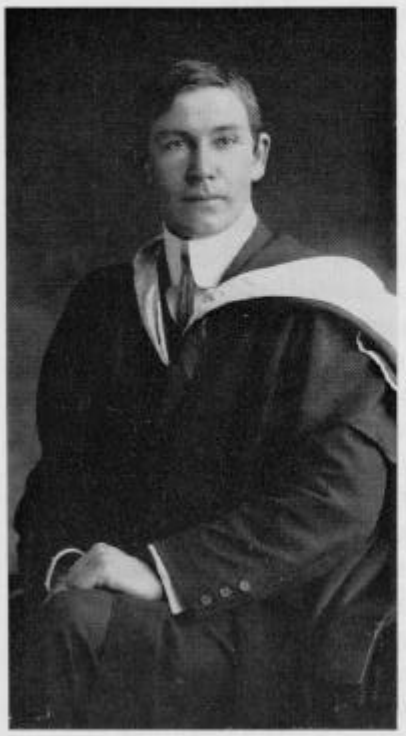
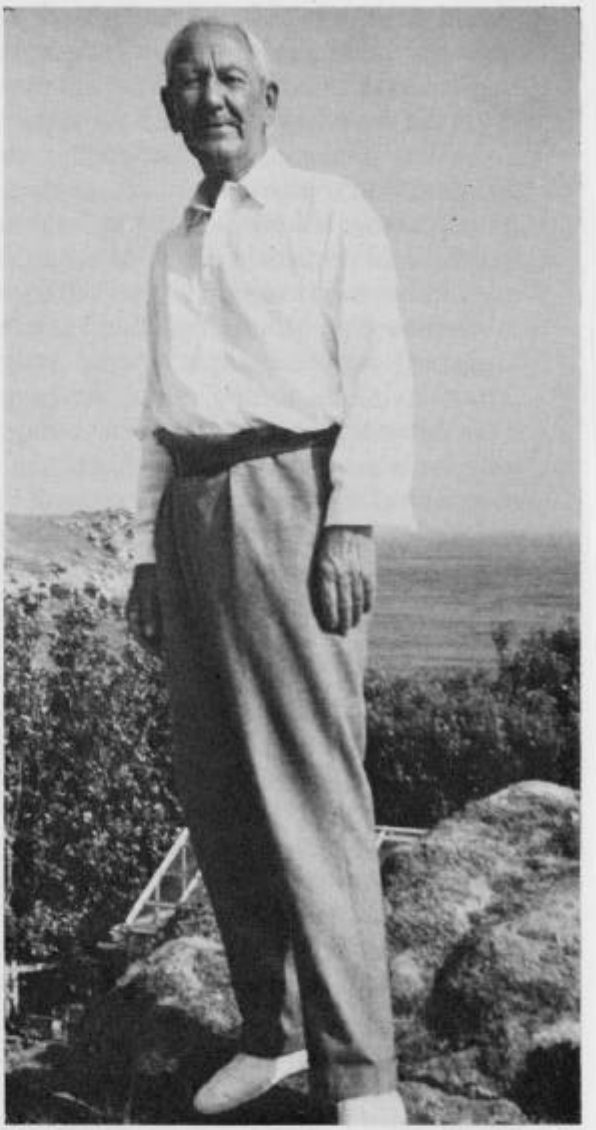
PLATE XXVI





