

JOHN
COWPER
POWYS

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The date 1966 holds no particular significance in connection with John Cowper Powys: he has been dead for two and a half years; the centenary of his birth is six years ahead. And the very timelessness of his books—of his thought—seems alien to anniversaries, to sporadic turnings, and, perhaps, to special periodicals such as this. There is no season for elemental themes.

And yet 1966 is signal. More books by John Cowper Powys will be in print before year-end than at any time during his life. With the forthcoming reissues of *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Maiden Castle* by Macdonald and Company and Colgate University Press, fourteen works will be available in England and in America.

To extend this growing interest, PHILOBIBLON is pleased to print, for the first time, an essay written by John Cowper Powys in the early 1930's, shortly after he bought a small farmhouse—Phudd Bottom—near Hillsdale some hundred miles north of New York City. "An Englishman Up-State" is from the collection of Powys manuscripts given to Colgate by Norman H. Strouse—a collection which includes the holographs of *Maiden Castle*, *Porius*, and the *Autobiography*. Following the essay are five reminiscences written, with but one exception, for PHILOBIBLON. On page 16 Louis Wilkinson, the oldest friend of the family, speaks of John and his brothers Theodore and Llewelyn. Russell Speirs, on page 18, recalls bringing Powys to Colgate for a lecture in 1929. On page 23 Kenneth Hopkins, in an article written nearly three decades ago, gives his impressions of a visit to John Cowper in Dorset. Malcolm Elwin, on page 27, tells about his editing of Powys' later works, and on page 30 Thomas Davies, drawing on a recent trip to England and Wales, speaks of other members of the Powys family.

The cover sketch, done in maroon chalk by Ivan Opfer in 1934, is from the Colgate University Powys Collection. Henry Miller sent the tribute to John Cowper Powys illustrated on page 35 to the Colgate Library in October, 1965.

R. L. Blackmore

AN ENGLISHMAN UP-STATE

by
JOHN
COWPER
POWYS

AFTER TRAVELLING about this country for a quarter of a century, I think—as far as a mere foreigner and resident alien can go in such things—I may be said to know it pretty well. I have indeed lectured in nearly every state in the Union, and not, mind you, by any means only in the big towns, but in all sorts of remote little college towns, scattered from coast to coast, and from North Dakota to Louisiana.

There may have been other reasons, beyond pure fastidious choice, for my choosing Columbia County as my resting place; but had I—free from every other cause of decision—pondered at length on the question as to where I would live in all these States I find it hard to imagine any other choice. As a matter of fact it is rather a piquant problem, where, in this enormous land, a typical Englishman of Letters would select the spot wherein to spend his declining years and to lay his bones! Other things being equal—I mean assuming that such an Englishman had no *philosophical* or *professional* predilection for any particular American Scene, such as D. H. Lawrence's for New Mexico or Charley Chaplin's for Hollywood—I think I am right in taking for granted that an alien of this type would select, out of all the rest, the kind of landscape which most nearly reminded him of England. And certainly among all the floating vignettes of rural scenes, those airy memory-pictures from innumerable train-windows and from innumerable explorations on foot through secret by-ways and hidden trails, that come crowding in upon my mind when I am in a mood for calling up the past, not one reminds me of England as does Columbia County, New York.

It has been my custom, in all these twenty-five years of my wanderings through this country, to spend most of the afternoons at the places where I was to speak in the evenings, in going for quite prolonged and sometimes quite exhausting walks. I fear in this matter I displayed a certain lack of responsibility; for since these country colleges paid me for my public

work it was hardly fair to tire myself out for the pleasure of my private sensations. But fair or not it was what I always did; and I used to come back to the small Hotel in these places only just in time to get my supper and change my clothes before giving my lecture; come back very often quite drugged with the country sights and scents I had absorbed into my being from green retreats in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, Maryland, Connecticut, Vermont or Michigan.

Personally—and I expect it is the same with all Englishmen—what I am always on the look-out for in this country is the presence of some kind or species of *hedges*. In Kansas I saw numerous noble hedges composed of Osage-orange bushes; but though arresting in their free beauty, these Kansas hedges—“hardly hedgerows, little lines of sportive wood run wild”—lack that rich intermingling of many various growths which are the pride of the hedges in England. And also of the hedges in Columbia County! From a distance no one could possibly detect the real local origin of these chequered lines of demarcation. Their origin is however unquestionable. They grew where they grew as soon as the old walls, with the lichen-spotted fences balanced above them, began to fall into indistinction. They grew by chance! Chance and chance alone, in this matter of hedges, was the landscape gardener of Columbia County.

It was Nietzsche who expressed the opinion that the psychology of a people comes from the nature of the soil. His own taste leaned in the direction of a light gravelly soil. Certainly the loamy, clayey soil of so much of this country would have seemed very unpromising to him. But Columbia County soil in this respect, although not gravel, would have beautifully hit his fancy; for its slatey stone, interspersed with patches of shiny, quartz-like whiteness, seems to drain off the rain water and to dry itself after a rain fall with astonishing rapidity.

My own house stands at the foot of a wooded hill close to a winding “dirt road,” or lane as we would say on the other side, and it shares with all the other old houses in this county those architectural peculiarities so dear to the old Dutch settlers, a great sloping roof, coming down almost to the ground at the back, and two curious little windows, like peering dolls’ eyes, under the eaves, and close to the wide boards of the attic floor. I boast a stone wall between my front garden and the road, and another stone wall, a very ruinous one, against the ascent to the wooded hill at the back.

Columbia County is indeed not only remarkable for what looks like the

most carefully planted hedges; it is also remarkable for its picturesque stone walls. These walls give me, as an Englishman, a recurrent shock of surprise and pleasure. They are exactly like the stone walls of Derbyshire, my native county in England, but in combination with these artfully balanced rails and poles, some leaning upright and some leaning sideways, and all delicately grey and mistily green, from weather stains and lichen and moss, they have a look that, to my eyes, has something *idealized* about it—too mellow and too beautiful to be quite real—a look as if they belonged to some fabulous Arcadia where the walls had slowly subsided into the kindly earth by reason of there being no person nor animal against whom they assert exclusive property rights. And just as these ancient lichen-covered fences, drooping with the weight of at least a century, and sinking down amid the slowly sinking stones, evoke a feeling of peaceful melancholy that is indescribable, so the fact that there is no physical and no moral reason, to be stayed or held up by any wall or fence in this region gives you the feeling that in such a communistic Arcadia the right of being a man with two legs over-rides all proprietary restrictions.

Half a century ago there was an old retired sailor living in this house of mine and it appears that he earned his living partly by practising the art of a barber in what is now my kitchen and partly by rebuilding these stone walls. Considering that no mortar was ever used, and the whole thing was a matter of exquisite balancing, this latter task must have been quite as difficult as trimming the beards of that formidable generation, and I like to think that there was even then something about Columbia County that could bewitch a sea-faring adventurer into making it his home.

