

Some writers are given a great gift: the ability to weave words of jewel-color into perfect shapes. Manly Wade Wellman was a master of such craft. John the Balladeer is one of his most beloved creations: a good man armed with faith, who brings hope to, and support for, those who deserve his aid. John stands for the Light against the Dark and, by the power of his singing silver strings, draws sweet and healing waters from mud and choking weeds. His magic music shouts to the "mountains so high" and soothes in the "valley so low." Long may he wander among us to keep The Spring ever flowing for years to come.

—Andre Norton

## THE SPRING

*by Manly Wade Wellman*

Time had passed, two years of it, when I got back to those mountains again and took a notion to visit the spring.

When I was first there, there'd been just a muddy, weedy hole amongst rocks. A young fellow named Zeb Gossett lay there, a-burning with fever, a-trying to drink at it. I pulled him onto some ferns and put my blanket over him. Then I knelt down and dragged out the mud with my hands, picked weeds away and bailed with a canteen cup. Third time I emptied the hole to the bottom, water came clear and sweet. I let Zeb Gossett have some, and then I built us a fire and stirred up a hoccake. By the time it was brown on both sides, he was able to sit up and eat half of it.

Again and again that night, I fetched him water, and it did him good. When I picked my silver-strung guitar, he even joined in to sing. Next day he allowed he was well, and said he'd stay right where such a good thing happened to him. I went on, for I had something else to do. But I left Zeb a little sack of meal and a chunk of bacon and some salt in a tin can. Now, returned amongst mountains named Hark and Wolter and Dogged, not far from Yandro,