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## Alice Corbin an Appreciation

Witter Bynner Oliver LaFarge

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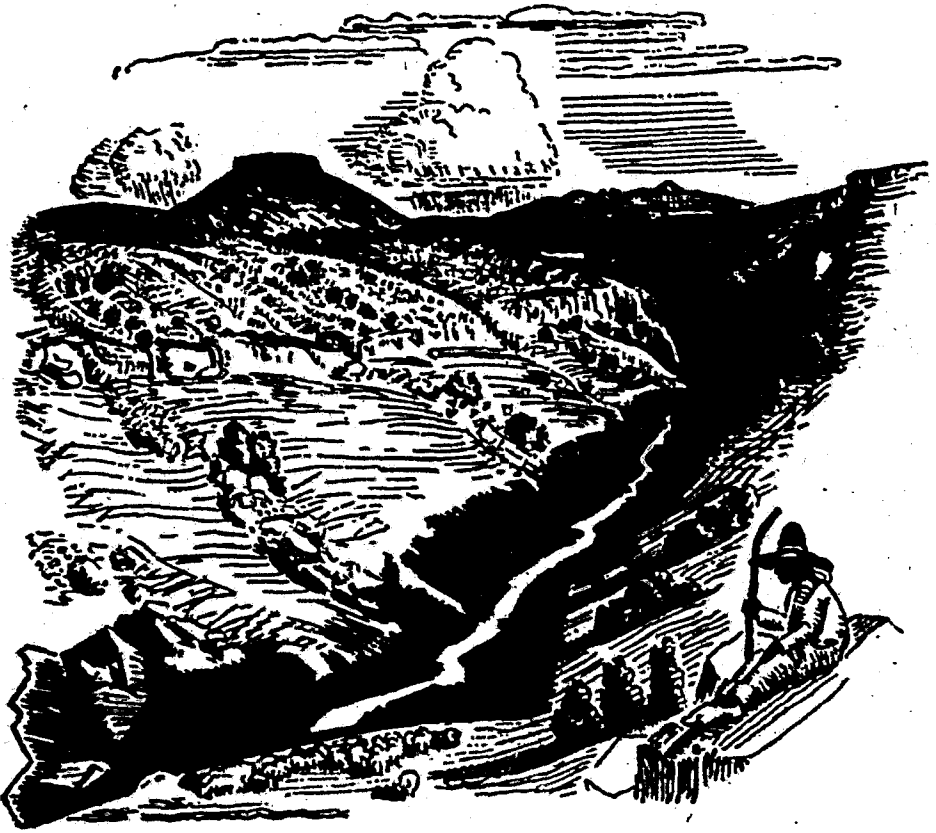
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***ALICE CORBIN:  
AN APPRECIATION***

*edited by*  
*Witter Bynner*  
*and*  
*Oliver LaFarge*



**A**LICE CORBIN HENDERSON, born in St. Louis, Missouri, married to William Penhallow Henderson, the artist, in 1905, and mother of one daughter, Mrs. Edgar L. Rossin, published her first book, *Adam's Dream, and Two Other Miracle Plays for Children*, in 1907, and the second, *The Spinning Woman of the Sky*, a volume of poems, in 1912. At this time she also became active in the literary world as fellow-founder and associate editor with Harriet Monroe of *Poetry: a Magazine of Verse*. In her editorial post, which she held until 1916, she was largely instrumental in the discovery and encouragement of Midwestern and other verse since become famous. She compiled with Harriet Monroe *The New Poetry*, an anthology published in 1917. Not only poets who were then local, like Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, and Vachel Lindsay, owe

much to her ardent interest; a poet as remote from these others as Ezra Pound, iconoclast and expatriate, has given frequent testimony of debt to her.

After her resignation from editorial work and her move to New Mexico because of ill health, she published two books of verse, *Red Earth* in 1920, and *The Sun Turns West* in 1933, during which time she also compiled an anthology of New Mexico Poetry, *The Turquoise Trail*, published in 1928. *Brothers of Light, the Penitentes of the Southwest*, her first book of prose, an authentic and notable contribution to both history and literature, was published in 1937.

Mrs. Henderson is now living at Tesuque, New Mexico, near Santa Fe, where for over thirty years she has been a vital and loved leader in the community and a constant espouser of good causes.

## ALICE AND I

*Witter Bynner*

**I**N TIREDER or wiser age one abstains both from giving and from attending lectures. In my comparative youth, the date being 1921, I arrived in Santa Fe to give one. The town was off my professional beat; but I had asked a reluctant agent to swing me here, unprofitably, between Oklahoma and Colorado and to let me have a week's respite besides. Because of influenza, in one of those years when influenza was not just a cold, I took more than the week's respite, had to stay in Santa Fe six weeks to recover and have been recuperating here ever since. The person who was to blame for all this is Alice Corbin.

In an earlier year of lecturing—1916 I think—I had been heckled from the floor at Chicago. My subject was "Contemporary American Poetry"; and, before the secret had broken that Arthur Davison Ficke and I were respectively Anne Knish and Emanuel Morgan, founders and wielders of the Spectric School

of Poetry, I was telling my audience how superior Spectric verse was to Imagist verse. I was advancing the Spectric theory. The poet is imbued with a subject or faces one suddenly. Instead of emotionalizing or intellectualizing his approach to it, he blanks his conscious heart, his deliberate mind, and lets the subject submerge him both from inside and from outside. He acts as a medium and records the force and range of his theme in a mode seemingly beyond his control. It might have been called the Ouija School of Poetry; but on a brash platform I was taking our "school" more solemnly than my conscience should have permitted. I was preferring the specter to the image and probably confusing image with imagery, when an interruption came from the audience. A woman's voice gave us the Imagists' insistence that an image was not a mere figure of speech but a clearly seen picture of an idea. In a sharp but friendly interchange between auditor and lecturer, was the former unwittingly siding with earlier artists who would nowadays be called representational, and the latter unwittingly siding with present-day artists who believe the inner consciousness chooses better pictures than the outer consciousness? Brittle though our talk was, each of us was thinking he had the better of the tilt, a liking sparked between us; and after the lecture Alice Corbin and I shook hands and planned to join again. We did join shortly afterwards at the Hendersons' studio in Chicago, where I met Alice's painter-husband, William Penhallow Henderson, and their diminutive daughter.

I was wandering in those days, still young, still lecturing, the commercialized troubadour, and from time to time I saw the Hendersons in Chicago. Some years later I heard that Alice was ill, that she was in Santa Fe for her health, and I wrote her. In answering she proposed that I come to Santa Fe on one of my tours. And so I came.

It had not occurred to me that she was seriously ill. I had thought merely that Santa Fe was a better climate for her. And

so, when I stepped off the primitive car which a spur track brought from Lamy into a town of nine thousand, I thought I was greeting with a kiss the Alice I had sparred with in Chicago and thought I was giving my luggage to a broad-hatted cowboy hand from some frontier hotel. Not until we had almost reached the sanitarium did I realize that the Alice alongside me was the diminutive daughter, now grown to fifteen, that the cowboy-hand in the front seat with my luggage, who had not till now said a word, was William Penhallow Henderson and that the elder Alice was a bedded invalid.

Though it troubled me at first to stay in a building which was half hotel, half sanitarium for tuberculars, I was soon persuaded that I was safer at Sunmount than in a New York trolley car and I remained beyond the six weeks needed for recovery from influenza. Alice Corbin's room, perhaps purposely, was opposite the doctor's office. She was not only a bed-patient but under strict watch as to rest and diet. Doctors, nurses, servants, and patients were all, in those years, easy comrades and so were such guests as lived long enough in the haphazard hotel section to become fellow Santa Feans. Waitresses would bring coffee for groups in this or that private room instead of serving it at this or that table in the long dining hall. Later Alice brewed her own coffee, and we would gather nightly in her room for gay, swift talk and forbidden cigarettes. Now and then we would enjoy in our coffee cups a fill or two of Taos Lightning, that fiery corn whiskey which we keg-rolled in the backs of our cars. Willy would be there, Little Alice would be there, a nurse would be there. Finally even the head doctor would be there and almost grant that these trespasses upon rule were doing his patient good.

In spite or because of such trespass, Alice presently emerged from the sanitarium, well enough to move to the little house on Camino del Monte Sol which her fifteen-year-old daughter and Nella, their canny Spanish-American maid, had been running with the authority of Mothers Superior. Amusing moments en-

sued when neither of them wished to yield any of that authority to the lay mother; but soon life continued around Big Alice very much as it had done farther up the hill: intimate gatherings, tea, coffee, cigarettes, white mule, and talk, talk, talk. At the sanitarium, we had often read poetry to one another, poetry established and poetry our own. Now, with mainly practitioners present, poetry and painting took fuller sway.

It was a small, pleasant, primitive adobe house, with an outdoor privy and with horses corralled alongside. I remember well when little Starlight was foaled on a cold night. Visitors would come across distances which now demand motoring; but we came on horseback then by day or at night on foot with lanterns and would kick snow off our overshoes in the welcoming glow of the room with its corner adobe fireplace. Painters from near-by houses on the Camino would be there, Applegate, Bakos, Shuster, Nash, sometimes Sloan and Davey from streets farther away, often Indian painters like Awa-tsireh from the Pueblos and occasionally a visiting writer, Lindsay with his chants, Sandburg with his guitar, Frost with his wit, Lummis with a red bandanna round his gray temples, or neighboring Jack Thorpe with his brother.