There is a stream or "creek" in front of my house which has an enchanting bed of many-coloured stones. Under the pressure of the water all manner of delicate rose-tints and greenish moss-like markings and amber-coloured emblazonings variegate, in the most daedalian way, this stony water-course; but my river is an "enchanted" one, in a less pleasing sense too, for during certain months in the summer its waters sink down completely out of sight, and these beautiful stones are left so long in the hot sun that before the rains bring back the water, or draw up the water to the surface from its subterranean bed, all kinds of delicate flowering plants spout up between them. My brother Llewelyn, who came here fresh from his famous Syrian excursion, used to call my dried up river-bed a "Wady"; but I doubt if in any "Wady" in Palestine the Lord preserves his little fishes in such

snug basins between the big stones, whence with a modicum of scooping they can be conveyed at the drying up of the waters to the deeper pools.

This stream that runs through my field on the other side of the road remained anonymous to me for three years. But I now learn that it is called the Agawamuk, a name which belongs, so I am assured, to one of the Mohawk tribes. It gives me a peculiar satisfaction to learn this and to know that, as Vachel Lindsay puts it, "There's a Mohawk in the Sky" among these pleasant fields. Personally I confess,—and I fancy, for all D. H. Lawrence's eccentric predilections, it is a natural English preference—I have always greatly preferred these nomadic Indians of the Easterly States over their sacerdotal, artistic, idolatrous brethren of New Mexico. I have never "Cottoned," as they say, to Lawrence's exacting Quetzalcoatl, and all the sacrifices of these turquoise collectors leave me cold. I hold by my childhood's Hiawatha, and the purer, more elemental cult of the formless Great Spirit! But I do believe there is something about Columbia County—some kind of spiritual aura—that goes back to these Indians—whether Mohawk or otherwise—and it is most interesting to me to note the way in which this ancient "Culture" while overlaid by the friendly customs of the Dutch settlers who succeeded them, can be, at any rate imaginatively, called up—as Glendower called up his Welsh spirits—out of the vasty deep.

One such aboriginal—I forget his tribe but he was a great Chief—came to tea with my brother when we both lived in Patchin Place and we were dumbfounded by the man's inherent grandeur and the stupendous massiveness of his head. I can tell you our own Neanderthal pates—no paltry skulls as skulls go—were reduced to something positively finicking in the presence of this overpowering cranium. Such were the personalities I make no doubt who formerly in Columbia County saluted the sun and obeyed the night.

What a place Columbia County must have been in those days—a kind of vast wooded Shropshire as I would imagine it, quarrelled over between the great Van Rensselaer Lords of the Marches and ragamuffin puritans from over the border! I would like to be able to get one glimpse of it as it was then. The spot to go to, to be inspired with such a vision, would be one of these little over-grown graveyards lost, or in the process of being lost, in the midst of these hills. Slowly, into the same kind of indistinction as the old stone walls, these ancient tombs lapse and fall and

crumble. No lively relatives, after half a century of oblivion, come to bring flowers on Decoration Day to these "rude forefathers" of Columbia County. The memory of them has faded away; and their very names are erased by slugs and snails and brambles and rain and moss. These are the graveyards of the *great-grandparents* of Columbia County. Our grandparents we do consider and remember. *Their* graves and the graveyards where they lie are strictly, neatly, tenderly, piously attended. What a contrast it is! If you walk along a solitary lane between almost any of these hills you will come upon one of these deserted graveyards. Such a spot is a very curious place on the surface of the earth. Here is humanity forgotten by humanity! Here lie our great-grandfathers, watched over by woodchucks and skunks, and in excrescences of their monuments affording comfort and protection to grass-snakes and adders!

It would need the genius of the poet Masters to bring this beauty into relief, and I believe he *has* got his eye upon this region; but no poet, no! not our modern Chaucer himself, could catch the full pathos of these derelict graves.

It is the *roundness* of the wooded hills in this country that give such a peculiar character to the scenery. In other respects, especially where the woods have been cut down and there are wide-stretching sloping fields in their place and open expanses of soft, smooth, cattle-pasturing grass, the region as I have hinted has a very English look. I have seen districts in Derbyshire, in Shropshire and even in Somerset, that it resembles closely—always excepting these round-topped wooded hills. But these hills give it the strangest look! Often, as I ponder upon what it may be of which these queer round hills remind me, I recall as a child how in trying to reproduce the impression of one of Derbyshire's many high grassy hills in the soft mud of our Vicarage garden I daubed it over with moss until it became for me a mountain of mystery, a sacred mountain. That is really what Columbia County is like! It is like a rolling valley of green tumuli, so overgrown with thick soft undulating moss, that they become "mountains of mystery"!

Yes, there is no escaping from the fact that there is something mystical and awe-inspiring about Columbia County; and remembering how in that mud-heap by the edge of the shrubbery, with green moss, I am tempted to explain this sense of "Tremendum Mysterium" by the lingering on in my mind of that ancient classical superstition about Sacred Mounts. Certainly

when seen at twilight, before the winter divests them of their leaves, these rounded hills have a most extraordinary appearance. In this appearance they are totally un-English. Nor does the look they present seem to me at all tropical. They look like green grave-mounds—hundreds of green graves—and as you contemplate them, as it is very easy to do, without seeing a sign of a house or of a barn in your scope of vision, you very quickly come to regard this whole region as a vast battleground of prehistoric earth-giants.

It is wonderful to have a river just across the road from your door and to be able to watch it foaming down in miniature rapids while you stand on the bank. In the summer that arresting flower, the blue *Mimulus*, with a reddish stalk and moist glossy leaves grows there, out of the very cracks in the stone; and it is there in a hot parched season that I have actually seen, working themselves along, like eels, over a slab of waterless stone, a procession of little trout, seeking, as our modern starved emotions do in T. S. Eliot's *Wasteland*, some place where a drop of water may be found. Not many people have, I submit, seen fish, even little ones, moving in line along the dry land! But as an Englishman, born in Derbyshire and bred in Dorset and Somerset, I have a natural mania for wild animals, wild birds, wild plants. You can believe how carefully I have counted the occasions when I have seen deer. A stag, so far, I have not seen; but I have heard the men and the dogs on his track, and my hope has always been: that "close couched where thickets shed cold dews and wild flowers on his head" he "hears the baffled dogs in vain rave through the hollow pass amain, chiding the rocks."

Mr. Boissevain with Miss Millay the poet were, among the people I know, the first to discover this singular Arcadia. Mr. Boissevain, a European of Europeans, loves this place as a spot on the earth's surface where you can walk for miles and meet not one single fellow creature! This is literally true. I touch wood and cry "absit omen!" but only once in my four years' life here have I met another human being on these hills—and *they* were only a group of transient city children at whose presence you would have to be a very selfish misanthrope to grumble.

This very day, taking my neurotic black spaniel for his walk before breakfast, I saw a typical Columbia County sight. There, in the dazzling zenith-azure, was a huge light brown hawk—in the flashing morning sun his great wings showed transparent, radiant, white as snow—being fairly hunted back into those glistening sun regions of his eagle home by

a crowd of egg-sucking crows.

In the matter of butterflies I am constantly baffled by the difficulty of finding in my enormous butterfly-book specimens that I have seen again and again and have indeed grown completely familiar with. The first butterfly however that I saw *this* year—"and the Spring comes slowly up this way"—was very familiar to me in Europe, if not in England; for with us it is rare, though by no means unknown. This was what at home we call "The Camberwell Beauty"—a great rose-purple butterfly with white embroidered fringes to its broad wings.

