

CURRENT BOOKS

FELLOWS' CHOICE

Recent titles selected and reviewed by Fellows of the Wilson Center

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF HOWARD NEMEROV

by Howard Nemerov
Univ. of Chicago, 1977
534 pp. \$20
L of C 77-544
ISBN 0-226-57258-7

For 30 years Howard Nemerov has been one of America's most consistently graceful formalist poets. This rich collection, which won the National Book Award for Poetry in 1978, gives a clear picture of the scope and moral urgency of his work. Nemerov's attention has always been fixed on the bewildering wealth of America's cultural inheritance and on the ways in which poetry can make our lives not just tolerable but joyful. A poet who has become, in a serious sense, a religious writer, Nemerov has fulfilled a vocation he describes in "The Map Maker on His Art": *My fluent pen/Wanders and cranks as his great river does,/Over the page, making the lonely voyage/Common and human.*

—Frank McConnell ('78)

THE HORSE OF PRIDE: Life in a Breton Village

by Pierre-Jakez Hélias
Yale, 1978, 378 pp. \$15
L of C 78-6929
ISBN 0-300-02036-8

We are engulfed today in a flood of media-made nostalgia—for the corrupt 1920s, the desolate '30s, and more recent uneasy decades. Even the catastrophic years of World War II are made to seem attractive as they recede in time. Professor Hélias's rambling memoir of his Breton childhood (he was born in 1914) is different. The work of an eminent ethnologist, fond, even glowing at times, it has the ring of truth to it. Much that he reports could apply to any self-sufficient rural community a generation or more ago: Anne G. Sneller's elegant *Vanished World*, a 1964 book about upstate New York, immediately came to my mind. But rural Brittany had a special problem. French was a foreign language to many Bretons even in the 1920s. It was rarely heard in Pouldreuzic, Hélias's village (he learned it only in school). Thus, the peasantry about which he writes experienced

not only general economic modernization but also a remarkably rapid integration into another language and culture in the course of one lifetime. Only an insider who had lived through this change and remembered the oral traditions of Brittany's "civilization of the soil" could so compellingly transport us to the world of his grandfather, a man "too poor to buy any other horse" who said, "at least the Horse of Pride will always have a stall in my stable."

—Walter M. Pintner ('78)

**FOUNDATIONS OF
CHRISTIAN FAITH:
An Introduction to the
Idea of Christianity**

by Karl Rahner
Seabury, 1978
485 pp. \$19.50
L of C 77-13336
ISBN 0-8164-0354-6

Germany's Karl Rahner, 74, is the world's best-known Catholic theologian, renowned for his breakthrough thinking on a vast range of difficult questions. At the age of 72, having published many volumes of his collected essays, he composed his first full-scale work of theology, setting forth his reflections on the basic idea of Christianity. His goal was to show the overall intelligibility and credibility of Catholic Christianity without getting entangled in detailed historical or exegetical investigations. This fruit of a lifetime of study and meditation glistens with original insights into nearly every aspect of the Catholic message. Although it lacks the timeliness and passion of some of Rahner's shorter pieces, readers with a taste for the philosophical analysis of religious experience will spontaneously hail *Foundations* as a classic of its kind.

—Avery Dulles, S.J. ('77)

**A PRETTY GOOD CLUB:
The Founding Fathers of
the U.S. Foreign Service**

by Martin Weil
Norton, 1978, 313 pp. \$12.95
L of C 77-25104
ISBN 0-393-05658-9

At the outset the author quotes I.F. Stone: "To do a book on the State Department, you would need Drew Pearson for gossip, Karl Marx for social forces, Henry James for social nuances, and Max Weber for institutional patterns." On his own, Weil does a fine job of telling the story of "a small group of Christian gentlemen who founded the profession of diplomacy on a permanent basis in America" during the first half of this century. Few emerge as heroes. Many emerge as second-raters: in their snobbism, their aping of aristocratic European diplomats, their disdain for Washington and for domestic politics, the