The Hendersons and I attended many Pueblo ceremonials together in those days; but we liked to watch singly and to absorb the dances, or to be absorbed by them, rather than to make them the social occasions they are now; and when the Easter dance or the August dance came at Santo Domingo, each lasting three days, we would last the three days with them, sleeping on the schoolhouse floor, and be up at dawn to see the first Koshare, with Alice Corbin as alert and hardy as any of us. Sometimes we were the only white watchers. Sometimes we took with us a visiting writer like Bliss Carman or Edna Millay, or a composer like Ernest Bloch.

Resident writers in 1923 were few. Elizabeth Shepley Sar-

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geant was here, telling in *Harper's* about her "mud house"—whence dated, I think, the local dubbing of us painters and writers as "mud-hut nuts." Manuel Chavez was here, but not yet called Fray Angelico. Mabel Sterne was in Taos but not yet known for her memoirs. Erna Fergusson was in Albuquerque but was conducting tourists to the Indian country, not yet a courier in print. Ruth Laughlin's pen was not yet notably busy. Mary Austin, Haniel Long, Lynn Riggs, Ernest Seton, Oliver La Farge, Alfred Kreymborg, Paul Rosenfeld, Arthur Davison Ficke, Raymond Holden, Louise Bogan, Clifton Fadiman, John Gould Fletcher, and others came later to settle or sojourn in Santa Fe. But Spud Johnson shared my house in 1922, and it was then that the D. H. Lawrences made their first Santa Fe visit. Mabel Sterne, now Mabel Luhan, was bringing them through town from Lamy on their way to visit her in Taos, but it was too late for them to undertake what used to be a long and tough drive. At quick notice she could find no Santa Fe roof for them but mine, although at that time it covered only three small rooms, porous to the wind.

But what a sudden warmth we whipped together—Lorenzo and Frieda, Mabel and Tony Luhan, Alice Corbin, Willy Henderson and Little Alice, Spud and I. Mabel and Tony left early; but the rest of us talked by the fireplace into the snuggest of the small hours, all of us bobbing at Alice as children bob at apples on Hallowe'en. She looked like an apple, with her round, rosy cheeks. And Willy was drawling his narratives of earlier Western days. And Little Alice was correcting both parents at intervals. The Lawrences, tired after their journey from the Coast but relieved to find a simple household, were soon recounting global adventures and they were as much like children as were the rest of us. With the Hendersons' help we gave them a late supper, and Spud and I were up early next morning to wash the dishes and feed our guests; but the Lawrences, let me record,



were up before us and every dish was either clean or holding part of a good, hot breakfast which they had prepared and exactly timed for their hosts.

Later, when other writers and multiplying summer visitors came to Santa Fe, Alice Corbin was a main organizer of the annual Poets' Round-Up, to raise funds for Indian causes; and, in closer bound and bond, she brought a small group of us residents together to read and criticize one another's poems and to stimulate new writing: Spud Johnson, Haniel Long, Clifford McCarthy, Lynn Riggs, Robert Hunt and me, with others occasionally joining. Sometimes there would be personal poems betwixt us, a challenge and an answer; and, since Alice Corbin is not to know beforehand that we offer her herewith a garland of respectful affection and therefore can not be asked to grant me the right to print a sonnet of hers, I venture, without her permission to enter a brace of exchange which dates from those poetry meetings. Alice wrote:

### EL CONQUISTADOR

You are so much to every casual friend—  
 The butcher and the baker and the rest,  
 And anyone who has a mood to spend  
 May spend it in the hollow of your breast:  
 Lowitsky has a share in you and all,  
 All, all possess you—and I only groan  
 To see you thus made common carnival,  
 And nothing left for me to call my own!

O Hal, O Hell—what is the use to sue  
 The insubstantial, evanescent you!  
 Harlot of sympathies although you be,  
 I search and hope and never may be sure  
 If what you give me differs from the lure  
 That holds Lowitsky and that maddens me!

I replied at the next session of our group:

TO ONE WHO EXCLAIMS AT  
MY FRIENDSHIP WITH A  
SECOND-HAND DEALER  
("You always like anyone.")

Lowitsky breathes his portion of the sky,  
He too a curious vessel in the sun,  
Of bright afflatus and opinion,  
With as good veins to hold them in as I.  
Why then pretend that he can only buy  
And sell mean objects and perforce be done  
With other thinking and with other fun?  
Man has a second hand if the first die.

All men are made of earth to comprehend  
Sun, moon and stars and thoughts: diameters  
Crossing the wheel. Circumference encloses  
You, me, Lowitsky too. Unto one end  
We move together, while the circle stirs  
With all its knowledge and with all its noses.

This sort of interchange was good teasing, good questioning, good fun. I wish it had continued longer. Alice's sonnet, femininely playful, and mine, masculinely pontifical, were not, for others, of any special import in content or expression but for us, in personal and literary stimulus, they were of timely import; and that sort of give and take enlivened our enjoyment and experiment. It was good for us; and Alice managed continuance of our meetings as long as she could. It was not her fault that they ceased, nor was it ours. Towns grow too large. Nor should this particular verse exchange have ended where it did. My pulpit sonnet was not fair. Alice's understanding of every sort of person, her sympathetic entrance into the feelings and

reasons of others, have been a lifelong characteristic. Years ago, as everyone knows, she was Associate Editor, with Harriet Monroe as Editor, of *Poetry: a Magazine of Verse*—in fact she was co-founder of it. And in that golden period of American poetry her vivid, sympathetic spirit meant much to most of the poets who made it golden, as it has meant much to all of us who have encountered her in poetry or in life.

Among my letters through the years from Ezra Pound I have found a pertinent passage:

"Alice was only intelligent element (in that frying pan) 1911-12 or whenever—only means of getting an idea into dear ole 'Arriet's hickory block. In short Alice my only comfort during that struggle. Blessings upon her."

Blessings upon her, say we all.

## A NOTE ON ALICE CORBIN HENDERSON AND *POETRY*

*George Dillon*

"ALL YOUNG poets hate editors," Alice Corbin Henderson once observed in an editorial. "And they are right. When a poet becomes tolerant of an editor, or an editor of a poet, it is not a healthy sign; both have ceased to be alert. . . . But the established poet, whose reputation is not only made but embalmed, and the editor who has no more plasticity than a hitching post—there is no friction between them. They are mutually tolerant of one another. Why not? The relation between them is simply that of a manufacturer and a retailer of any reasonable staple commodity, like sugar or molasses or green cheese. . . . All the poet in me hates the editor. The editor in me swears that I am a very bad poet; the poet knows that the editor is a fool. And neither one is entirely wrong."

No doubt it was characteristic of Mrs. Henderson that, having schemed, labored, and exhorted for several years to stir up a new

poetry movement, she was quite ready to abandon her dominant role as an editor as soon as the movement showed signs of being a "popular" success. For so it did, momentarily, although young poets today find it hard to believe that anything of the sort happened—the vogue extended into the 1920's, helped along by the same kind of fad excitement that has more recently operated towards the popularization of modern painting. It seemed, for a while, that publishers were bringing out several "leading" or "major" poets every month; and all this uncritical fanfare must have been profoundly boring to Mrs. Henderson, who had recognized and encouraged, when they were altogether unknown, such poets as Pound, Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Sandburg, and Lindsay.

There were, to be sure, other factors tending to withdraw her from the editorial work, among them her change of residence to New Mexico and her increasing absorption in the lives and culture of the southwestern Indians. That interest was to find expression in a number of singularly real and moving poems, poems deeper and stronger yet simpler than any she had written before. They proved that Mrs. Henderson, whose agile mind and exceptional background enabled her to analyze the masterpieces of literature and to debate subtleties with the best critics alive, had nevertheless found a superior charm and reality in that relatively untouched field of experience. As a poet, she fulfilled her talent in writing about that little-understood minority. Such poems as "On the Acequia Madre" and "Una Anciana Mexicana" have a more lasting quality, it seems to me, than a great deal of contemporary work which today is much better known.

It is clear, at any rate, that she had no wish to become a "hitching post for established poets." The editorial from which I have quoted was written in 1916, after four years of intensive service as an editor, during which she, equally with Harriet Monroe and Ezra Pound, had worked to make *Poetry* the protagonist of the new movement. She had also collaborated with Miss Monroe on

an anthology which was to become a sort of hieratic best-seller for many years. That she had, however, no illusions about the momentary boom in poetry is evident from a letter sent from New Mexico, at about this time, to her fellow editor:

"Out here, against these hills and in quietness, one is apt to get a perspective on many things. (I've tried to forget the magazine, but I don't succeed.) I very much fear that Cinderella is going back to her ashes, and that she may feel more comfortable there than in her automobile—that this supposed popularity of the art is a good deal of dust, or rather, that when the dust clears away, not much may remain. By that I mean especially that one sees so much stuff passing itself off as poetry that is nothing of the sort. The need for a perfectly fearless high standard was never greater than it is at the moment." And though she expressed pleasure in the new anthology, a copy of which had just arrived, she was candid enough to recognize "some stuff that has no business there at all (including some of mine)."