But with the flora of Columbia County I am in a much stronger position than with the birds and the butterflies. Plants cannot fly away; and for some reason botanists—though often cold, inhuman, detached, and crochety individuals—are better, when it comes to illustrating their texts, than either ornithologists or entomologists. What caricatures, what parodies of birds have I seen in our little guide books, both with regard to shape and with regard to colour! What a person really wants is a Bewick for Columbia County—and if such an impossibility could be imagined—a Bewick whose pictures were coloured!

Perhaps my sole successful discovery, made entirely *on my own*, in the matter of birds was the nest of the *Pipilo Erythrophthalmus*, commonly known as the Towhee or Chewink, whose eggs were of a lovely greyish tint dotted at the larger ends by goldenish hieroglyphs. I refrain from taking any of this Towhee's eggs for fear of making the bird desert; though now I am tempted to regret my virtue, because I find that American bird-books, unlike English bird-books, give no pictures of the eggs. My book says that the eggs of the *Pipilo Erythrophthalmus* are white, with reddish brown dots over the whole surface. Such is not my memory of them. To my eyes they were of a greyish tinge and had very irregular markings. I cannot recall whether Thoreau ever deals with the eggs of the *Erythrophthalmus*; but if *he* said they had dots over the whole surface I would yield the point.

But when it comes to flowers it is a totally different story. As recently as yesterday I found a flower completely unknown to me which I find to be the "Stiff Gentian" as differentiated from the "Blind Gentian" which I have found before and the "Fringed Gentian" which I have never found. But with what pleasure I have found—and anyone who knows how soon we grow acquainted with all the commoner plants in England will understand

my feeling of enraptured discovery—in the wooded hills behind my house that enchanting sulphur-coloured flower the "Smooth False Foxglove," and in a swamp about a mile away "Water Avens," that curious sorcerer's plant, with its stiff reticent blooms, like heathen requiem-bells dipped in the blood of wounded satyrs!

But if the flowers of Columbia County captivate me and absorb me, its trees especially in the valleys are even more arresting. There is for example one of the noblest Plane-trees I have ever seen—in this land called a Sycamore—which stands overlooking a lane and a rapid stream bordered by Alders. There are remnants about its roots of one of these ancient stone walls and in the strength of its upward growth it has actually caught up a great stone, as heavy a stone as a man could lift, and absorbed it into its own trunk, so that the vegetable substance of the tree has come to enclose the mineral substance of this stone, both of them, as in some mystical theological doctrine, blending their diverse essences together! I have named this great tree "The Plane of Cos," because in my Loeb Edition of Hippocrates there is a picture of such a tree, thousands of years old. But I have seen Plane-trees in England. The tree which is entirely new to me is the rough-barked Hickory, a magnificent specimen of which I find I have purchased with my Columbia County plot of ground. Like some great pillar of submarine coral—coral the colour of earth-mould—its trunk stands, and the rough curves of its amazing barks are as intricate and delicate, as your eye follows them upward, as the fern-like markings of hoarfrost upon a window.

One very interesting thing has come to endear me especially to this district and that is the surprising way the most modern inventions exist side by side with the most primeval and ancestral ways of life. Every farmer has his car, for instance, and in a curiously communistic way not only will the same perambulatory engine be used at all the farms in a given neighbourhood to get the corn chopped up and slung into the Silos, but the men themselves, according to an ancient collectivist custom, will proceed in a body from farm to farm at hay-carrying, corn-cutting, or even corn-husking times and be feasted by each house-wife in turn. The corn is cut by hand, however, the instrument used being a steel blade fixed at an acute angle into a helve of sturdy wood; and when it is "carried," the Columbia County conveyance that is employed is certainly the most primeval kind of wagon I have ever seen.

It was my old friend Arthur Ficke, that fine lyric poet of classic prestige, who made smooth my settling in this spot, and I live like a crochety parson at the foot of the high hill from which our poetry-composing squire contemplates his chosen landscape.† Ficke, in his time, has been a considerable traveller, and is an adept upon Japanese Prints; and I often feel as if it could hardly be by chance that this interpreter of the amenities and subtleties of these old exclusive traditions should live under the protection of two monumental Pines and a seignorial Chestnut-tree.

Of course along with the chance sown hedges and the primeval wagons and the ruined stone walls there does exist, scattered over this enchanted scenery, that curious air of untidiness, that sense of litter and confusion and hugger-mugger casualty which is so inseparable from any American scene. The sight of all this tangled under-growth and the sight of these huge dead trees standing erect where they died would quickly show I was not in the Old World, where people have lived their settled, if penurious, lives for so long. In fact you have the feeling, even where the laborious old Hollanders have worked most hard, that Nature is always waiting, ready to over-flow it all again in a great sea of recurrent tangle!

And it is all so virgin of *names*, this splendid unspoilt free landscape! People speak of a field simply as the "north lot" or the "south lot" that in Wessex would have some quaint historic designation carrying the mind back to the Vikings or to the Danes or to some Monastic Foundation of the time of King Stephen.

But this curious anonymity in Columbia County has given a splendid opportunity to one aspect of my Wordsworthian mind. Just as that old horse-faced incorrigible pedestrian has his "Poem on the Naming of Places" so I have amused myself by "christening," if I can call it so, every stump and stone, every rock, swamp and rivulet in this virginal Arcadia by some appellation drawn from my own people, my own history, my own gods. But I have not neglected our great Americans either. When Edgar Lee Masters came to visit the Parson of Phudd Bottom, I could hardly restrain my impatience to take him over hill and dale and show him "Master's Stone," a great, lonely, out-cropping rock, white and glittering, like the head of the Lord in the Apocalypse. Even Dreiser, who has been known to eat breakfast at the Parsonage and dine at the Great House, suffered

† Arthur Davidson Ficke (1883-1945) is buried in a grove of trees atop this hill.--Ed.

himself to be conducted by me till I could show him the Suffering Tree, a young heroic Ash, that upheld in its mortuary piety the enormous dead trunk of its progenitor.

Every district, all over this terrestrial globe, may be found to have some especial *sacred moment* in the annual revolution of the seasons, some moment when the deeper Platonic essence of its inmost identity rises up and asserts itself. Such a moment for Columbia County comes at the end of the Fall, at the first sign of the approach of Winter. For it is *for the Winter*, for those long months under the burden of snow that everything in this Arcadian retreat arranges itself, orientates itself, and finds its deepest and most inherent explanation. That "aquarelle" or "pastel" look, that virginal look, so strangely colourless and neutral and chaste, that the atmosphere of this place possesses—what is the cause of it? Nothing but the fact that for almost a half of the year the land lies hushed, silent, dead, sepulchred in white snow!

The most characteristic thing in Columbia County, its explanation, its secret, its symbol is the magic power of *hibernation*. Men and beasts and reptiles—nay! the fishes in the rivers and the very weeds by the way-side—are born to live by the greatest and the oldest of all mortal arts, the art of hibernation. And it is this, the fact that the woodchucks and snakes and squirrels of Columbia County set an example that we all follow that gives a peculiar heightening, almost an epic heightening, to our laborious storing away of the earth's riches, to our preserving of fruits and nuts and berries, to our salting down of meats, nay! even to our thrifty and almost fetish-like attitude towards our savings as they lie safe "in banco." This last aspect of the spirit of hibernation has recently received a severe shock; but it has been a wonder to me, as an outsider, to observe the stoical and cheerful spirit in which the "shakiness"—to put it gently—of the banking business has been accepted among us—very much as a bad season is accepted—without bearing anyone any particular grudge.

