## ALMOST AS OLD AS THE HILLS THEMSELVES.
FRED L. ASHWORTH

Under a branching maple I chat with an old man about work and crops. He looks like a gnarled tree himself, weathered and grown wild, an abandoned orchard returning to forest. We do come to resemble that which we know. Seeking lore, children pester their elders with questions. Herbs and trees and stars and water. The ordinary is never seen. The eye is more easily attracted to a detail that appears unusual against the background of event. Fred Ashworth is a native of these parts. His knowledge of the natural world is known throughout my community. "I canvassed and explored this northern section of New York State for 45 years before I found a butternut that I considered worthy of propagating," Fred writes. There are the stories I've heard of how he seems to know trees better than most folks and how he knows the land and how he might be a source of advice on growing things so I went to his place and asked.

"Then one spring, several years ago, at a place known as Chamberlin Corners, near Madrid, New York, I saw some butternuts under a tree beside the road. They had opened slightly at the sutures with the winter weather and I found I could pry off the shell and remove the kernel without breaking it. I was so thrilled with this evidence of cracking quality that I even put it back together, picked up some more and planted them. I have named this the Chamberlin butternut."

The plants that Fred Ashworth handles are ordinary plants. There is a wonder in this — you can be friends with the material with which you work.

— *Alan Casline*
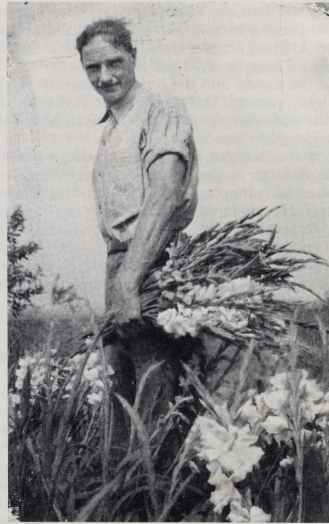
Fred Ashworth in 1924

POEMS by FRED L. ASHWORTH

MENDELIAN ALCHEMY

Standing with her tall glad spikes;
Herself fairer than the flower;
She proudly shows the kinds she likes;
Fruit of her toil and dreaming hour.

'twas Golden Sunshine in her glads,
And golden sunshine in her hair.
Both recessive, mystery clad;
Both dream-precious, unique and rare.

Wings of Song was favorite too;
Bringing to mind her whistled air;
Suffusion of Coryphee hue
Her fine, patrician features share.

Evolution *is* Creation;
And the keeper at the gate
Is Mendelian relation
Until life finds its proper mate.

RINDA'S LAUGHTER

There's a ringing appeal in the flick of the steel
And the swallow-like sweep o'er the bay,
In the snap and the spring of the crack's icy fling
That the summer can never convey.

There's a wild, fleeting thrill in the plunge down the hill
And a laugh in the leap out away,
With a white whelm of snow in the landing below
That the summer will seldom forsay.

There are fairy flowers in brown silvan bowers
And a sparkle on needle and spray,
And a crystal world born with the radiant morn
That the summer can never array.

There's a beat the axe rings and a song the saw sings
As the timbers tremble and sway,
And a warmth of delight in the homelight at night
That the summer will never gainsay.

There's the Valkyrie's night with its spectral fire bright
As they search the battlefield gray,
Ghostly rainbows of fire coiling higher and higher
That the summer will seldom display.

There's a challenge and glow in the wild winter snow
Of the storm as it roars on its way,
Writhing serpents of snow in the sunset's red glow
That the summer will never assay.

LOVE

That biologically stablized form of insanity
Which gets by under the name of "love"
Has been harnessed to most of the hopes of humanity
But balks at a sophistical shove.

DEAD ELMS

I saw the sun go down ten times tonight
Amid its flaming clouds and glory;
And on each ridge we left behind, less bright
Stood elms robbed of their leafy glory.

Dark fingers reaching for the clouds of mauve:
Dead limbs of grotesque form and gestures:
A plane's Midgard Serpents trail far above:
Piebald cows gleaning stony pastures.

Evolution in action; seen by all:
Some hedgerow will sprout an immune tree
Of chestnut, oak or elm by an old wall.
None so blind as those who will not see.

Earthly unique, a full Moon lights the night,
Shining behind the stark tree profiles:
Crescent of Venus in the waning light:
Sparkling dew on the last slow miles.