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The Meaning of Culture

John Cowper Powys

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John Cowper Powys could never be straightforward or orthodox but here he sets off with a useful purpose. 'The aim of this book,' he declares, 'is to narrow down a vague and somewhat evasive conception, which hitherto, like "aristocracy" or "liberty", has come to imply a number of contradictory and even paradoxical elements, and to give it, not, of course, a purely logical form, but a concrete, particular, recognizable form, malleable and yielding enough and relative enough, but with a definite and quite unambiguous temper, tone, quality, atmosphere, of its own.' The book is in two parts: Analysis of Culture which deals with, in separate chapters, Philosophy, Literature, Poetry, Painting and Religion: Application of Culture which covers Happiness, Love, Nature, The Art of Reading, Human Relations, Destiny and Obstacles to Culture.

John Cowper Powys hoped 'that the fine word "culture" . . . might lend itself to an easy, humane and liberal discussion - a sort of one-man Platonic symposium - and even turn out to contain, among its various implications, no unworthy clue to the narrow path of the wise upon earth.' He succeeds completely, in his own idiosyncratic way, in achieving that.

'Mr Powys is to be congratulated on having written a book of the kind that most needs writing and most deserves to be read . . . Here in a dozen chapters of glowing and eloquent prose, Mr Powys describes for very reader that citadel which is himself, and explains to him how it may be strengthened and upheld and on what terms it is most worth upholding. . .' *Manchester Guardian*

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