Yes, the Winter months are the real culmination of our life here. They are the heavenly Nirvana that is to free us from the teasing bustle of Being. In the Winter for example we cease to receive expensive visitors from the city. We are *what we are* in the Winter in unapproachable felicity. And what a consummation it is to all our toilings and worries, what a mysterious Peace of God, when, as the thermometer goes down and down and down, we can actually feel the mystic purgation of the frost, actually

hear the planetary shivering of the telegraph wires of Space, and the intense tinkle of the sleigh-bells of Time, as "the welkin rings" to its own crystalline constriction!

Certainly this is a good place to live in for anyone who worships the elements. Only once in my life have I seen the Aurora Borealis; and that was in the middle of the night from above this Columbia County lane. But to my hyperborean soul the most wonderful thing of all about this place is a certain strange golden light, a rich mediaeval red-gold light, that is liable to fall at any time of the year, though perhaps most often in the Spring, clean across these wooded hills, making them like enchanted forests in an ancient Teutonic fairy-tale! This burnished glimmer, like the wavering light reflected from the bronze armour of a great king's bodyguard, is the other symbolic clue to Columbia County. In fact in this favoured spot we get the two extremes of human experience, the satisfaction of our craving for peace and security, and the satisfaction of our craving for the unusual and the strange. Under the flickering spears and burnished shields of these natural elements we can feel both these satisfactions. For even at the moment we are enjoying the homely protection of the familiar banks of the Agawamuk there can pass shivering through us a touch, a breath, a vibration, like the Pilgrim's chorus in Tannhauser, of the mystic tremor of the real Gothic North.



Phudd Bottom
(and Kenneth
Hopkins)
March,
1965

THE BROTHERS POWYS

Has it ever happened before that each one of three brothers is so distinguished in literature as John Cowper, Theodore Francis, and Llewelyn, these three brothers Powys?

There are now more readers and admirers of John Cowper than of the other two. He is the most prolific and writes the longest novels. He is not my favourite Powys writer, but this is because of my reluctance to read long novels and long sentences. "One of the great sprawlers of literature," Angus Wilson has called him; "his same rascally old style" is the phrase of another critic. Sometimes a sentence of John Cowper's will resemble some queer mythical invertebrate animal, or even monster, breeding from itself as it uncoils. He was for many years a lecturer, and he often writes rhetorically. As a lecturer and as a companion he had the rare power of drawing from his hearers their best qualities. "He makes you feel important," one of his hearers said of him. He was the most eloquent speaker that I have heard, his only fault being, as in his writing, that he went on too long, so that even his eloquence would wear down patience a little. But no criticism can discount the genius that will endure in his writing as it cannot in his spoken words. In the greater passages of his work there is genius that makes a complete and overwhelming conquest.

There is no resemblance between these brothers as writers. Each of them knows and loves Nature, but Nature has a different meaning for each. John Cowper animates, humanizes Nature, whereas to Theodore Francis Nature is an expression of God, a revealer of God. The chief value of Nature to him is that it brings him thoughts about God. "The people of the earth are clay pieces that the moods of God kindle into life." "I have tried to escape," he also writes, "but the moods of God have hunted me out." John Powys has said that Theodore is the most original of his family, and I feel that this is true. His conception of God is in some respects unlike any other conception, and his style is entirely his own, though influenced by the Bible and by Bunyan. It is direct and clear, with a force of its own. His humour and wit are his own, so are his irony

Louis Wilkinson has known the Powys family for more than eighty years. His *Welsh Ambassadors*, written under the *nom de plume* Louis Marlow, is a biographic study of the Powyses; his autobiographic novels *Swan's Milk* and *Forth, Beast!* present vivid portraits of the Powyses. He lives now at Haselbury Bryan, Dorset.

and his sense of good and evil. He is a careful craftsman, though not too careful. As to his material, "I like best," he has written, "a story about ordinary people, and then for something odd to come in."

Llewelyn, of the three, is most in love with Life. He relished most keenly every moment of living, as is seen clearly in all his work. His observation of life and Nature is realistic; he knows well and graphically describes Nature's many aspects, and is affectionately familiar with animals and flowers. *The Twelve Months* is a good illustration of this. In *Love and Death* he shows most movingly his sense of the Beauty of passionate love, to which Nature is seen not only as a background, for the two are poetically as well as realistically interfused. Llewelyn, unlike John with his mysticism and polytheism, and unlike Theodore with his controlling belief in his own God, is not of any religion, western or eastern. He does not believe in God nor in personal immortality, and this lack of belief makes his love of life on earth all the stronger. In style, Llewelyn shows some influence by classical English writers, but this does not make his writing any the less easily intelligible, though it may account for his not being nearly so widely read as he should be. Both he and Theodore, who in earlier days was the most celebrated of the three, are now less well known. This is, I am sure, only temporary, for the qualities of the work of Theodore and of Llewelyn are enduring.

Both still have ardent devotees, though less in number than those of John Cowper Powys, who is no less, but, I think, no more sure of survival.



John Cowper Powys:
an early
lecture-tour
photograph

A MAN FROM THE WEST COUNTRY

Anyone with half-open eyes could recognize him as an ace, not a die. There could be no one else like him. When I looked at him I did not think of other human beings; I thought of things in Nature to which he seemed to me to owe kinship: great crag, or crag-haunting bird—osprey or eagle. The man was elemental and exceeded human dimensions. The magnificence of sea-birds showed in his beak-like nose and his untamed black hair. Without knowing anything about the inner man, anyone might guess that a being so imposing outwardly must have a shining spiritual counterpart. I had read his novel *Wolf Solent* and I had sat in a Syracuse University auditorium where what was at once luxuriant and wild in the man's imagination seemed at home in an atmosphere of Victorian Gothic; and where, like one who had brought with him his own sea-breeze and mountain air, he freshened the works of contemporary writers and hypnotized his listeners out of sleep into full wakefulness.

Walking up to him, I said, "I'm from Colgate University. I've come to take you there." He held out a hand and fixed me with a steady gaze. Under the beetling eyebrows, his black eyes looked into me in a most penetrating way, discovering such things in me, I felt, as I would have kept from all the world. I recognized in that moment, the kinship between the half-mystical *Wolf Solent* in the novel and John Cowper Powys in the *Utica Railway Station*.

"Could you possibly lend me ten dollars?" he said. "You know, I often set out without having made proper preparations for a journey. I've been surprised before now with no money at all, or very little, in my pocket."

I took out my wallet. I knew exactly how much I had in it—one ten-dollar bill and a one-dollar bill. I often traveled in those days with less than that. It was the year 1929 and I was a college instructor. I dreaded embarrassment and was easily embarrassed. While extracting the ten-dollar

Russell Speirs, poet, playwright, and Professor of English Literature, has taught at Colgate University since 1923. A letter received with these reminiscences appears at the end of his article.

bill, I held the wallet in such a way that John Cowper Powys could not see that I had only one dollar left. But oh those piercing eyes that had found me out! Might they not be able to see through leather too?