1. In his Auckland robes, 1910.

2. On Middle Carn, September 1959.
Photograph by T. Mustanoja.

KENNETH SISAM

KENNETH SISAM

1887–1971

KENNETH SISAM was born on 2 September 1887 and died on 26 August 1971. In writing something about his life in New Zealand (1887–1910), at Oxford University (1910–17), in London (1917–23), at the Clarendon Press (1923–48), and in Scilly (1948–71) I have had a great deal of help, above all from his daughter, Miss Celia Sisam. I would like to thank her and also the following: Mr. Hugh Sisam; the abbot of Downside and Dom Daniel Rees, O.S.B., for allowing me to use the letters Sisam wrote to Edmund Bishop in the years 1911–17; Mr. D. M. Davin, for giving me access to files of Press correspondence and for much other help; Professor Dorothy Whitelock, for the loan of letters Sisam wrote to her; Lady Welch, who was with him in the Ministry of Food (1917–20); Mrs. Figgis, who, as Miss Bone, was with him there and at the Press (1920–4); Dr. Nigel Abercrombie, Professor J. A. W. Bennett, Mr. R. W. Burchfield, Mr. E. H. Cordeaux, Mr. R. E. Coxon, Dr. Roger Highfield, Mr. Raymond Page, Mr. David Vaisey, Miss Margaret Weedon.

Sisam's paternal grandfather, Thomas, farmed the lands of Arrow Mill, near Alcester. His father, Alfred John, left Warwickshire for the North Island of New Zealand in 1863, together with two brothers. In New Zealand he got married and had eight children, four daughters and four sons, of whom Kenneth was by seven years the youngest. His wife was Maria Knights and, to judge from photographs, the sons Leonard, Walter, and Kenneth, derived their distinctive looks from her. Kenneth was born at Opotiki on the Bay of Plenty. In about 1890 the family moved to the then very small settlement of Whakatane some forty miles further east along the coast, where Alfred Sisam was police constable and clerk of the court and two of his daughters successively had charge of the post office. Mrs. Sisam died there in 1894 at the age of 48. By this time the country, still essentially wild after the Maori wars, was being tamed and settled in sections. Alfred Sisam obtained one of forty-four sections balloted for in 1896 at Opouriao, about twelve miles inland from Whakatane, and Leonard and Walter went to work it. Kenneth joined them when he was 11,

'to be broken of the idle habits of the sea-coast villages', or so he said in a letter to Edmund Bishop, 23 December 1916: he remembered the house as 'a kind of wooden box' with almost no furniture. His is the story of the boy from the backblocks with few tangible advantages who ends by winning the highest honours: the five books at the farm were Josephus' history of the Jews, a volume of eighteenth-century plays,[1] Prescott's *History of Peru*, a translation of Hugo, *Les Misérables*, and an encyclopedia of the horse and its diseases. His first school was Whakatane primary and his second Opouriao South primary, a one-master school. In 1900 Kenneth won a scholarship to Auckland Grammar School. In 1906 another scholarship took him to University College, Auckland, where he took his B.A. in 1908 in English, Latin, French, Mathematics, Jurisprudence, and Constitutional History, and his M.A. in 1910 in English and Latin, with first-class honours. The electors to the Rhodes Scholarship decided that Sisam had the best claims of four good candidates to be New Zealand's Rhodes Scholar for 1910. In October of that year he matriculated at Merton College, Oxford.

Stories of the young Sisam in New Zealand are preserved in the memories of his children and his colleagues at the Press. His custom of not having any lunch to speak of was formed, so he said, when he walked to the Opouriao school: he usually gave his lunch to a hungry dog at the first creek he came to. The habits of Press authors with their manuscripts put him in mind of his uncle's dog who went to sleep in the bush, instead of bringing the cattle home. Te Kooti, the Maori leader, who died in 1893, gave him plum cake. Going up to Auckland in the first years of the twentieth century was quite an undertaking, and the two-day journey by horse track to the railhead at Rotorua was in part through peculiarly wild and barren country, devastated by recent volcanic eruptions. Frequent returns home for holidays were out of the question. Sisam boarded in Auckland with a Mrs. Farquhar and there he met her niece, Naomi Gibbons.