Mrs. Henderson left Chicago thirty-three years ago, which was just seven years before I came here as a student. I did not know her. Yet as I write the words I am hardly convinced by them, for in those days I was impressionable, and her memory was a recent and vivid one among some of the people I knew—at the magazine and at the university Poetry Club, at Mrs. William Vaughn Moody's, and among those who had been active in the Chicago Little Theatre. I had then no clear appreciation of what she had accomplished—the very large gift of love and intellect which she brought to the establishment of a poet's review. But I was certainly aware of her as a personality; she existed in my imagination (along with Elizabeth Roberts, Glenway Westcott, and Yvor Winters) as one of the talented writers who had recently come and gone. Eunice Tietjens spoke of her with devotion. Maurice Lesemann, the young poet whom I most admired, used to read her poems in the unnerving *sostenuto* which we

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all tried to imitate—for he, in a high, unrequited way, had fallen in love with her.

And in the magazine collection there were several photographs of her, looking rather angry and decidedly attractive, which have always startled me with their aliveness.

After leaving Chicago she continued for six years, until 1922, to be a very frequent contributor of editorials and criticism, and a constant adviser to *Poetry*. During these years the continued appearance of her name on the masthead, which both she and Harriet Monroe seemed to regard as an honorary sign, was in fact brilliantly justified. In her letters to Miss Monroe (a rich file, now part of the University of Chicago collection) one can see how frequently she was consulted on manuscripts, books, details of policy; and from the marginal notes in Miss Monroe's handwriting one sees how important her influence was. Even her most lightly humorous remarks were aimed at upholding the "perfectly fearless high standard." There were to be no compromises! "Keep *Poetry* up, up!" she wrote. "The need is all the greater because the other magazines are so poor—you don't want to be classed with them. I shiver when I think of the leftovers in the file! Are there many?"

Here and there, in the letters, certain especially incisive passages have been marked by Miss Monroe as ideas for future development, and in reading the magazine one finds that Mrs. Henderson did develop some of them in the form of editorials; for instance, her excellent piece on impressionistic criticism, "A Jitney Bus among Masterpieces." Those early volumes of *Poetry* make good reading today, a considerable amount of their liveliness being due to the articles signed E. P. and A. C. H. In the light of subsequent history they are often fascinating: one is struck by so many accurate judgments of writers, including British and French poets, who were then unknown or misevaluated—judgments, and comparisons, which must have been

regarded as daring and extreme, if not eccentric, at the time, but which now appear to have been simply oracular. The continued life of these articles is also a matter of personality. Both Pound and Mrs. Henderson commanded a vigorous, informal style which has the quality of good talk; it would be equally refreshing in any of the current literary magazines. At that time Pound was really enjoying himself, writing his keenest criticism, and from the articles and letters of the two writers, it seems clear, that he was very greatly stimulated by the young editor's interest. It was a case of mutual stimulation.

Edith Franklin Wyatt recalls that Mrs. Henderson's admiration of Pound was closely related to her still earlier enthusiasm for Whistler. She felt that Pound would perform the same kind of service for literature that Whistler had done for painting; and she saw various personal analogies between the two men.

I imagine that anyone who has edited *Poetry* in the later years must have come to know the writings of Mrs. Henderson rather well. She is one of those to whom we turn voluntarily (in contrast to most of our dutiful peering into the archives, which has come to be such a large part of the work here). We have turned to her in moments of difficulty and in moments of leisure. We have found courage, the kind we often need, in her criticism—beginning with her early slam of a Masefield book (then widely praised) on the score of facile melodrama. That criticism, of a poet whose best work she admired, is the model of a courageous slam. It appeared in the same issue with Pound's review of *A Boy's Will*. We have also had good counsel from her on the subject of criticism itself. "Criticism," she wrote, "that weighs and balances only after the event is, indeed, of little consequence to the artist. The only criticism of value [to him] is contemporaneous criticism, the kind that is perfectly able to navigate in an uncharted sea, take soundings, and proclaim new depths and shores." We have been entertained by her informal notes and comments (as, for instance, when she quotes several poems

from an *Others* anthology, and concludes: "We regret to say the printer announces there are no more I's in the font.") And we have been cheered and strengthened by her consistent refusal to expostulate with, or be baited by, the type of mentality that proposes to edify the arts. In announcing a prize offered by the old *Life* magazine for "a song of modern Democracy, typifying the spirit of Liberty, Fraternity, Equality and the Allies," she remarked simply, "Isn't that enough to frighten the Muse?" The comment serves for all such attempts at forcible inspiration, including the latest I have just heard about: an offer of one thousand dollars for a poem on "Individual and International Morality."

But soon I shall be pulling down, one after another, the volumes of *Poetry* in their worn green bindings—the color Mrs. Henderson chose for them, against angry protests. I must not begin to do that, however, for a selection of even the most memorable passages from her editorial writings would fill another volume. It will be the task of the biographer and literary historian to rediscover all that material and evaluate her contribution to the modern poetry movement and to the magazine. As far as I am concerned, it is quite inestimable. Though she has been away so long, I hope she may find it agreeable to reflect that her mind is a living presence in this office, and will surely continue to be, so long as the doors of *Poetry* remain open.

## ALICE CORBIN AND IMAGISM

*John Gould Fletcher*

THE BUSINESS of poetry is not to teach, or to reflect, but to state—so thought a small group of poets who assembled under the instigation, guidance, and control of the twenty-six year old student of philosophy and art, Thomas Ernest Hulme, at a restaurant in Central London in the early months of the year 1909. Eight years later, Hulme himself was dead in France, his major



work unwritten or existing only in brilliant fragments; the notion of poetry that he had been the first to develop had been elaborated and taken up under the name of Imagism by a whole school, led by Ezra Pound in England and Amy Lowell in America; a magazine founded in Chicago by Harriet Monroe had, for five years, been the leading exponent of the revolutionary ideas and technique of Imagism; and the first associate editor of that magazine, the subject of this article, had come to New Mexico to recover from tuberculosis and to write a book of poems which still, in its own way, is a classic example of what was originally meant by Imagism.

Such, and summarily, is the story of Alice Corbin, whose books, along with those of Mary Austin, must forever stand at the forefront of any discussion or critical study that can be made of American literature as it has developed in New Mexico. To transpose the range and feeling of New Mexico into the English language required a handling of style and vocabulary that is not particularly familiar to most Anglo-Saxon writers. It is quite possible to assert—and perhaps it has been asserted by some—that all literature in New Mexico should *really* be written in Spanish, but inasmuch as the Anglo-Saxon variety of Americans have controlled this region, politically and economically, for a century, to complain that New Mexican literature has largely been written in English is like complaining that W. B. Yeats in Ireland did not write in Gaelic.

Two women, both previously developed as writers by other environments, both highly sensitized as individuals, and neither particularly strong physically, led the way into the foreign-rhythmed, wide-horizoned region of New Mexico. Later on an uprooted Englishman, D. H. Lawrence, who was also intensely sensitive to the feminine side of experience, followed them. It may be said that all three were in a measure influenced by Imagism; or, in the case of Mary Austin, by such direct, objective parallels to Imagism as can be found in American Indian

poetry. All three said something about New Mexico that finally had to be said.

Mother earth—*tierra madre*—is what the Spanish-Americans call it; and in that phrase is so much that most Anglo-Saxons cannot understand. In New Mexico, mother earth is most often a harsh mother, since so much is desert—endless gray chamisa and sage looming beyond the narrow spaces of ditch-watered alfalfa, the round orange-gold of pumpkins, the white plumes of corn. Beyond that, the piñon and juniper standing in dense, dark green clumps, still on the desert, but leading the eye to seek for the vast pueblo ruin on the mesa-edge beyond. This last stands as a reminder that there is something here that was old long before the Spaniards raised their crosses and low adobe chapels and farmhouses by the edge of the stream—a people in whose myths the earth was never created at all, but has, despite floods and disasters, always existed. Beyond the piñon and the juniper, the high upland of the rocks and pines—and those strange trees, the aspens, with dull green leaves forever quivering by silvery-grey stems—and then, the bare rock in the cloud, and the snow. Layer on layer of mother-earth and all of it strange: as strange, faraway, remote, and fiercely individual as China or North Africa. And never, despite the throngs forever coming on, of sensation-gaping Eastern tourists, or of untalkative, oddly-detached atomic scientists, coming in from the great laboratory at Los Alamos, can New Mexico be anything else than mother-earth in this sense. Break a branch of piñon and let its resinous sap stick to your fingers, or dig a new water-ditch through this crumbling red soil if you would know why New Mexico earth is mother-earth. It clings as it yields.