He must have sensed that the young man driving the open-air Dodge car with smooth tires was no more sure of himself than of the antique he was steering; for he spoke of ordinary matters, admired the snow-covered hills in sunlight, regretted the neglected and decaying houses in villages, told me of other places he had been in America. Finally, hesitantly, I asked him something about *The Brothers Karamazov*. We forgot the white hills, the broken houses, the other parts of the country. I stopped worrying about a possible blow-out. I listened, as enraptured as I had been on first hearing the fabulous man in beautiful Crouse College Auditorium earlier that fall. And as I listened I had the illusion that the man talking to me was not the Englishman, John Cowper Powys, but the Russian, Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoevski. My remarkable companion had so completely projected himself into the spiritual realm of another individual that he had for the time being all but cancelled his own identity. He had, as it were, become his subject by impassioned contemplation of it.

The coming of John Cowper Powys to Hamilton was, although I did not realize it at the time, the beginning of the Colgate Concert and Lecture Series. Awed by the splendor of Mr. Powys' platform performance in Crouse College earlier that fall, with unaccustomed bravado I had visited Colgate's president, Dr. George Barton Cutten, in his office, telling him that we *must* find means for letting Hamilton residents and Colgate students and faculty hear the great man. Doctor Cutten listened sympathetically. "But," he said, "you must know that we have no funds set aside for paying speakers. Have you anything to suggest?"

My heart became suddenly heavy. "No," I said.

"Well," said the President, smiling broadly and slightly amused by my sudden despair, "I *do* have something to suggest."

I essayed a smile. "Please tell me," I said.

Dr. Cutten, wise enough not to like anything to come too easily to anyone, said, "If this man is the platform marvel you insist he is, it should be your role to persuade the English Department to sell tickets enough to pay the speaker"

On the night of December 9, 1929, the Colgate Chapel had few empty seats. Townspeople, students and faculty had come in great numbers to

hear John Cowper Powys. Professors E. W. Smith, Stanley Baldwin, and Carl Kallgren looked pleased. They had worked hard persuading other professors, townspeople, and students to buy tickets at fifty cents each. The usual Chapel speaker was a returned missionary—always good, often dull. John Cowper Powys, the first literary man of stature to visit Colgate, would be different. In the Chapel that winter night he spoke as one who had had both a blood and a spirit transfusion from the author whose work he was praising and appraising. He was aglow from the central light in the mind and heart of his subject. On the platform, tall, dark, mercurial, he glided about like a man possessed. He had, more than any other person I have ever heard, the ability to make great numbers of people feel that reading good books can be an experience attended by excitement and delight. His own speech was as spontaneous as birdsong. Loud and prolonged was the applause of the Hamilton-Colgate audience. And I found myself telling myself, "It's going to be rough on the next good man from China or Africa."

The day after the lecture Doctor Spencer, Colgate's librarian, and Miss Elsie Guller, his assistant, were busy removing dusty masterpieces from shelves. Business at the library was brisker than it had been in a long, long time. "I just wish we had duplicate copies of all those books he spoke about," Miss Guller said. As for the members of the English Department, they hoped that enthusiasm would stay alive in those persons whose names were on the waiting lists.

The English Department had, perhaps for the first time, a balance at the local bank. In due time the department brought other literary figures to the campus: Robert Frost, the Abbé Dimnet, Louis Untermeyer, and William Butler Yeats. Thereafter, organization took over from spontaneity. But it was the rapt eruptive genius of a man from the west country, who could make spoken prose sing like the highest poetry, that was the origin and impetus of the Colgate Concert and Lecture Series.

Before the lecture, while we were having dinner at the Colgate Inn, some service club was meeting in an adjoining room. The songs were sentimental and patriotic. Mr. Powys listened and smiled. "American women are not so silly as American men," he said. "They never carry on that way in public. They have clubs, but they talk about art and poetry, things that take them meaningfully out of their routine."

At a near-by table someone was loudly criticizing a busy waitress for

what he called poor service. Mr. Powys listened to the man, who seemed to want to be heard by everyone. Then he said to me, "I always like to be especially considerate of waitresses and other servants of the public." When the same waitress, harried and unhappy, came to serve us, Mr. Powys spoke to her wittily and pleasantly. He did everything he could to bring a smile to her face. What he said affected me too, of course. I made certain that Mr. Powys saw the tip I left for the girl. It was much bigger than tips I was in the habit of leaving. I left it gladly. I wished that the villain in the little drama, the sharp-tongued man at the near-by table, might see it too. But Mr. Powys saw it, the girl would see it and gather it in. Three would be made happy by the compassionate nature of a man who could not be too self regarding or too busy to react to little things and little people brought into his life by chance. Without such a concern, I thought, he could not have created a Wolf Solent or have seen deep into the hearts of Dostoevski's people, just as Shakespeare, had he overlooked Feeble, never could have created Hamlet.

John Cowper Powys wrote me a letter and enclosed a cheque for the ten dollars he had borrowed. I, being a most careless caretaker of treasures of any kind, of course lost the letter. I remember that it was a kindly letter. I can never forget the man who wrote it, simple and complex at once; like the enduring granite and the daisy waving near it in the wind.

To the Editor:

I find that I cannot recreate precisely what John Cowper Powys said about Dostoevski or others. All I can do is try to recreate moments that had an aura of immortality about them. I could go into detail about the man's striding across the speaker's platform in the very act of creating something with words that might not come to him ever, while writing, not even in a tenth revision. It was his spontaneous creating of a temporary masterpiece in the presence of listeners that made him the attractive figure he was to audiences. But I cannot, for the life of me, find words that would come near to matching the words he must have overheard from attending spirits there on the platform.

Maybe I should have left out names of Colgate professors, for example, as they have relevance for the local scene only. I tried not to intrude my person too much, but I found I could not say anything real about Powys without indicating his effect upon me, a rather timid, insecure teacher,

twenty-eight years old and not at all sure of myself. I wanted to suggest that Powys was as considerate of poor me as he was of the poor waitress.

I could not write about how the students reacted individually, or how he answered questions, without being untrue. Of course, he didn't answer questions from the platform. In his own amazing way he made a work of art that would have delighted Aristotle, with a beginning, a middle, an end. He was artist enough to know when to stop.

After he had spoken his masterpiece (what a pity it could not have been tape recorded!), he did, of course, answer questions of interested students. I do not want to speculate about how much was ham and how much was divination. I remember the scene at the Inn with the waitress because it affected me profoundly. But were I to try to recall the words he uttered about Joyce or Gide, I'd be inventing. I was profoundly moved by the man. I wanted to convey that to the reader. How can one speak without hyperbole of one who was wedded to it? And if, in relating the man to natural phenomena, I sound like Dylan Thomas remembering Ann Jones, I plead the same reason.



John Cowper Powys
and Kenneth
Hopkins
July 24, 1937

A VISIT TO JOHN COWPER POWYS

JULY 1937

Mr. John Cowper Powys lives in Wales, but he has been staying close to Bournemouth for a few days and I have had an opportunity to pay him a visit.

