There seems to be a belated move afoot to collect Manly Wade Wellman’s stories of John and his silver-stringed guitar into a book. Mr. Wellman has in mind that the stories might be joined together by vignettes of the following sort, and we are hopeful that you will be as approving of the whole idea as we are.

WONDER AS I WANDER:
SOME FOOTPRINTS ON JOHN’S TRAIL THROUGH MAGIC MOUNTAINS

by Manly Wade Wellman

Then I Wasn’t Alone

Reckoning I had that woodsy place all to myself, I began to pick Pretty Sara on my guitar’s silver strings for company. But then I wasn’t alone; for soft fluty music began to play along with me.

Looking sharp, I saw him through the green laurels right in front. He was young. He hadn’t a shirt on. Nary razor had ever touched his soft yellowy young beard. To his mouth he held a sort of hollow twig and his slim fingers danced on and off a line of holes to make notes. Playing, he smiled at me.

I smiled back, and started The Ring That Has No End. Right away quick he was playing that with me, too, soft and sweet and high, but not shrill.

He must want to be friends, I told myself, and got up and held out a hand to him.

He whirled around and ran. Just for a second before he was gone, I saw that he was a man only to his waist. Below that he had the legs of a horse, four of them.

You Know the Tale of Hoph

The noon sun was hot on the thickets, but in his cabin was only blue dim light. His black brows made one streak above iron-colored eyes. “Yes, ma’am?” he said.
"I'm writing a book of stories," she said, and she was rose-faced and butter-haired. "I hear you know the tale of Hoph. How sailors threw him off a ship in a terrible storm a hundred years ago, but the sea swept him ashore and then he walked and walked until he reached these mountains. How he troubled the mountain people with spells and curses and sendings of nightmares."

His long white teeth smiled in his long white face. "But you know that story already."

"No, not all of it. What was Hoph's motivation in tormenting the people?"

"His food was the blood of pretty women," was what he replied her. "Each year he made them give him a pretty woman. When she died at the year's end, with the last drop of her blood gone, he made them give him another."

"Until he died too," she tried to finish.

"He didn't die. They didn't know that he had to be shot with a silver bullet."

Up came his hands into her sight, shaggy-haired, long-clawed. She screamed once.

From the dark corner where I hid I shot Hoph with a silver bullet.

**Blue Monkey**

"I'll turn this potful of pebbles into gold," the fat man told us at midnight, "if you all keep from thinking about a blue monkey."

He poured in wine, olive oil, salt, and with each he said a certain word. He put the lid on and walked three times around the pot, singing a certain song. But when he turned the pot over, just the pebbles poured out.

"Which of you was thinking about a blue monkey?"

They all admitted they'd thought of nothing else. Except me—I'd striven to remember exactly what he'd said and done. Then everybody vowed the fat man's gold-making joke was the laugh-ingest thing they'd seen in a long spell.

One midnight a year later and far away, I shoved pebbles into another pot at another doings, and told the folks: "I'll turn them into gold if you all can keep from thinking about a red fish."

I poured in the wine, the olive oil, the salt, saying the word that went with each. I covered the pot, walked the three times, sang the song. Then I asked: "Did anybody think about a blue monkey?"

"But, John," said the prettiest lady, "you said not to think about a red fish, and that's what I couldn't put from my mind."

"I said that to keep you from thinking about a blue monkey," I said, and tried to tip the pot over.

But it had turned too heavy to move. I lifted the lid. There inside
the pebbles shone yellow. The prettiest lady picked up two or three. They clinked together in her pink palm.

"Gold!" she squeaked. "Enough to make you rich, John!"

"Divide it up among yourselves," I said. "Gold’s not what I want, nor yet richness."

_The Stars Down There_

"I mean it," she said again. "You can’t go any farther, because here’s where the world comes to its end."

She might have been a few years older than I was, or a few years younger. She was thin-pretty, with all that dark hair and those wide-stretched eyes. The evening was cool around us, and the sun’s last edge faded back on the way I’d come.