Alice Corbin became, along with Mary Austin, one of the two first interpreters—except for a few anthropologists like Cushing and Washington Matthews, who had stuck to the Indian and avoided the Spanish-American element—of New Mexican life in American literature, because Alice Corbin had tried

for so long to be a poet, had been taken up in 1912 by Harriet Monroe (a splendid organizer, but not the most sensitive or intellectually daring of editors) as her chief counsellor and assistant; and because Alice Corbin had thus fallen under the influence of Imagism without having met anyone directly connected with the movement. In letter after letter, objection piled on objection, *Poetry's* first foreign correspondent, the most radical and most disturbing of all the expatriates, Ezra Pound, had hammered away at the new magazine (the first in American history to give prizes to poets) with arguments insisting that everything must be treated directly, objectively, without circumlocutions or inversions of any kind, shorn of all decorative adjectives and windy rhetoric. Although Pound himself went later out of his way to commend the work of another expatriate, T. S. Eliot, whose early poetry seemed to reflect, in a more world-weary fashion, the hyper-aestheticism of the "art-for-art's-sake" people, and such poets as the forgotten Donald Evans, through an atmosphere of even stronger *fin-de-siècle* disillusion, yet Pound's own poetry was not of that sort—but rather tensely primitive or savagely satiric. And Alice Corbin had responded, as later on Miss Monroe's second associate, Eunice Tietjens, also responded, in kind. Perhaps the two most remarkable offshoots of the Imagist movement, apart from D. H. Lawrence, who developed and practised his own kind of imagism, are to this day the books, *Profiles from China*, which Miss Tietjens later published, and Alice Corbin's *Red Earth*<sup>1</sup> which appeared in 1920. And both are by-products of the atmosphere manifest in *Poetry's* Chicago office.

*Red Earth* is a book of individual portraits, as the prose *Brothers of Light*<sup>2</sup> later on is a book of scenes and backgrounds. There is nothing in it that does not belong to New Mexico, and it stands to this day as the best book of direct, objective New

<sup>1</sup> *Red Earth*, by Alice Corbin, Ralph Fletcher Seymour, Chicago, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> *Brothers of Light*, Alice Corbin Henderson, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1937.

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Mexican poetry written in English. It has all the sharpness of that unforgettable landmark among American poetry books, Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*. But it is better written, with a deeper sense of the poetical apprehension of experience, and less externalism and surface reporting. A few examples reveal how close it is to its sources in Imagist poetry.

"In the Desert" starts like this:

I have seen you, O king of the dead,  
More beautiful than sunlight.

Your kiss is like quicksilver;  
But I turned my face aside  
Lest you should touch my lips.

In the field with the flowers  
You stood darkly.

This is, in rhythm and in handling (note the development of the cadence and the absence of adjectives) clearly derived from the Imagist H. D.:

You are clear,  
O rose, cut in rock;  
Hard as the descent of hail.

and also:

The light beats upon me,  
I am startled.  
A split leaf crackles on the paved floor;  
I am anguished—defeated.

"Juan Quintana" pursues the same line of approach, along with a quality of folk-portrayal taken from Yeats and from other Irish poets, such as Padraic Colum, of Yeats' following:

The goat-herd follows his flock  
Over the sandy plain,  
And the goats nibble the rabbit-brush

Acrid with desert rain.

Old Juan Quintana's coat  
Is a faded purple blue,  
And his hat is a worn brown;  
And his trousers a tawny hue.

He is sunburnt like the hills,  
And his eyes have a strange goat look.

Yeats himself would have recognized that as a poem of his own vintage, far more easily than he did the outwardly more ambitious but inwardly far more self-consciously orchestral folk-balladry of Vachel Lindsay.

"Una Anciana Mexicana" is in blank verse, with conversational overtones that recall some of Ezra Pound's own best early poems as well as those of Robert Frost:

I've seen her pass with eyes upon the road—  
An old bent woman in a bronze-black shawl,  
With skin as brown and wrinkled as a mummy's,  
As brown as a cigar-box, and her voice  
Like the low, vibrant strings of a guitar.

Here, in three different poetic modes (cadenced verse, ballad, blank verse) is the gist of Alice Corbin's vision of New Mexico—a vision strangely objective, direct, unwavering, without either speculative self-analysis or sentimental self-pity:

When it's all over and there's none to care,  
I mean to be like her and take my share  
Of comfort when the bright day's done,  
And smoke away the nights and see the sun  
Through eyes that open inward and look back.

Which again recalls Yeats in his most realistic vein as well as Pound.

What was it, then, that had attracted Alice Corbin so powerfully to the "New Poetry" practiced by mid-western realists,

Irish folk- and myth-singers, and to the as yet as good as unknown group of Imagists developing under Hulme and Pound and Flint in London? She had taken the liberty of writing to Pound direct in the summer of 1912 (eight years before *Red Earth* was published) and had asked him to contribute to the new magazine which Harriet Monroe was now publishing. How had she even heard of the name—unforgettable now, whether for good or evil—of Ezra Pound, who so far had scarcely even been published in the United States, and who had come back to this country but briefly in 1911-12, since his first departure in 1908?<sup>3</sup> Is it possible that she had heard of Pound through Yeats, who may have been interested from the days when Pound, in 1909, had shaken the complacency of Edwardian London with his *Personae* and *Exhortations*? I do not know the answer to that question, and perhaps Alice Corbin does not recall how it happened that the Imagists entered the columns of *Poetry* from the date of the first number in 1912.<sup>4</sup> In any case, all we can say is, that without their influence, without the influence of Pound, H. D., Aldington, Flint—the poems contained in *Red Earth* could not have been written. Nor would *Poetry* have marked so sharp a break from Victorian tradition.

New Mexico itself, with its sharp contrasts of landscape and of life, gave the technique which produced one of the best regional books written in America over the last thirty years.

<sup>3</sup> *Provença*, a selection from Pound's early volumes, had appeared under the imprint of Small, Maynard in Boston in 1912. It attracted no attention. *Ripostes*, which continued Ezra's sensational career in London in 1913, also appeared in the same year in Boston.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Fletcher seems to be making a mystery of a simple matter. Alice Corbin says that she was well acquainted with Pound's writing, among others', and that "we wrote to 'em all and told 'em to come on in." Mr. Fletcher seems to have forgotten across what wide spaces artists sympathetic to a new movement learn of each other, in all the arts. People living in Chicago are quite capable of getting hold of London publications, not to mention Boston ones. Incidentally, it may be remarked that it is scarcely a "liberty" for artists to communicate with each other without introduction in the interests of a common artistic cause—at least this is true for painters and writers, as well as for scientists, and therefore, I presume, for poets. It is especially no liberty when the one who writes first is offering publication in a new, excellent, and greatly needed periodical.—O. La F.

That such a development of Imagism as *Red Earth* shows that Imagism was, after all, capable of producing poetry of only limited range is a truism today. The poetry that has had a wider following since that time has sprung from a disquiet concerning man and his destiny that was set going by Eliot's *Waste Land* in 1922, and which moves back to such sources in speculation and in poetry as Marlowe, Webster, Donne, Pascal, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud. None of the critics who have so voluminously and exhaustively argued about this newer, more "metaphysical" type of poetry, have as yet been able to say whether the metaphor which takes the central place in this type of verse, as "the image" did in the earlier verse as an "objective correlative" of the emotion, is actually a kind of knowledge, non-scientific but complete, or merely a personal game of the poet, playing with his own private association of thought. Thus the earlier, more imagistic poetry, which aimed at less, and actually achieved more, may be said to possess a more valid claim to permanence.

These considerations of structure and texture, which have made present-day American poetry more formal on the surface, but far more complex in its desperate shifts from abstract logic to far-fetched detail, were foreign to all the first Imagists, to Hulme, to Pound, to H. D., to Flint, to Aldington, to myself. The business of the poet then was not to teach, not to provide an "apprehension of experience" or an "objective correlation of emotion," but to observe and restate historic and objective reality. The language and the thing were then one, in such poetry as Alice Corbin wrote in her *Red Earth*. And her *Brothers of Light*, the prose book she did on the Penitentes, has equally the objectivity, the directness of good Imagism. Compared with these, the poems collected in *The Sun Turns West*<sup>5</sup> reveal a writer with a deeper quality of mysticism, with more inwardness possibly, but also one less sure of her ground, more given to Celtic indefiniteness.

<sup>5</sup> *The Sun Turns West*, Alice Corbin, Writers' Editions, Santa Fé, 1933.

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THREE POEMS

*Alice Corbin*

LINES

Love and remorse  
Struggle to keep me  
Wondering why  
Peace cannot come without sorrow—  
And sorrow drown  
Remembrance.

TESUQUE GARDEN

Now is the season of  
    bending down  
To the earth,  
    the sweet earth—  
Planting the seed,  
    feeling the bud—  
Coaxing with love  
    the pliant earth—  
Now is the season  
    of earth and love.

EDGAR

The sunlight was about him always:  
And at high noon  
He was lifted like a ray to the Source  
    of all Light . . .  
Remembering, we remember ever  
How the air always brightened where he walked:  
Remembering, we remember ever  
How he lived in that Light.



ALICE CORBIN

## ALICE

*Carl Sandburg*

"ALICE CORBIN, where art thou?" runs a query often in the minds and memories of the Old Guard who witnessed the launching of *Poetry: a Magazine of Verse* in 1912. She had a gallant heart and a gay smile and the great expectations required for the sailing of that dauntless little ship. A poet, a creative critic and editor, she has a definite and highlighted place in the story of American literature of that period. When some of us arrive at where we can with ease look backward and record with care and deliberation certain adventures we have seen and shared, Alice Corbin will stand forth in elements of both the angelic and the demoniac. Only one having both those elements could have the range of affectionate understanding, compassion through identity, necessary to ride herd on Vachel and Carl, Edgar Lee and Ezra, Robinson and Hal Bynner, H. D. and Amy, John Gould Fletcher and Edwin Arlington Robinson, those two lawyers Archie MacLeish and Wally Stevens—and God knows who all, by the way of clowns, acrobats, trapeze artists, sword swallows and fire eaters. "Alice Corbin, where art thou?" Whithersoever thou art, if you ain't got sweet reminiscences, who has?