Printed accounts of him when he won his Rhodes Scholarship are in Auckland papers. The University College Students Association said that 'During the whole of his course Mr. Sisam has shown himself to be a man of untiring energy, not only in

[1] Now in the English Faculty Library, Oxford, of Sisam's gift in 1915. The first play in the volume is a 1772 edition of Richard Cumberland's *The Fashionable Lover*.

his studies, but in furthering a scheme for the benefit of the college. He is a student in the finest sense, combining unusual accuracy and sense of detail with great breadth of view, a wise caution with high originality.' It referred also to his prowess in cricket, rugby football, and hockey, and added that 'He is also thoroughly used to swimming, rowing, and the management of boats at sea.' Miss Sisam tells me that the scheme for the benefit of the college was to acquire more land on which to build and that the authorities turned it down—unwisely, they thought later; also that he was a slow leg-break bowler and opening bat. Cricket and rugby football were abiding interests; also boats.

These were exciting days for anyone with a leaning to English language—and for that matter English literature: L–R and the first half of S of the *Oxford English Dictionary* appeared in fascicules during 1901 to 1910. Perhaps the Dictionary started Sisam off, but his interest in English was promoted, it is said, by a plot at the Grammar School to do down a classmate who was first in everything. Sisam was told to get ahead of him in English and did so. Probably he began Old English when he first went to University College, Auckland: his name and the date 'March 5th 1906' are in his copy of the seventh edition (1898) of Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*. In his second year, he acquired, 20 December 1907, Bülbring's *Altenglisches Elementarbuch: I, Lautlehre*. The large and curly 'K. Sisam' in these books and in a Horace dated by him 'March 20th 1906' is very different from the later Sisam signature on letters: in books he wrote his name only when he was young. Egerton who held the chair of English at Auckland considered him 'in many respects the best and most promising student' he had ever had. P. S. Ardern (1884–1964) was not teaching at University College when Sisam was there, but it seems likely that they met.[1]

After 1910 Sisam returned to New Zealand only once, but he continued to take much interest in it and to keep up with his relatives in North Island. As a background to his whole life the experiences of the first twenty-three years were of great importance. In the words of another New Zealander, D. M. Davin, he derived from them 'versatility in emergency, a power of improvisation, a fundamentally practical approach, a relish for simple solutions, and a skill in finding them'.

[1] On Ardern's high quality as scholar and teacher see the memoirs by J. A. W. Bennett, James Bertram, and H. W. Orsman in *Comment, New Zealand Quarterly Review*, 21 (1964), 11–13.

At Oxford Sisam was allocated to Merton College, perhaps because it was the college of Professor A. S. Napier. In 1910 Napier was fifty-seven and almost, if not quite, at the height of his powers. He looked for a worthy B.Litt. subject for Sisam and suggested that he should work on one of the still-unpublished Latin psalters with an interlinear Anglo-Saxon gloss. 'An Edition of the Salisbury Psalter (Salisbury MS. 150) with Introduction and Critical Notes', supervised by Napier, was announced in the *Oxford University Gazette*, 3 November 1911. The choice of subject had an unexpected consequence. In September 1911 Sisam wrote to the chief liturgical scholar in England, Edmund Bishop, to ask him if he would agree that the Salisbury manuscript had its origin at Sherborne. It was not the sort of letter to please Bishop, who wrote after five weeks to say, in a sentence of rare complication, that the conclusion was faulty.[1] Sisam replied at once (23 October) and this second letter showed Bishop the real quality of his young correspondent. Sisam said 'I should like to be able to point to some place from which it *might* have come.' Bishop interlined 'quite the right spirit' above '*might*'. The exchange of letters ceased in February 1912, by which time Sisam had his answer, that Shaftesbury, not Sherborne, was the likely first home of the Salisbury psalter. It began again when Sisam wrote to Bishop early in 1913 and continued until Bishop's death in February 1917 at the age of 71.

A glimpse of Sisam as a Merton undergraduate is in Hubert Phillips's *Journey to Nowhere*, published in 1960. Phillips went up to Merton at the same time as Sisam, but, like most other undergraduates, he was four years his junior. Phillips remembered him as level-headed and 'a valuable friend to me, and to many others'. When he went to Sisam's book-spread room, '"Sit you down" was his invariable greeting. "You can move the books off that chair."' There were many besides work-books: 'novels; plays; essays; belles lettres; criticism'. On many matters, 'Sisam blinking rapidly . . . laid down the law with a firmness and a finality that Dr. Johnson himself could hardly have bettered.' Mr. R. E. Coxon, another Merton contemporary, assures me that the law was laid down only to a small circle of friends: 'To the outer world I should have thought he appeared almost diffident and retiring.'