"The world’s round as a ball," and I kicked a rock off the cliff. "It goes on forever."

And I harked for the rock to hit bottom, but it didn’t.

"I’m not trying to fool you," she said. "Here’s the ending place of the world. Don’t step any closer."

"Just making to look down into the valley," I told her. "I see mist down there."

"It isn’t mist."

And it wasn’t.

For down there popped out stars in all their faithful beauty, the same way they were popping out over our heads. A skyful of stars. No man could say how far down they were.

"I ask your pardon for doubting you," I said. "It’s sure enough the ending place of the world. If you jumped off here, you’d fall forever and ever."

"Forever and ever," she repeated me. "That’s what I think. That’s what I hope. That’s why I came here this evening."

Before I could catch hold of her, she’d jumped. Stooping, I saw her falling, littler and littler against the stars down there, till at last I could see her no more.

_Find the Place Yourself_

_It might be true that_ there’s a curse on that house. It’s up a mountain cove that not many know of, and those who do know won’t talk to you about it. So if you want to go there you’ll have to find the place yourself.

When you reach it, you won’t think at first it’s any great much. Just a little house, half logs and half whipsawed planks, standing quiet and gray and dry, the open door daring you to come in.

But don’t you go taking any such a dare. Nor don’t look too long at the bush by the door-stone, the one with flowers of three different colors. Those flowers will look back at you like hard, mean faces, with eyes that hold yours.
In the trees over you will be wings fluttering, but not bird wings. Round about you will whisper voices, so soft and faint they're like voices you remember from some long-ago time, saying things you wish you could forget.

If you get past the place, look back and you'll see the path wiggle behind you like a snake after a lizard. Then's when to run like a lizard, run your fastest and hope it's fast enough.

I Can't Claim That

When I called Joss Kift's witch-talk a lie, Joss swore he'd witch-kill me in thirteen days.

Then in my path a rag doll looking like me, with a pin stuck through the heart. Then a black rooster flopping across my way with his throat cut, then a black dog hung to a tree, then other things. The thirteenth dawn, a whisper from nowhere that at midnight a stick with my soul in it would be broken thirteen times and burnt in a special kind of fire.

I lay on a pallet bed in Tram Colley's cabin, not moving, not speaking, not opening my mouth for the water Tram tried to spoon to me. Midnight. A fire blazed outside. Its smoke stunk. My friends around me heard the stick break and break and break, heard Joss laugh. Then Joss stuck his head in the window above me to snicker and say: "Ain't he natural-looking?"

I grabbed his neck with both hands. He dropped and hung across the sill like a sock. When they touched him, his heart had stopped, scared out of beating.

I got up. "Sorry he ended that-away," I said. "I was just making out that I was under his spell, to fool him."

Tram Colley looked at me alive and Joss dead. "He'll speak no more wild words and frightful commands," he said.

"I reckon it's as I've heard you say, Grandsire," said a boy. "Witch-folks can't prevail against a pure heart."

"I can't claim that," I said.

For I can't. My heart's sinful, and each day I hope it's less sinful than yesterday.

Who Else Could I Count On

"I reckon I'm bound to believe you," I admitted to the old man at last. "You've given me too many proofs. It couldn't be any otherwise but that you've come back from the times forty years ahead of now."

"You believe because you can believe wonders, John," he said. "Not many could be made to believe anything I've said."

"This war that's going to be," I started to inquire him, "the one that nobody's going to win—"
"The war that everybody's going to lose," he broke in. "I've come back to this day and time to keep it from starting if I can. Come with me, John. We'll go to the men that rule this world. We'll make them believe, too, make them see that the war mustn't start."

"Explain me one thing first," I said.
"What's that?" he asked.
"If you were an old man forty years ahead of now, then you must have been young right in these times." I talked slowly, trying to clear the idea for both of us. "If that's so, what if you meet the young man you used to be?"

So softly he smiled: "John," he said, "why do you reckon I sought you out of all men living today?"
"Lord have mercy!" I said.
"Who else could I count on?"
"Lord have mercy!" I said again.