ALICE CORBIN

*Padraic Colum*

REVERSING ARISTOTLE I now measure time by movements. So it was at the time when Chicago was the center of American literary activity, when *Poetry* was making Poets and Poems important, and when Vachel Lindsay, still with Nicholas preceding his name, was making crowds join in those recitations of his so enchantingly filled with sound and color, when visitors could find signs that works and figures of Renaissance proportions were going to have their births in Chicago, that, in a studio or

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drawing room I would become aware of a young woman's looks and words.

As she was one of the editors of *Poetry* and the wife of a painter with ideas, what she said generally was expectedly authoritative. But that was not remembered by me. Then sometimes she would say something with an odd intentness and an odd reserve. It is by these momentary withdrawals and tentative movements that Alice Corbin stays in my mind as someone who had known something the recollection of which would bring gentleness into her looks.

In a poem that Ezra Pound quoted as one of the best written in that epoch, the text of which I cannot now find, what was recollected by her came to me. It was a short poem about some bare, sun-dried place and the lost hope and glory that belonged to one who looked over it, one of those Castilians whom nothing in our civilization can help us to understand. But she understood and could speak for the man. What she had to say was not about the glory of the Conquistador but about a dream that was eclipsed, not by soldiery from another side but by the days of the modern and the way of the world. Her recollection is of a dream that is eclipsed.

Her lost dream has a Spaniard to characterize it:

The old songs  
Die—  
And the lips that sang them.  
Wreathed, withered and dusty,  
Cuff-buttons with royal insignia  
There, in the musty museum,  
Are all that is left of Sarasate.<sup>1</sup>

Somewhere, somehow, sometime, Alice Corbin got the endowment that is so rare in American poets, the endowment of reverie, and it is reverie that gives distinction to certain of her

<sup>1</sup> From "Music" in *The New Poetry*, Edited by Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1934, p. 93.

poems and brings them close to the folk-song with its thoughtfulness:

But would you stay as now you are  
Or as a year ago?  
Oh, not as then, for then how small  
The wisdom we did owe!  
Or if forever as today  
How little we could know!<sup>2</sup>

When I read the poem that this verse is in over to myself, I understand how that young woman with brown hair and brown eyes and a heart-shaped face moved me by some words said tentatively, said intently, said with reserve.

## SANTA FE IN THE TWENTIES

*Ruth Laughlin*

I ALWAYS THINK of the William Penhallow Hendersons as smiling; of Whippie stalking along in high-heeled boots, eyes twinkling under his big sombrero, small moustache widened in a grin and a merry quip for me as we passed; of the smile that lifted Alice Corbin's round, red cheeks and shone deeply in her brown eyes. Through a friendship of more than thirty years it is good to recall those smiling faces. The smiles were never fatuous or merely polite. They expressed deep humor and courage and the inner resources of creative artists who faced life with high challenge and a gay curiosity as to what would happen next.

One day last fall, when the cottonwoods on the Tesuque hillside below her house were shining gold, Alice Corbin and I laughed over the memories of Santa Fe in the 1920's.

"Years ago you told me that only the newcomer should write of the Southwest," I reminded Alice. "You said that first im-

<sup>2</sup> From "Two Voices" in *The New Poetry*, op. cit., p. 88.

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pressions were clear, vivid and exciting but that after six months the scene became too familiar and lost its sharp focus."

"I've changed my time limit on that," she laughed, "though the memory of my first Christmas in Santa Fe is so vivid that I can almost feel the crisp cold air now. We came here in 1916 and I have written about the impact of New Mexico ever since. There is still much that I want to say. . . ."

"Your poems in the *Turquoise Trail* and *Red Earth* express what all of us would like to say about this country," I said.

"We loved this Red Earth country from the beginning, even though we came here for my health," Alice explained. "We wanted to see all of it . . . every pueblo, every Indian dance, every Spanish village. We rode horseback to Chimayo and stayed all night with Mr. Chavez whose family built the Santuario long ago as their private chapel. That was during the First World War and the little statue of Santiago wore a tin lemon sieve on his head, bent to look like a war helmet. His arm was broken and Willie mended it with tissue paper and glue."

That act of helping to save a prized relic was typical of the Hendersons. They valued the historic traditions of Santa Fe and worked to preserve them. They took a vital interest in the town and supported every worthy civic project whether it was concerned with art, architecture, writing, the Fiesta, or a water trough for thirsty horses hitched near the plaza.

Alice Corbin spent her first year at Sunmount Sanitarium, and Whippie and the small daughter Alice lived in a near-by adobe house on the loma south of town. When Alice moved down to join them she discovered that the rutted dirt road in front of their home was called Telephone Road in honor of the proud new telephone poles marching up the hill. She changed that to the original Spanish name, El Camino del Monte Sol, the Road to the Sun Mountain. Other artists and writers soon built their studios near the Hendersons and the Camino became famous,

but I always think of the name as a monument to the poetic sensitiveness of Alice Corbin.

In our busy lives the years pass rapidly and mostly without specific dates or events. It was my visit with Alice Corbin and my realization of what she had meant to Santa Fe that brought me a fresh evaluation of the last three decades. At the close of the 1940's I realize that many members of the original art colony have passed on, others have reached distinguished maturity in spite of the devastating years of World War II, and a new group is now adding vitality to the old town. I think of the 1930's as the depression years when many plans were thwarted but also as a period when the art colony settled in and became an integral part of Santa Fe. I look back to the 1920's as an astonishing decade that flourished with initial impetus, creative urge and significant civic development.

Early in the twentieth century the fame of the Taos Art Colony encouraged many young artists to come to the Southwest instead of Paris. Santa Fe's pioneer artists were Kenneth Chapman and Carlos Vierra, followed in 1912 by Gerald and Ina Sizer Cassidy. During the next eighteen years probably no art colony in the United States had a more active roster than Santa Fe. The artists in permanent residence included W. P. Henderson, Warren Rollins, Albert Schmidt, Sheldon Parsons, Gustave Baumann, Olive Rush, Raymond Jonson, B. J. O. Norfeldt, Dorothy Stewart, Henry Balink, Preston McCrossen, Datus Myers, Andrew Dasburg, Vernon Hunter, Theodore Van Soelen, John Sloan, Randall Davey, Julius Rohlshoven, McHarg Davenport, William Lumpkins, Frank Applegate, Josef Bakos, Freemont Ellis, Willard Nash, Will Shuster, Walter Mruck and three sculptors, Eugenie Shonnard, Allan Clark and George Blodgett. Among the writers were Alice Corbin, Mary Austin, Witter Bynner, Willard Johnson, Haniel Long, Ida Raugh, Glenway Westcott, Lynn Riggs, Isabel Campbell, Elizabeth De Huff, Ruth Laughlin, Omar Barker, Roark Bradford, Earl and

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Marion Scott, Dorothy Hughes, John Curtis Underwood, Peggy Pond Church, Ray Otis, Phillip E. Stevenson, Thomas Wood Stevens and Helen Stevens.

In the 1920's Santa Fe was a small, friendly town where everyone knew everyone else and each individual's work was a valuable asset to the community. Whippie Henderson painted the murals for the Country Club where we danced, and Gerald Cassidy painted the murals for the movie theatre. The Little Theatre had enthusiastic members including Jane Baumann, Anna V. Huey, Hazel Pond, Norman Magee, Edwin Brooks, John Evans, Jim Macmillan and Robert Brown. Ashley Pond slid down a pole from his bedroom to his garage to jump in his car, race to a burning building and lead the Volunteer Fire Department whose staff numbered several artists and professional men.

During those years Lynn Riggs wrote his first one-act play called *Knives From Syria* with the encouragement of Ida Raugh. Glenway Westcott and Ted Stevenson struggled with their first novels, Mary Austin wrote books and articles, exhorted audiences and presided in Buddha-like majesty over a young crop of writers jokingly called the Genius Club. Marsden Hartley found inspiration in New Mexico's primitive religious art and wrote sensitive interpretations of Indian ceremonies. Poets gathered around Alice Corbin and Witter Bynner, and Spud Johnson published their poems in his temperamentally gaited literary magazine, *The Laughing Horse*.

Frank Applegate stopped over on a cross-country trek and stayed the rest of his life. His versatile gifts included ceramics, painting, writing, and collecting primitive art in bultos and santos. He bought land on the Camino opposite the Hendersons and encouraged a group of young artists to mix adobes and build their homes on that hillside. They called themselves the Cinco Pintores, the five painters being Will Shuster, Josef Bakos, Willard Nash, Freemont Ellis and Walter Mruck. These artists delighted in the plastic lines of adobe architecture but

the sloping lintels of Mruck's house even went beyond the local vagaries. For years his place was known as the "Adam and Eve House" on account of the colossal nude figures moulded on the street side of his fireplace. Across the road Mary Austin began to build her "Beloved House" and below her Alice and Datus Myers completed a spacious home with tiled walls, patios and fountains, studios and library. By this time the Hendersons had added rooms and studios to their vanguard adobe home.

