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AUSTIN

CABELLIAN *HARMONICS*

By Warren A. McNeill

With an Introductory Note
by JAMES BRANCH CABELL

[There can be few readers of KALKI who are unfamiliar with the reputation of Cabellian Harmonics, if not with the text; and for these few, Mr. McNeill has kindly written us a new preface, which follows immediately below.

[The book consists of ten chapters (plus an introduction by Cabell himself). We hope to run at least one of these each issue. -- EDS]

LOOKING BACK

Cabellian Harmonics was written to share with a larger group the fun one little band of readers found in trading discoveries about the less obvious features of the writing of James Branch Cabell. The similarity of that objective and the present policy of KALKI is obvious.

My interest in Cabell was stimulated in 1924, when I dropped out of college, for economic reasons and was working as a newspaper reporter (The Lynchburg, Va. *News*). The hospitable backroom of a bookshop near

the newspaper office was a gathering place for those who talked of Cabell's anagrams and double meanings, his poetry hidden in prose form, his real and imaginary sources, the themes knitting together his books, his theology of the writer who creates his own universe, and the secret of the mirror and pigeons.

I discovered that if I sent Mr. Cabell an editorial or book review I had written concerning him I could count on a prompt and courteous reply, including answers (not always explicit in their meaning) to questions I asked about his books. Each letter I received was savoured and digested by our group.

When I returned to college (University of Richmond, VA.) to complete work for my B.A. degree in 1925, Cabell became the subject of my English Major thesis. Again, I found him helpful in answering questions. My correspondence with him continued when I returned to newspaper work (Richmond, Va. *Times Dispatch*) and after (I had reviewed THE SILVER STALLION for my paper's book page in 1926 I was invited to meet Mr. Cabell in his home. Personal contacts continued until 1927 when I received my M.A. from the University of Richmond and returned to Lynchburg to work again on *The News*.

Back in Lynchburg, the bookshop sessions were resumed and I was encouraged to continue to seek Mr. Cabell's answer to questions we raised. He was particularly co-operative in helping me identify, and properly scan, passages of what he called "contrapuntal prose", and in February of 1928 I confessed to him that I hoped to put this material into book form, and asked if he would co-operate by writing a foreword.

The project, as first conceived, was for the book to be written by me with the printing sponsored by Philip Lightfoot Scruggs, the bookshop manager who also was a writer, and to have distribution handled by a travelling representative of several publishers, who often joined our group discussions.

The first synopsis, submitted to Cabell, suggested the title: *James Branch Cabell as Economist*. The five proposed chapter headings were:-

- I. Economics of Concealment.
- II. Contrapuntal Subterfuges.

- III. Something about Jurgen.
- IV. Vagaries of a Verse-Maker.
- V. Reflections as to Mirrors and Pigeons.

The conception grew and changed after Mr. Cabell gave his blessing and continued to offer helpful information. When I sent him a first draft of the completed manuscript in March, I pointed out that it now had ten chapters, largely in deference to Horvendile, who insisted that I too was bound by Poictesme's decimal system.

In April Mr. Cabell sent me his foreward and in May I told him of the possibility that the publication would be handled by Random House. Negotiations with Bennett Cerf for the Random House issue were completed in August, It was then agreed that the limited edition would consist of 1500 copies for sale, to correspond roughly with the 1550 sets of the Storisende Edition of Cabell's BIOGRAPHY which was then being issued in quarterly instalments, *Cabellian Harmonics* was announced in the Random House forecast for the 1928-29 season. Publication date, as designated by the note accompanying review copies, was November 20, 1928.

Putting together, forty years later, this bare-bones outline of how the book came into being I am conscious of how much farther others have gone in their detailed research of Cabell and his work. I doubt, however, if any have derived more enjoyment than I have from the exercise.

So, I still inscribe myself, like "The Toy Maker" in FROM THE HIDDEN WAY:

"Only a scribbler who is content."

Wann A. McNeill

Louisville, Ky.
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