He wrote: "We are lodging with Hilda Smith—remember Hilda—the daughter-in-law of old Shepherd Smith, Henry Smith I believe is that old gentleman's name, and Hilda married his son, another Mr. Smith whose first name escapes me. Mrs. Legg will tell you though—anyway, in East Chaldon all know all!"

So it was that in the early evening of Saturday last I was walking along that road and we met, I and he and the dog "Very Old," close by the dairy. "What a romantic meeting! How splendid to meet so!" he said as we shook hands, and then: "Coom along . . . Very Old!—the Man's not stopping! Coom along . . . Black!" and we walked the few remaining yards to his lodging.

We discussed Mr. Powys' forthcoming book which contains what Dorothy Richardson has called the finest description ever written of the landscape of Hell. I must not indicate too much of the plot but it concerns a descent into Hell and a number of exciting adventures from which the narrator is finally extricated by Socrates and safely returned to Earth and the homes of men. Mr. Powys read some poems in his musical voice, giving each word and thought the full value intended by the poet:

*"You've had your way and I have done your will;
Now there is time for thought and for repose;*

Kenneth Hopkins, British poet, novelist, and critic, is poet-in-residence and Associate Professor of English at Southern Illinois University one semester each year. His *Collected Poems* was published in 1965, and his *The Powys Brothers: A Biographical Appreciation* will appear in the fall, 1966. This sketch, written in his youth when he was an apprentice ironmonger in Bournemouth, has not been revised for this first printing. The sonnet quoted is his.

*But in my thought and rest you beckon still—
 'Give more, give all, give more than all'—I chose
 No simple lover lovely though you are,
 Unlearned in love, in artifice unskilled,
 Lacking deceptive wiles to maim and mar—
 Yet you have made me do the thing you willed.
 Will you blend love with liking or with shame?—
 Or mix two separate loves to shape and spoil
 The reasoned, balanced, finished thing you name
 So lightly as 'our love'—this seeming foil
 That sets two hearts to conflict or concur,
 To be love's maker or its murderer?*

"Isn't that an excellent thing! and how the first line calls to mind that other fine old sonnet beginning 'Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part!' The sonnet is a fine, fluid medium, and can be wonderful in the hands of a master like Milton or Wordsworth. I have often thought how fine an essay could be made upon those 'controversial' sonnets, as I call them, of Milton; they are humorous and political and yet genuine poetry: and how well they can be read even today! This series of sonnets treat largely of Milton's own day, and nothing else like them exists in our literature; take that one beginning: 'A book was writ of late called Tetrachordon' referring to Sir John Cheke who 'taught'st Cambridge and King Edward Greek.' "

Speaking of modern reviewers, Mr. Powys mentioned the clever young man who boasted of his own ignorance of Poe, whose life by Edward Shanks he had been delegated to review, and deplored the modern tendency for critics to be not men of learning and fine critical ability like George Saintsbury or W. P. Ker, but merely novelists scarce able competently to write their own books, let alone judge of others. Mr. Powys told how a chapter of his book *Visions and Revisions* was read every day to Thomas Hardy, whose copy was splendidly bound and kept always in the drawing room upon a little table. Hardy liked best the essay on Shelley and least that on Dante. Even after Mr. Hardy died the book remained in place and Mr. Powys remembers exactly where to seek it when he visits Mrs. Hardy.

Miss Sylvia Townsend Warner called during the evening with books brought from Spain after her recent visit; we then talked of politics but Mr. Powys sees little virtue in any of the present systems. He is an

individualist and seeks only peace and an unmolested life having not to concern himself in the ways of a world with whose constant warring he has no sympathy.

Mr. Powys admired my staff, which is the same "Exbatterpate 5" whose single blow slew that bull on Dartmoor; Mr. Powys has an even larger staff yet more solidly shod with iron, fit to beat in the toughest skull, but he mourned the loss of "Sacred" and "Precious" noble staves now no more. I said that all good things pass away and are lost to us, notably those things whose value we have discovered only when too late: "That's very true, Kenneth Hopkins, that's very true!" I took my leave.

The early morning of Sunday was very clear though cloudy, and from "The Five Mary's" Mr. Powys and I surveyed all the landscape of Wessex which Thomas Hardy and Theodore Powys and Llewelyn Powys and John Cowper himself have pictured. We picked out Badbury Rings and the tower on the Drax estate near Wimborne and the Hardy monument beyond Dorchester; but next moment Mr. Powys was busy replanting an uprooted flower found dying at his feet, and speaking the names of several other flowers, "Rest Harrow," "Shaking Grass," "Ragged Robin" and "Wolf's Bane," telling how his father taught his sons every bird and flower of the Somerset lanes around Montacute.

We spoke of his books and those of his brothers; I suggested that his "Autobiography" was his best book and would always be read: "Well! I'm very glad to hear you say that, Hopkins! I remember Llewelyn saying to me on our last stay together in New York—I remember the very place—he startled me so—it was the street which he always called Fosse Way—Seventh Avenue—he said, 'Do you realize we shall be remembered when we are dead?—we're writers, John, we're not dizzards!' and it gave me a terrific shock, because I've always worshipped writers and as a youth I read all those lines in 'English Men of Letters' and 'Great Writers,' which proved afterwards a fine help in lecturing. But Theodore is the most original of us all, Theodore will always be read, always—but he lacks Llewelyn's and my vitality—Theodore can't even get up in the mornings!"

The time came for me to go and I left Mr. Powys at the gate of his brother Theodore's house, with a last hand-shake and a last wave of the hand and his voice following me up the valley: "Coom along . . . Very Old . . . the friend's gone!"

An Englishman Up-State.
or
Columbia County, New York.

After travelling about this country
a quarter of a century,
for a ~~quarter of a century~~ I think — as ~~far as~~
far as ~~quarers~~ ^{foreigners} and ^{residents} alien ~~can go~~
can go in with ~~them~~ ^{them}, I ~~think~~
be said to know it ~~pretty well~~
~~pretty well~~ pretty well. I have indeed
lectured in ^{many} states in the Union, ~~and~~
and not, mind you, by any means only in the big towns,
but in all sorts of remote little ~~colleges~~ college-towns,
scattered from coast to coast, and from North Dakota to
~~Louisiana~~ Louisiana.

There may have been other reasons, beyond
mere fortuitous choice, for my choosing Columbia
County as my resting-place; ~~but had I~~
~~but had I~~ but had I — free
from every other ~~cause of decision~~ cause of decision —
pondered at length ~~on~~ on the question as to
where I would live in all these States I find
it hard to imagine any other choice.

As a matter of fact it is rather a big question, ~~where~~
where, in this enormous land, ~~as a~~
as a typical Englishman of letters would select ~~to~~
the spot ^{to spend} his declining years ~~and~~ ~~to~~ lay his bones!