Outside these simple mud houses conformed to traditional Spanish-Indian lines, but inside the artists expressed their individual tastes. Witter Bynner installed his fine Chinese carvings, paintings and jade in his adobe home. John Sloan painted the geometric lines of Indian design on his floors and ceilings. Gus Baumann carved lintels and doorways with the skill he had long used for wood-block prints. The etcher in B. J. O. Nordfelt found expression in the carved and gilded panels set into his ceiling. Randall Davey restored a Spanish balcony on his house at the end of Canyon Road, and Theodore Van Soelen and Albert Schmidt built homes at Tesuque. Olive Rush, Sheldon Parsons, and Gerald and Ina Cassidy bought historic houses on Canyon Road and added carved beams, church panels and patio gardens.

No one took as intense an interest in Spanish-Indian architecture as Carlos Vierra. He studied and photographed every old building he could find and preached his gospel of the long heritage of native architecture so vehemently that it became known as the "Santa Fe Style," although buildings at the State University in Albuquerque had been designed along Indian lines some years before.

The archaeologist, Sylvanus Griswold Morley, was the first to restore an old adobe for his home and show that native construction and carving was more attractive than the new-fangled red brick bungalows. Fired by the enthusiasm of Sylvanus Morley and Carlos Vierra that generous patron of the arts, the

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Honorable Frank Springer, gave the first large contribution toward a State Art Museum to be built along the lines of New Mexico's venerable mission churches. Later Mr. Springer commissioned Carlos Vierra to build a new house along the old lines which remains to this day one of the best examples of its kind.

A young architect, who was then a patient at Sunmount, spent days with Carlos Vierra studying old photographs and plans. His name was John Gaw Meem and by 1923 he had designed his first "Santa Fe Style" homes. A few years later the Santa Fe railroad chose him to remodel and enlarge La Fonda Hotel. Since then his name has become synonymous with the best designs of southwestern architecture.

This was the era of the world-wide renaissance of native crafts. It was a revolt against the mechanized destruction of World War I, a nostalgic longing for peace and a hunger for beauty produced by a man's own hands. New Mexico's Indian and Spanish handicrafts assumed new importance in this revival. The art colony led movements to sustain and preserve such indigenous crafts as pottery, silver and tin smithing, embroidery and weaving.

The Hendersons, Mary Austin, Frank Applegate, the Senior and Junior Leonora Curtins, Mary Wheelwright, Frank and Harry Mera, John Gaw Meem and Carlos Vierra, were leaders in organizing the Spanish Colonial Arts Society and the Indian Arts Fund. Through the latter ancient Indian pottery was saved and the best examples of new pottery were added to form a collection that has become an inspiration to international designers and to the modern Indian craftsmen.

The Indian Arts Fund collection of pottery, blankets, baskets and silver was the inspiration for building the Laboratory of Anthropology with financial aid from the Rockefeller Foundation and on land south of town donated by Amelia Elizabeth White and Francis Wilson.



Near the Laboratory Mary Wheelwright planned a unique museum for Navajo Ceremonial Arts. William Penhallow Henderson designed this museum on the lines of a Navajo hogan, and Alice Corbin wrote the text for the Navajo legends explaining the Navajo sand paintings.

The art colony did not closet itself in an adobe tower to paint or write but became articulate and intensely interested citizens. These people had discovered an Old World charm and tranquility in Santa Fe and were determined to preserve it. They fought against tearing down old houses and replacing them with filling stations, against reducing Santa Fe to that ugly American sameness that is labeled Progress, against Texas Club Women who innocently planned a Culture Center. They were individualists who argued violently with each other but united against too much change in their adopted home. Whippie Henderson felt this so strongly that he began to design buildings and planned the restoration of Sena Plaza for Amelia Elizabeth White. Alice Corbin always spoke up at any meeting where the original character of Santa Fe was imperiled.

Human rights as well as civic problems gained a champion in Alice Corbin. She was an original member of an organization formed to defeat the Bursum bill and its threat to pueblo lands. For twenty-five years she has worked with the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs to help the Indians and encourage their arts and crafts.

As a writer her influence was also widespread and vital. Although she had resigned as associate editor of *Poetry* when she left Chicago, she continued to serve as long-distance adviser and was in touch with numerous poets who submitted their work to that important magazine. When Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry*, visited Alice in Santa Fe the local group gathered around the Henderson fireplace and talked far into the night about old and new forms of literature.

Other friends of Alice Corbin came to find out why she was

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so enthusiastic about an off-the-railroad western town. Witter Bynner planned a three-day stop to see Alice and give a lecture, and became a permanent resident. Bynner took over the adobe house of Paul Berlin, the painter, and his wife Natalie Curtis, who wrote of Indian music. Among others who lived here for part of the year were Arthur Davison Ficke, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Robert Henri, George Bellows and Nicolas Roerick. Willa Cather came here to check material for her classic *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Alma Gluck sang at informal evenings at the Hendersons, Ernest Block composed his American Symphony, and Adolf Bohlm interpreted Russian dances. Sinclair Lewis wandered in and out of studios, Carl Sandburg chanted ballads to his guitar, and Vachel Lindsay gave his inimitable "Chinese Nightingale" as a special treat for his friend Alice Corbin.

Although automobiles did not have modern high-speed motors, other New Mexico writers and artists traveled the dirt roads to join the Santa Fe parties. Mabel Dodge Luhan and Tony, D. H. Lawrence and Frieda, Ernest Blumenschein, Victor Higgins, Howard Cook, Barbara Latham and Kenneth Adams came down from Taos; Erna and Harvey Fergusson came up from Albuquerque, Paul Horgan from Roswell, and Oliver La Farge from field work in the Indian country.

Everyone looked forward to John and Dolly Sloan's annual celebration August 4. One year the Bohemian crowd was startled to see a white horse join the party in the studio. Every year the audience demanded that Hal Bynner repeat his sermon by the Negro preacher, Randall Davey give his hilarious interpretations, and John Sloan go through his act of finding the hair in the soup.

Visiting, talking, partying are essential recreations for artists. Evenings at the Sloans', Hendersons', Hal Bynner's, or Mary Austin's offered exchange of thoughts and often heated arguments. They served as cross-pollenization to fertilize the artist's

half-formed plans. I remember one evening when we were all sitting on the floor in front of the fireplace and Dolly whispered, "Don't disturb Sloan. I can see that he is getting an idea for a picture." Between celebrations the art colony did serious work and gained national recognition.

Alice Corbin's appreciation of New Mexico grew deeper each year. She collected a fine library of southwestern books and studied New Mexican history, Indian myths, Penitente rituals and the folk legends and customs of her Spanish-American and Indian neighbors. She was always eager to get first hand information from such authorities as Edgar L. Hewett, Paul A. F. Walter, E. Dana Johnson, Charles F. Lummis, Nina Otero-Warren, Kenneth Chapman and Harry Mera. She delighted in Howard Thorpe's early reminiscences and encouraged him to write his collections of cowboy stories and ballads. She was an enthusiastic friend and admirer of Eugene Manlove Rhodes and, in later years, took the lead in an effort to bring out a memorial edition of all his books and make his grave a literary shrine.

Her generous help for young writers as well as those who have attained distinction has been a fine and lasting influence. Her interest has deepened with thirty years' residence and today she is still eager to add her smiling wisdom and encouragement to any constructive development in the arts or community life. In Santa Fe we value Alice Corbin as a good citizen, a distinguished poet and a beloved neighbor.

## THE POETS' ROUND-UP

*Haniel Long*

DUSK OF A DAY late in February, 1925, Santa Fe. I was going to meet Alice Corbin Henderson for the first time. An old friend was taking me across the mile of fields between his little house and her little house. It was supposed to be a short cut,

this march across the fields, for we were late, but barbed wire fences rose up against us. The stars above the white mountains seemed enormous fruit on a lacework of dark limbs and branches. The evening smelt of cedar burning in kitchen stoves. Fresh arborvitae burned on the hearth of Calypso, I remembered. But it was not across the fields of parsley we strode towards Alice Corbin—it was through the barbed wire of modern times. Occasionally my friend groaned; he was a genius for getting caught between the second and third wires.

Then a warm kitchen and Alice Corbin and her daughter, Little Alice, and her husband, "Whippy" (William Penhallow Henderson), a tall man with an iron gray moustache, and twinkling eyes. Nella, the smiling maid had made coffee, lots of it, and there was bread and butter. I had long known of Alice Corbin because she was one of the founders of *Poetry: a Magazine of Verse*. With my wife (another Alice, I was in a world of Alices), I had been studying abroad, and in a French magazine had read some of Alice Corbin's *Red Earth* poems translated by André Spire, and it had been my first knowledge of a book that still inspires awe in me. I looked at Alice Corbin in the well lighted, cheerful kitchen and some of the French lines went through my mind; she had written them in French, I conceived, being confused by the unfamiliar region and the new, mysterious people I was meeting. It really doesn't matter in what language the *Red Earth* poems are written, for they come from the beginning of things, like the large stars over the mountains, like the fragrant arborvitae on the hearth, only they are infinitely melancholy, with the loneliness of the heart at day's end. And they are infinitely remote, as though written by one who saw the world and its doings from a long way off, where only the eternal elements of man's life matter—birth and death, love, suffering. It was the mood in which she had first seen this southwestern country, and there was good reason for it. Reading the *Red Earth* poems in the atmosphere of postwar Europe, I

could respond to their undertones; and reading them today in the bleak world of East-West tension, I respond anew to their impact. The graver the moment in one's personal life or in one's world, the more these poems have to give.