The years 1913–16 are illuminated by Sisam's letters to Bishop. They are particularly interesting, to me at least, for the

[1] Nigel Abercrombie, *The Life and Work of Edmund Bishop*, p. 428.

evidence they provide of his early love for palaeography. They suggest that, but for illness, he might have become a Traube or a Lowe. Wanley was an inspiration. Writing to Bishop on 13 June 1914, the day after his first visit to the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, he says 'it reminded me of dear old Wanley's letter—I copied all that there were in Bodley once when time seemed less precious than it does now—Take 'em all together and they'll appear to be a most noble parcel of books.' Palaeography comes into the letters again and again: 10 February 1914, 'Shades of Traube! How we limp behind the great ones. My own impression of English script of late 9th–11th centuries is that its contractions don't matter a pin'; 2 April 1914, 'My interest in the Pontifical is purely palaeographical' (a hard saying to Bishop who had no special interest in palaeography and wanted to make Sisam into a liturgiologist) and 'I am very interested in any handwriting of that time, and should like to work through it all from about 900–1100. A Herculean task of course'; 14 July 1914, 'Bosworth Psalter [Bishop and Gasquet, *The Bosworth Psalter*, 1908] . . . has been, or, I should say, will be when people see, an extraordinary help in the subject for which it wasn't written—palæography'; 17 February 1915, on 'a certain way of finishing the 3' in the Vercelli manuscript of Old English poetry 'which I remember very clearly in the Worcester charters of 969 and 984, but elsewhere *almost* nowhere'; 16 November 1915, 'the real life of script which is *form*'; 22 October 1916, 'When I look at the facsimile [of the Heliand] all the duct, which is the real life of a script after all, is un-English, Netherlandish (it is more likely therefore to be written by an Old Saxon in England)'. Sisam's ticket allowing him to use the manuscript room in the British Museum is dated 5 July 1911. The letters refer to visits there in January 1912, in July and December 1914, and in January 1915. Three surviving notebooks from this time are concerned mostly with letter-forms. Of the Athelstan charter of 930 among the Crawford charters in the Bodleian, Sisam noted 'reminds strongly of Junius 27, but much rougher in form . . . a roughness and delicacy I can't catch'; of the Eadwi charter in the same collection, 'reminds of a charter of the date in vol. iv of B. M. Facs. but more lively and better'; of Cotton Domitian vii, f. 47^{v}, 'a very interesting half page in bold archaic insular'; of Royal 8 C. iii, 'interesting as presenting a number of good hands *c.* 1000'.

Trouble with health and eyes are first mentioned in letters written early in 1913. For some reason, a robust athletic young

man was changing, after a few years in Oxford, into a more or less permanent invalid—or so it must have seemed to the victim in 1916. A photograph (1913 or 1914 ?) shows a very different person from the Auckland graduate of 1910. In June 1914 Sisam told Bishop that 'an appendicitis operation nearly two years ago was only the beginning of a series of well meaning blunders which have reduced me—I hope only temporarily—to the state of a cripple'. He also blamed the climate: 1 May 1915, 'When I first came to England . . . I used to wonder at the feebleness of the English physique but now I just marvel that they have the strength to stand their climate.' The winter was 'a desolate time for us who were born "in the sun"' (30 January 1914). After a holiday in Cornwall, he resolved not to attempt another in England and was in Lugano at the end of March 1914. In July he was going to Switzerland again 'to see whether their excellent climate and hotels can "give new wheels to our disordered clocks"'.