Other things being equal — I mean assuming that
such an Englishman had no historical or
professional predilection for any ^{particular} American scene, such as
D. H. Lawrence's for New Mexico or Charley Chaplin's
for Hollywood — I think I am right in
~~taking for granted that~~ taking for granted that ~~an~~
~~alien of this type would select, out of all~~
an alien of this type would select, out of all
the rest, ~~the~~ kind of landscape which most
~~of~~ nearly reminded him of England —
And certainly ~~among~~ among ~~all~~ the ~~floating~~
floating vignettes ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~country~~

An Englishman Up-State, page one,
from the Colgate Powys Collection

JOHN
COWPER
POWYS:
PUBLISHING
HIS LATER WORKS

It was Edward Garnett who introduced me to the work of John Cowper Powys. He was chief reader and literary adviser to Jonathan Cape, who published my biographies of Charles Reade and Thackeray in 1931 and 1932, and in either one year or the other Cape invited me to lunch with him and Garnett at a restaurant in Charlotte Street, Bloomsbury. After J. C. Squire, Garnett was one of the most widely-read men I ever met, and that day we passed from the Restoration dramatists to Maginn and "Father Prout" as ancestors of the modern short story before he turned to contemporary writers and urged me to read *Wolf Solent*. "Powys," he said, "is unique among novelists because he goes down to the bedrock of human emotions as deeply as the greatest poets."

After reading *Wolf Solent* I became a Powys addict and acquired all his books on publication, but it was not till I began to write my *Life of Llewelyn Powys* that I corresponded with John Cowper. Abundantly he kept his promise to give me all the help he could; to a few lines of tentative inquiry he would respond with letters of eight, sixteen, sometimes twenty or twenty-four pages, with post-scripts written round and round the margins, full of reminiscence and revealing comment. For instance, the passage on page 10 of the book about his attitude to his parents is based on a letter of 4th May 1945.

Late in 1946, when I was appointed general editor of Macdonald Illustrated Classic, I asked Powys if he would write an introduction to

Malcolm Elwin, whose books include *Lord Byron's Wife*, *Victorian Wallflowers*, *Charles Reade*, and *Thackeray*, wrote the definitive *Life of Llewelyn Powys*.

Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*. The result so impressed Eric Harvey, Macdonald's managing director, that he suggested I should ask him to expand his thoughts on Sterne in an introduction to *Tristram Shandy*. In returning the proof of this second introduction on 1st May 1949, Powys mentioned that he had at last finished his "Romance about the events of seven days in the year 499 A. D.," to which he had frequently referred in his letters. "I began this Romance—it is called *Porius*—in 1942, seven years ago!" he wrote; "I am so scared lest my kind friend Mr. Greenwood's Reader, who was so good to me over *Rabelais*, may cry & howl when he sees or when he lets Mr. Greenwood see the LENGTH of *this*."

Like Benjamin Robert Haydon, Powys needed a large canvas as a medium of expression; he described Haydon as "a real fellow-spirit of mine in his desire to be a Medium for the large, gigantic, *misty—not* mystical—obscure, cloudy, titanic, difficult-to-catch, heavily moving lumberings of the *real Zeit-Geist*," adding that "*Porius* is really a very ambitious attempt to project myself *into* that actual age—the autumn of the last year of the 5th century—and *to write as if I were really there*."

He had repeated reminders that his chosen medium was not popular. Cape reluctantly rejected *A Glastonbury Romance* as too long to be a commercial proposition; the original version was cut for publication, as were the original versions of *Weymouth Sands* and *Maiden Castle*. In 1949 the war-time paper shortage still prevailed in England, and after Powys's letter in May many months passed without news of *Porius*. In those days his old friend Louis Wilkinson used to come twice a year to stay with me, and he told me that, though the original version had been cut, publishers still regarded the length of *Porius* as impracticable.

Though we had corresponded intimately for seven years, I had never met Powys. It was not merely that the war had discouraged travel—that the railways were inconvenient and filthy, and that you were not allowed to use your motor car unless "your journey was really necessary": I had chosen at only twenty-three to live and work in rural seclusion and was as difficult to dislodge from my Devon retreat as Powys from his in North Wales.

But it seemed to me incredible that the greatest imaginative genius of our time should have spent seven years on a novel only to find publishers reluctant to print it. So I made my first pilgrimage to North Wales in October, 1950, and saw the full moon rise above Bala Lake on the evening

before spending a day with Powys at his Corwen cottage.

On my return I wrote to Eric Harvey that Powys was not merely the greatest man I had ever met, but his goodness equalled his greatness (as history shows, the two seldom go together), and I urged him to follow my example in making the journey to meet him. He went within the next few weeks, by which time the bulky typescript of *Porius* was in my hands. My report on it ran to some 7 or 8,000 words; as a result *Porius* was published by Macdonalds in 1951 without any further cuts—nine years after the author began its writing.

A publisher would hardly expect a productive future on signing on a new author of seventy-eight. Yet Powys's productivity during the next decade may be envied by many writers half his age. He was already writing *The Inmates* before *Porius* was published; *Atlantis* and *Homer and the Aether* were inspired by his habit of reading Homer for recreation; *The Brazen Head*, at first called *The Three Barons*, began as a story about Roger Bacon, though—as Powys wrote after some months of work—"I'm afraid another chap has come in who has stolen his thunder"; there was the final statement of his philosophy, *In Spite of*, and lastly his books of "space" fiction, *Up and Out* and *All or Nothing*.

All these books I read in both typescript and proof, undertaking the proof-reading when I heard that Powys was having trouble with his sight—he did eventually lose the sight of one eye. No writer since De Quincey has been so adept in management of the long sentence, but sometimes a predicate was hard to seek and I ventured for the sake of clarity to split up some of those that ran to a page's length or longer. He was always grateful for suggested amendments; he was perturbed only when his friend Redwood Anderson—one of the accomplished philologists of our time as well as an eminent poet—read a page-proof of *Homer and the Aether* and proposed copious alterations, not only in the anglicising of many Greek names, but in Powys's interpretation of Homer's story. Even then he attempted no argument; he did not doubt that his friend must be right, but was agitated lest the publishers might receive a heavy printer's bill for corrections!

Much of my life has been spent in the writing of biography and trying to perform a service to my subjects after their deaths. But in Powys's case I enjoyed the privilege of doing all I could for a great writer while he was still living—a rich and rewarding experience.

THE POWYS FAMILY

In the spring of 1965, on a trip to England and Wales, I visited many of the places where John Cowper Powys and his brothers and sisters lived. The trip and the opportunity of meeting several members of the family suggest this as an appropriate time to bring up to date the chronicle of the Powyses.

The sons and daughters of the Reverend and Mrs. Charles Francis Powys were not notable for their numbers—it was a generation of large families. What is remarkable is that ten of these parsonage children reached maturity and that nine of them became writers or artists. John Cowper, Littleton Charles, Theodore Francis, Gertrude, Eleanor, Albert Reginald, Marian, Llewelyn, Philippa, William and Lucy Amelia: they were born in that order between the years 1872 and 1890, and each was to be drawn in his own way toward a contemplative and creative life.

In the opening article of this issue, John Cowper Powys speaks of his love for his rural retreat at Phudd Bottom (the naming was his) in Columbia County. But time ruled that America was not to be his permanent home, as he had once planned. In 1934, after finishing his *Autobiography*, he returned to England, staying briefly in Dorset and then moving on to North Wales, first to Corwen, and later to Blaenau Ffestiniog where he died in June, 1963, four months short of his ninety-first birthday. In his last decade he wrote five books—*Homer and the Aether*, *Atlantis*, *The Brazen Head*, *Up and Out* and *All or Nothing*—books now being released for the first time in America by the Colgate University Press.