The night I speak of, Alice Corbin was wearing a dust-colored riding skirt and a white blouse and blue sweater, and I mention it because it is the costume I associate her with. Out of doors she added to it a leather jacket and a small, dust-colored squarish sombrero, with a thong under the chin fastened to two Navajo silver buttons she had sewed to her hat—a perfect way of dressing for the Southwest, windy or sunny or snowy.

Alice Corbin had a little study in a field sloping from El Camino del Monte Sol, where the painters lived, down into the nest to the last valley before the rise of the mountains. A wonderful thing it was that Witter Bynner, Spud Johnson, Lynn Riggs and I used to walk over there one evening a week to talk poetry with her, and read new poems. Alice Corbin makes very little difference in the reading of poetry and prose. That was the way with most of us, but Johnson always read very fast and in a low voice and had to be enticed into reading a poem again. Bynner intoned his poems like a bishop the prayerbook; we often asked to read them for ourselves, since it was hardly likely that any poem ever written could be as good as all of his sounded as he read them. When he has thus read my verses, I have been astonished at how well I write, and demanded to see my manuscripts at once. Riggs read well and with real interest in what he had written, and he often held up the palm of his hand as he neared the end as though asking us not to begin sniping till he was through, since the end was the best. He was at that time writing a sonnet a day; as Johnson said, making it not a daily dozen but a daily fourteen.

The small adobe study had a fireplace and a window at each end and a door to the east. It was furnished with enough chairs for us, and had a table. The walls were covered with bookshelves

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and all the books were books of poems or dealt with poets and poetry. Later we met in other rooms in another house Henderson was building, but we never gathered at anybody else's house for many years. I have always had a special fondness for the adobe room where the books were so near, so quickly picked out and used, and where the moon and the large stars and the winds and odors of fields were a part of our deliberations.

I can give my own account, remembering that the account of any of my associates would be different. Riggs and Johnson generally sat a little apart from the rest of us and did a good deal of talking together, when the manuscripts being examined did not interest them. I would call their attitude neutral but agreeable. They came quickly to the defense of a poem they thought was getting rough treatment. Alice Corbin herself was always a gentle critic, and took the position of allowing a poem to grow in its own right like a plant. Her attitude towards a new poem, or a new aspect of a friend's psyche, was one of welcome.

Nella, the maid, who produced such good coffee, often said to her mistress when things went wrong, "Put no tension to it"; but in our poetry evenings tension there was bound to be, though not too serious.

Alice Corbin is definitely a group person. Several things resulted from these evenings. For example, seven years later, a group of us started a venture in co-operative publishing—an intricate and instructive tale not to be gone into here. More for the general reader is the story of the Poet's Round-Up.

Alice Corbin, Margaret McKittrick, Sarah McComb, and Maurice Leseman were sitting one afternoon in Mrs. McComb's walled garden wondering how they could raise money for the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs. Alice Corbin proposed public readings by the local poets. Leseman suggested that Margaret McKittrick introduce them and the latter said she would wear her cowboy outfit to do so. "Then it can be a rodeo," someone suggested, "and the poets can be the horses." The

summer public was willing to pay money to see the poets, and there are always a good many poets in Santa Fe. And the poets were glad to co-operate to help the Pueblo Indians. Through the stormy time of the Bursum bill and afterwards, the Indians were in need of help, and their defenders were in need of money to help them. It has been true of Santa Fe, from the first entry of Kearny's troops, this interest in the welfare of the peace-loving Pueblo Indians. It is a wistful interest, not without the suggestion that our own evolutionary path has gone too far in the direction of exploitation.

In past ages poets have often faced their public, and it is good for the poets and good for the public to look at one another. In contests in the past laurel wreathes have been prizes. Poets have accompanied themselves on musical instruments. The troubadours recited or sang the songs their jongleurs had written for them. At the Olympic games, poetic contests honored Apollo. But I have not heard of any occasion quite like the Round-Up.

To Alice Corbin, for the sake of performers and audience, the affair had to be given a casual and semi-humorous turn. Being introduced as though they were horses coming out of the chutes at a rodeo took away self-consciousness, and it amused the audience. Before and during the affair, Peach Van Stone (Mrs. Walter Mayer) played the guitar and sang Spanish or cowboy songs. At first we held the Round-Up on the lawn to the north of Sarah McComb's house, under the tall cottonwoods along the river. There was always the fear of rain, for the rains come in summer, and at times we had deluges. There was the whistling of the narrow gauge train from Durango, which traveled at the rate of a fast burro. And there was the wind in the trees to contend with, a poetic rival indeed.

The audience sat on camp chairs arranged as near the chutes as possible, and could hear and understand most of the poems, I hope, despite time and tide and the narrow gauge train. Many

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of our auditors came back year after year, both residents of Santa Fe and summer visitors.

The performers often included personages like Mary Austin, Langdon Mitchell, Ernest Seton. All of us who were to read would meet at Alice Corbin's the evening before, so that we might arrange a balanced program. It is not as easy as one might think to do so. People love to hear ballads and stories and also witty poems, but we had to have a great deal more variety. Alice Corbin solved the difficulty by insisting that the poet read something in his true vein.

She was never more tactful and casual than in persuading the reluctant, strengthening the timid, advising the confused, and this of course in the midst of general conversation and argument. It was her attitude of welcome to what each of us had to give that made a success of it. Not all poets want to appear in public; not all of them want to dress up in blue jeans or Navajo skirts and jewelry; not all of them have good voices; not all of them, one might say, find life worth living. But the element of competition is excellent, as our kindly governess reminded us; the written word is destined for the eye and mind of others. It is true that the poet is the most independent of all artists, and the only one who can afford to look beyond the questions of what his hearers might find agreeable. But he faces a difficulty of a different kind, quite often, in a natural reluctance at personally reading to the world what he has dragged up from his own insides. All poets are shy, I think, even those who appear otherwise.

And one more thing about Alice Corbin. Once I had to while away a good deal of time doing nothing much, and I used to recite to myself my favorite poets, by the hour. But a poem which had haunted me for years, during the month of March—and it was now March at its worst—one of Pound's, proved irrecoverable except for one line:

"Stepping beneath a boisterous wind from Thrace,"



. . . I used to ask my friends whether they knew it or knew where I could find it. It is a trivial episode, but at the time, even in a world full of apprehension and suffering, the loss of this poem was a matter of moment to me. This Alice Corbin understood. If others did, they gave no sign of it. It was she who tracked the poem down, typed it off, and gave it to me to put in my wallet. I value this characteristic of Alice Corbin. . . .

She is a group person, as I say; and by that I mean a good deal. She has been part of various good movements here; she is at home in that civic world, and often a leader in it. But there is another kind of group in which I always see Alice Corbin, in which the end is simply to be with friendly spirits who share one's interests and enthusiasms; where people are valued for what they are, it is not a question of whipping them into line. Such groups, naturally unknown in totalitarian states, are the flower of the free nations, and the people who fit into them easily, and fight to save them, are, I often think, our most precious possessions. Fighting to save them may mean many things, but in daily life it means not trying to control the atmosphere of one's group, and not using it as a place to show off. It means paying others an attention full of perceptiveness of them as individuals.

## THE RABBLE

*Spud Johnson*

IT ALL STARTED at the old Henderson house—the little adobe with the deep screened porch at the corner, which stood just above the *acequia* on El Camino del Monte Sol. This house was perhaps the humblest on the road, yet it always sparkled with warm generosity and always swarmed with celebrities or neighbors, quite indiscriminately.

(Little Alice screaming in Spanish at Nella or her myriad relations; Whippie telling a long, long western yarn while dinner cooled; Alice Corbin smiling benignly at bedlam or at

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a quiet conversation, with equal calm and keen understanding.)

I remember many evenings there when the after-dinner gaiety was provided by playing a sonnet-writing game which George called "Bory-may." Whether this word came into our (or my) language by the Law of Hobson-Jobson from a French word which made sense, I don't know. I have a vague recollection that somebody once said it did.

Anyhow, the game consisted of each person contributing a word, or perhaps two or three, depending upon how many of us were playing. The third and fourth words had to rhyme with the first and second, the seventh and eighth with the fifth and sixth, and so on through fourteen words, to make a Shakespearean sonnet. Then each person wrote his own sonnet, all of us using the identical end-words. Surprisingly enough, we always produced a remarkable variety of compositions: some quite preposterous, of course; a few very apt to be scatological; and occasionally a quite respectable poem.

It was a good game in itself, and proved even better in its effect, for it started all of us into a new frenzy of writing. Soon we were bringing things we had written during the week to try out on each other, or to ask for criticisms and suggestions; and our gatherings tended to become a regular weekly event, and to be limited to writers, rather than a mixed group of painters, summer visitors, musicians and what not.

Alice Corbin had written very little since the publication of *Red Earth*. Little Alice was growing up and then getting married at fifteen; the new house further up the hill on the Camino was being built—everything had conspired to keep her too busy to write verse. So she was delighted, I think, to have us give that little push of incentive that group activity, at its best, can supply so painlessly.

