beach in 1916, the crucible from which fifty books poured. Henry wrote as he talked – the final discussions of Blake, Lawrence of Arabia, Conrad, Scott Fitzgerald, bring back such memories of the Old Man as I remember him, off duty and in the home, that reading his words now brings him alive into the room.

Richard Williamson

*The Habit of a Lifetime, an autobiography*, Brocard Sewell, Illus., Tabb House, 1992, £18.95. ISBN 0 907018920.

Father Brocard Sewell, Carmelite priest and man of letters, a Vice President of this Society, knew Henry Williamson well, their friendship arising from the good Father's editorship of the *Aylesford Review*, a literary magazine published by the Carmelite Community at Aylesford Priory. The Winter 1957-58 issue (Vol. II, No. 2) was devoted to the consideration of HW's work and over the several years of the *Aylesford Review's* existence there were many other pieces either by or about him. Father Brocard paid tribute to HW after his death by gathering together a collection of essays on various aspects of his life and work in *Henry Williamson, The Man, The Writings* (Tabb House, 1980).

This present book, his autobiography, is often humorous; not openly or brilliantly, but shrewdly – reminding me of a reticent Evelyn Waugh with that mature over-view of life that helps us to face the absurdities, the liturgies of cant, and the po-faced bullies who hide behind high office. Nothing misses his eye, although to see Fr. Brocard, as I have, over the years, no one would ever know, for though he never stares at you his eye misses nothing that you do.

He was not kowtowed by the life of monasticism, as was poor Gerard Manley Hopkins. His mind is too wiry and enquiring. Everybody interested him, and his book envelops a formidable list of vignettes; not just officers of the church, but

names like Colin Wilson, Eric Gill, and G.K. Chesterton. Aesthetes interest him, so do slim and gorgeous women – you will find many well-known names such as Diana Mosley and Francis Horowitz who come under both headings.

Henry acknowledged his friendship by dedicating the penultimate volume of *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight, Lucifer Before Sunrise* to 'Father Brocard Sewell, O. Carm., R.A.F. (ret'd)'. Henry insisted on pointing out the Air Force service. As an ex-RAF man myself this section of Brocard's book interested me greatly and I longed for more, for some of the war-time adventures are hilarious. But this only one example of the great variety of experiences that are related in this catalogue of events and names spanning most of the twentieth century, a chronicle of a catholic cognoscente.

**Richard Williamson**