

## Book Review

SPRING RETURNING: A selection of the works of James Farrar: Made and introduced by Christopher Palmer 144pp. Photos. Autolyucus Pubs.

I was delighted when, in 1983, Christopher Palmer told me that he was planning a revised edition of the book *The Unreturning Spring*\* out of print for many years, but under the same title as his recently broadcast programme, *Spring Returning*. I remembered how back in 1960 after reading a friend's copy I had sought the book high and low until frustrated I spent many lunch hours copying passage after passage into a notebook so struck had I been by the talent of the young airman author, just as Henry Williamson had been when he first read some short pieces John Middleton Murry had printed in *The Adelphi* magazine in 1946. How Williamson, who had hurried round to see Murry to learn more of James Farrar only to discover he had been killed in his Mosquito aircraft late in 1944, was able to bring together Jim's (as he was best known) prose and poetry into print is well known, and something we must always remain grateful to him for bringing about.

With original and reprint<sup>\*</sup> long out of print the publication of a new version that (one hoped) a new generation would appreciate was indeed good news, and I looked forward eagerly to release day.

Now I must admit that when I first saw the words "a selection..." on the cover of the new book, and counted 137 pages of actual text against the 236 of the original I was worried as to just *what* had been omitted. Gone first of all is Williamson's Introduction - but that is fair enough as Palmer has done his own of 16 pages which is very well done indeed as it not only covers all of the original story of how the book first came about, but brings everything up to date. Particularly well done is the examination of Jim's twin idols in his short life, the writing of Williamson, and the music of Delius. It has obviously been easier for Christopher Palmer to discuss the Williamson side than it was for the latter when writing his own Introduction which naturally was somewhat circumscribed. Additionally, Palmer is a Delian of note and can comment on Jim's feelings for the composer with appreciative understanding.

As to what has been left out, a careful back-to-back check reveals that by and large the 'selection' has been very skilful and I cannot honestly say that if you only have this version on your bookshelf you will have lost much. By far the greatest omissions relate to comments and letters dealing with life in the R.A.F. and the author's progress from station to station during his long period of training as a Navigator. More than enough is left in to give the full flavour of service life in war-time and progress from 'irk' to officer. Only scraps of creative prose are gone, but quite a number of poems have been left out, especially among his earlier attempts written at the age of sixteen or so. This was no doubt the reason why a long letter to his older brother, which in part dealt with the criticism of some of these poems by his brother, was omitted. Personally I think this is a pity as matched against the later poems they illustrate his development in the medium, and the letter could easily have been edited to just the section of self analysis.

As a bonus, the frontispiece photograph of Farrar in the original is replaced by a slightly later portrait, and there are a further twelve pages of illustrations including a water-colour self-portrait, which, apart from one each of Williamson and Delius, have never been previously published.

\* *The Unreturning Spring* by James Farrar. Edited by Henry Williamson: Williams and Norgate, 1950, and with slightly expanded Introduction: Chatto and Windus, 1968.

NOTE: Copies may be ordered direct from AUTOLYUCUS PUBLICATIONS 14 Barlby Road, London W10 6AR (Tel: 01-969 3579) at the published price, post paid.

J.H.