Littleton, born eighteen months after John, was a teacher and then

Thomas Davies, Acquisitions Librarian of Colgate University, is preparing a bibliography of the Powyses.

the Headmaster at Sherborne Preparatory School. After his retirement he wrote *The Joy of It* and *Still the Joy of It*; the second of these autobiographical volumes was published the year before his death in 1956.

T. F. Powys—Theodore Francis, the author of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*—was born the year after Littleton. After some thirty books, he stopped writing in about 1940, moved to the smaller, quieter village of Mappowder some miles north of the Chaldon that had been his home for three decades, and lived out his remaining years there until his death in 1953.

The fourth child and first girl was Gertrude. Born in 1877, two years after Theodore, she was the artist of the family. Her sketches and woodcuts were used to illustrate several of her brothers' books, and her portrait of John hangs in the National Museum of Wales at Cardiff. Until her death in 1952 she lived with her sister Philippa in half of a double farm house near Chaldon, Dorset, which they shared with brother Llewelyn and his wife, Alyse Gregory.

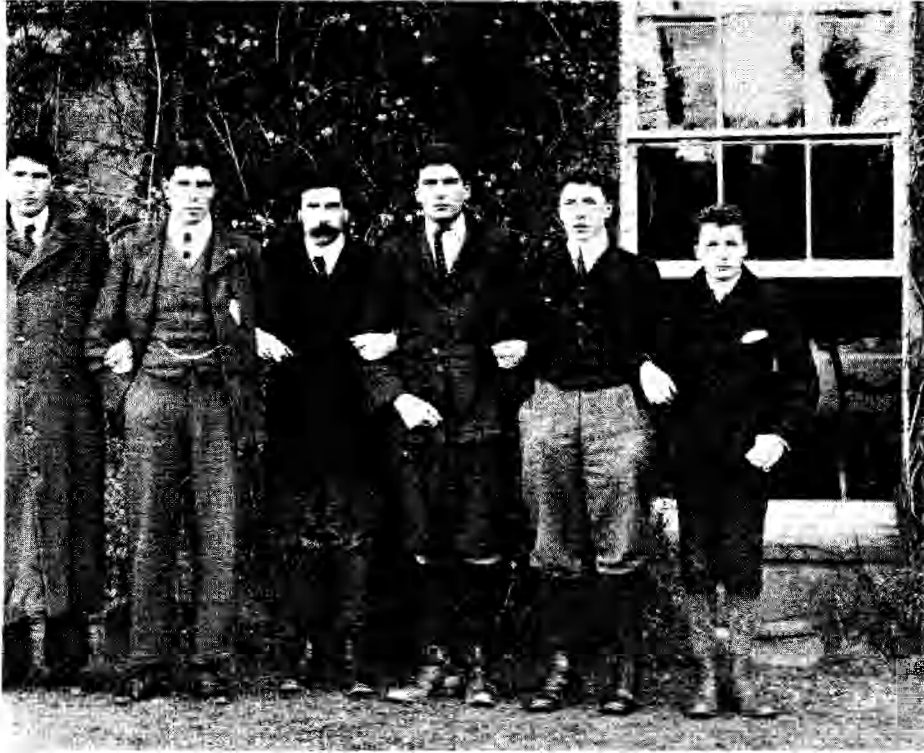
Eleanor, born the year after Gertrude, died at age thirteen in 1892. Of her John once said, "she showed the most talent of the lot of us!"

"Bertie," as the family always called Albert Reginald, was an architect and the author of five books in his field. Most noted of these were *The English Parish Church* and *Repair of Ancient Buildings*. He was the first of the adult Powyses to die, in 1936.

The third daughter, Marian, born in 1882, lives now in retirement above the Hudson River palisades of Rockland County, not a great many miles to the south and west of John Cowper's beloved Columbia County. For many years she ran the Devonshire Lace Shop on Madison Avenue, New York City, and was Curator of the Lace Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her book *Lace and Lace Making* is the definitive work on that subject.

Llewelyn, born two years after Marian, was to suffer recurrent pulmonary illnesses from his twenty-fifth birthday on. To build up his strength he visited the veldt of South Africa and lived there with his younger brother William for several years; these African experiences provided the background for his early books, *Ebony and Ivory* and *Black Laughter*. His autobiographic and philosophic essays and his two novels, *Apples Be Ripe* and *Love and Death*, celebrate a love of life that belies his own precarious health. He died in December, 1939, in Switzerland.

"Our little poet" was John's phrase for Philippa. Known both for



Circa 1901:
John Cowper

Littleton Charles

Theodore Francis

Albert Reginald

Llewelyn

William Ernest

her volumes of poetry and the novel *The Blackthorn Winter*, she died in 1962, six months before John.

While still a young man, William, the last boy of the family, went to Kenya to become a stock farmer. He lives today on substantial holdings near the equator, managing his farms and pursuing his hobby of painting. I have seen several of his landscapes which seem anything but the work of an amateur; "Sunrise on the Veldt," a painting which shows a herd of elephants emerging from the morning mists, is hauntingly beautiful.

Lucy Amelia Penny is the youngest of this generation of Powyses. After the death of her husband she lived for a time with William in Kenya, but has returned to live in a stone cottage in Mappowder, Dorset, less than two miles from the oldest friend of the family, Louis Wilkinson, and just across the road from Mrs. Isobel Marks, the daughter of Albert Reginald. All told, there were eleven children in the next generation, and although several have appeared briefly in print, no one of them is a professional writer or painter.

Last May, Louis Wilkinson and I had tea with Mrs. Penny, and later she and I strolled the few hundred feet up the main street of the village to the little cottage with its clear glass leaded windows where Theodore lived—a place of stone unoccupied now, low and square against the bulk of the church in whose yard he lies buried. And then later in my trip—even as John Cowper had moved northward from Dorset to the country where Powyses had lived centuries before, rough country which provided the mood and spirit of *Porius* and several of his later works—I toured north to Blaenau Ffestiniog in Northern Wales where his home remains just as it was during his last years. As I looked out of the window of the room that had been John's study, I knew why he chose One Waterloo Road for a home. The leaden skies swirled around the tips of Morwyn and Big Morwyn, the mountain peaks across the grey-green valley. From the clouds a shaft of sunlight yellowed a small rise and limed the stone fences that divided the pastures and fields. From the room you could hear the rain-freshened creek that flows by the side of the stone house. I sat on his couch and looked at the many friends—books, photographs, mementos—~~that~~ stay in his study. A place where a great man lived and worked—felt ~~deeply~~ and recorded fully—it speaks of him still. But his true memorial, ~~for all time~~, rests in his books.



John Cowper Powys, in his eighties, at Blaenau Ffestiniog

henry miller 444 ocampo drive - pacific palisades california 90272

John Cooper Powys was to me
"a living book" who speaks
to me today from his pages
as eloquently as when I
knew him in life. He is
one of the few persons I
shall always revere, whom
I shall feel forever
indebted to.

Henry Miller