Hal Bynner was then working on the Chinese translations almost exclusively, and he, too, was glad of this slight prod to write more of his own lyrics.

Haniel Long had recently come to Santa Fe, and with him I think it was a kind of relief to be talking shop with writers who were not his students, for he had been teaching for many years at Carnegie Tech.

Lynn Riggs and I completed the group: we were the youngsters, just out of college, and thrilled to be included in a group of professionals who discussed our work as gravely and seriously as they did their own.

So it came about, quite naturally, and with no plan at all, that we were meeting every week, generally at the Hendersons; and before we knew it, we were "A Club."

We were quite serious about it, yet gay, too. It was a workshop group, and we were all using it to try out new things, to get an advance reaction before sending things out into the bleak world of terse rejection slips; and as a stimulus to make us write when we might otherwise have fallen into the good old *mañana* spirit. But sometimes we wrote things just to amuse the group, or to burlesque each other, or simply to fill the gap between more serious "inspirations."

It was in these deviations that Alice was the ringleader. Her eyes sparkled and darkened with a real roguishness when she made some gently naughty crack, or pushed one of us off some too-sententious height with a ladylike but nevertheless bawdy quip, generally in her lowest, most throaty tone, but with an infectious gurgle of laughter behind it.

And that is how we got our name: we seemed to lapse so often into a Rabelaisian mood, that soon we were referring to ourselves as The Rabelais Club, which was quickly altered, since, that sounded much too stodgy, to the simple informality of "The Rabble."

It's a little sad to be recalling this now as something that happened a long time ago; but the interesting thing is that the group has not been completely dispersed, and we not only meet

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frequently and speak often of our old club, but occasionally revive it, with added members.

For instance, all of us, except Riggs, still live in New Mexico and not so many miles apart; and last year he was here again for several months—and, lo, the Rabble rose up on its hind legs and had several pleasant sessions, with three of the founders absent, but with three new members informally added.

And who knows but that verses written at these later gatherings may appear in Alice Corbin's next revised edition of *The Turquoise Trail*, just as the Rabble's first efforts certainly had a prominent place in Alice's own book *The Sun Turns West*, in Hal's *Indian Earth*, Haniel's *Atlantides* or even portions of *Pittsburgh Memorandum*, in Lynn's *The Iron Dish*, and in my *Horizontal Yellow*.

So thank you for all of us, Alice. The Rabble made us jolly—made us write—and it would not have existed but for your gay, hospitable interest in all of us, and in what we were doing.

## THE PENITENTE BOOK

*Oliver La Farge*

SO FAR AS I KNOW, there exists only one book upon the Penitentes of New Mexico which one can hand to any interested person with the assurance that it is completely dependable, and that is *Brothers of Light*.<sup>1</sup> In lending it to a friend, or stimulating one to go hunt himself up a copy, one does so also with the pleasant knowledge that one is letting him in for a real aesthetic experience.

Many of the contributors to this symposium have referred to the relationship between Alice Corbin and her husband,

<sup>1</sup> *Brothers of Light, the Penitentes of the Southwest*, by Alice Corbin Henderson, illustrations by William Penhallow Henderson, Harcourt, Brace and Co. New York, 1937.

William Penhallow Henderson. The creative demonstration of this relationship is in *Brothers of Light*, a work in which the author assumed a different role in many ways from her role in her other published works. There are, first, two forms of fairly obvious collaboration. The observations on the Penitentes were made by the two together, indeed could hardly have been made by a woman alone, since much of Penitente ritual is man's business. There is the collaboration of writer and graphic artist, the one producing the written work, the other contributing, not only illustrations, but a finely worked-out typography and format, so much so that a new edition of this book—which is devoutly to be prayed for—would be incomplete did it not closely reproduce the old.

This second element of collaboration, through which a large-scale publisher was caused to produce such a book as ordinarily comes from the special presses at a very special price, also reflects the fact that the author is indeed a poet, in the technical sense of the word. Your true poet's work is usually a slow distillate. His attitude towards its presentation inevitably differs from that of the prose writer, who produces an infinitely larger volume of writings of assorted lengths and deems his creative years arid indeed if they do not leave him credited with a minimum of a dozen solid books. The prose writer takes a hard-boiled, professional attitude towards the manufacture of the volumes which contain his work; he would never think of harassing his publisher with advice as to format. As for illustrations, all he asks is to be spared them, for not in a thousand seekings will he find one illustrator who will fulfill, rather than destroy, the images he has created. Corbin turned prose writer remained poet.

The existence of this single treatise, this monograph—for the latter term can correctly be applied to it—likewise derives from the poetic element. Corbin set out to write a book on the Southwest. Writers of varied ability, mostly on the modest side, have turned out books on the Southwest, or on New Mexico, with all

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too little effort. Corbin, approaching her whole as if each part must have the perfection of a poem, has brought only this one section to publishable completion. This one is not comparable to any other writing of similar expressed purpose that I know of. It stands as at once the best thing that has been written about the Penitentes artistically, and as the definitive published work on the subject to date. It is both scholarly and beautiful.

In the applicability of the adjective "scholarly," in the genuine research underlying the literary presentation, we find another aspect of the Corbin-Henderson collaboration, informal and indirect in part, perhaps, direct and overt in part, I know. I do not know how much of the scholar Corbin had in her to start with; not too much I suspect. Henderson had that bent definitely. As an artist, as an architect, as an observer and relisher of the Southwest, he was deeply read, loaded with far-ranging comparisons. I suspect that it was from him that his wife acquired the habit of backing her keen observations, her poet's perceptions, with learning. It is definite that in *Brothers of Light* a goodly part of the comparative material which gives the book much of its scientific weight was originally suggested to her by Henderson. *Brothers of Light* is a book which an anthropologist can read profitably and cite unhesitatingly, not only as to the observations therein recorded, but as to reasoning and evidence on the history of the Penitente pattern. This is due to a collaboration, not just on one book, but in life, the constant exchange of the riches of two minds.

In the 1930's a veteran southwestern ethnologist constantly belabored her colleagues because, in considering the origins of various Indian patterns and rituals, they completely ignored comparable or contrasting practices of old Spain, data which might importantly change their thinking.<sup>2</sup> In 1937 Corbin published *Brothers of Light*, which does not, of course, deal with the

<sup>2</sup> E. g.: Elsie Clews Parsons, "Some Aztec and Pueblo Parallels," *American Anthropologist*, vol. 35, no. 4, 1933, pp. 596-610.

Indians, but with a cult vulgarly supposed to be unique to the old Spanish area of New Mexico. Her reasoning concerning its origins and wide relationships is firmly based on comparative studies of Mexico and Spain. There are no footnotes in this book, none of the appanage of science; indeed, the author merely set out to be intelligent and complete. Papal prohibitions of public flagellations may be traced back to 1349, the descent of the Third Order of Saint Francis may be traced, but this is done so smoothly that even the scientific reader is lulled out of recognition that the book is what, were it made a bit more formidable, he would automatically call a "monograph."

When a scientifically minded poet produces a poetical piece of science, all one can do is praise God. The temptation is to search the book for quotations, but in a descriptive work of this kind, quotations of reasonable length are more likely to be demonstrations of inept amputation than of the full effect of the author's prose. Here and there a line stands clear, able to be lifted out: in the discussion of Penitente music, on page 73, the paragraph ends with the flashing, descriptive sentence, "These shrill sounds of religious fervor suddenly lifted above the bare desert have the effect of poisoning the single soul against space." Most of us would take a page *trying* to say that.

Fiction and non-fiction, we have had a great deal of "penetrating" or "understanding" writing about the native peoples of the Southwest. (Respectable writing about Spanish-Americans or Indians by themselves does not exist, from any period, except for certain autobiographies taken down by scientists, and even these are on the esoteric side.) Some writers muscularly lose themselves in an alleged identification with their alien subjects.<sup>3</sup> Some write studies from an Olympian, "we must understand them" point of view. Some, like Mary Austin, create literary images and then describe them, producing reality once removed. One group, outstandingly D. H. Lawrence (one wonders what

<sup>3</sup> *Mea culpa!*

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T. E. might have given us), sets out in a complex search for simplicity, peering through refractions of a mysticism they have brought with them and superimposed upon the country, a sort of prismatic vulva in which they see only their own problems surrounded by rainbows. When this last tendency is combined with neo-Rousseauesque sentimentalism, we reach the impressively adorned abyss of Hiawatha in modern dress.

The writers' fallacies derive from more general ones which we observe in the daily attitudes of what might be called "the reading class," collectors of Indian art, of Spanish *bultos* and folklore. There is the Lord-and-Lady Bountiful approach, how kind we are to these people, and the attitude which asks you to observe them treating the quaint natives as if they really were equals. There is the wildly sentimental. What is extremely rare is the man-to-man relationship, with solid, hard judgment of one's fellow man's weaknesses and strengths, respect both for one's self and for him, the true friendship which wishes to be understood as well as to understand. It is this relationship which the Hendersons established with a great diversity of people, with the entire naturalness of the simple and of true artists. It is none the less genuine for being enlightened with a poet's perceptions and enriched by research. Without it, neither the poems quoted in Mr. Fletcher's article in this symposium nor *Brothers of Light* could have been written.