Probably overwork was the main trouble. His letters show him at his B.Litt. thesis, exploring Anglo-Saxon manuscripts far beyond the requirements of the thesis, and (24 June 1914) with projects in mind 'enough to last me 20 years': the prayers in Arundel 155 and the Durham Ritual were at the top of the list. They also show him teaching. From 1905 onwards Napier had had a succession of young assistants to help him. S. J. Crawford, the assistant in Sisam's first four terms, was no longer available in Hilary term 1912, and Sisam was 'pressed into the service to fill a gap in the Old English lectures' (letter to E. B., 28 February 1912). He gave lectures or classes five or six times a week for fourteen terms and set himself a high standard: Professor Tolkien has told me how fortunate he considers he was to have been able to go to Sisam's lectures. Sisam told Bishop he was 'quite disheartened with the amount of teaching . . . which has fallen on my shoulders' (30 January 1914), that he had 'not had time this month to go near Bodley' (31 January 1914), that 'my work in term is perniciously heavy' (9 June 1914), that he was 'overwhelmed in the mere drudge work of teaching for three or four disconnected hours every day' (17 February 1915), that he was '"curled up"—mere tiredness' (27 February 1915). When Napier died in May 1916 Sisam was in charge of the teaching of English language and no doubt he had been virtually in charge for a year or two.

1915 was an important year in his life. He no longer had money from his Rhodes Scholarship, but only as a Mark

Quested Exhibitioner at Merton (1915–17) and from teaching, and it did not amount to much. He married Naomi Gibbons in January. In the summer he sent in his thesis: it was approved on 18 June and reported upon by the examiners, Craigie and Bradley, in the *Oxford University Gazette* (23 June, p. 767). His health seems to have improved temporarily, although it was at this time, as he told me in a letter, that his eyes failed him for close work. He did his first piece of paid work, other than as a lecturer, by producing for the Clarendon Press in three weeks a revision of Skeat's edition of *Havelok*, a text and edition he knew well, as he had lectured on it for the last nine terms. At that time (letters to Bishop, 14 and 20 June) his thoughts were on leaving Oxford: he badly needed a better job. In July, however, he told Bishop that he had 'decided to stay here at least one more year'. In November and December he was able to report two new events. One was his employment as a member of Henry Bradley's staff on the Oxford English Dictionary. According to family tradition he worked particularly on STER-words and STEWARD, part of the fascicule 'Stead–Stillatim' published in June 1916. 'I was inveigled into the big Dictionary and have never seen daylight since . . . I go there in such parts of the day as are not occupied with teaching with a kind of roving commission to fill gaps and very trying it is getting hold of all the technique of a vast work—how each author is to be quoted, what editions, etc. etc. What phrases to use to express complete ignorance, partial ignorance, and so on' (9 November 1915). The other event was an interview with Charles Cannan: 'I am glad to say that, health permitting, I shall be stationed here for a while. The Secretary of the Press, who is the real manager of its affairs, very kindly sent for me and told me he would do anything he could to keep me here for the present, and offered me a sufficient retaining fee in return for putting half my time at their disposal. This was very good of him, as he is a complete stranger' (24 December). A little more can be learned from a letter to Napier written in March 1916: 'I have arranged with the Press for doing the MS. work on AS. poetry in the following year, which will give me more chance to recuperate than I could ever hope for at the Dictionary, as I shall be able to get away from Oxford in the second winter term, always the most trying'. The arrangement helped him to decide not to accept an offer in March 1916 to go to America as Carleton Brown's successor at Bryn Mawr.

The Hilary and Trinity terms of 1916 were bad ones for

Sisam, even though the amount of teaching had declined, as a result of the war. On 1 April he told Bishop that he had been 'very poorly indeed for a long time', and that he had found the Dictionary too trying for his health,[1] also, that the writing of his letter had been delayed two days 'due to an urgent call to correct some troublesome proofs. I am rather a good technical reader'. On 8 May he was 'teaching from a couch' and confined absolutely to his room. The Press added to their good deeds by sending up 'Sir William Osler, who diagnoses the trouble as internal nervous affection, the result of run down, and in no way dangerous, or likely to be permanent, though taking long to cure' (12 May). On 28 May the word 'overwork' occurs for the first time, I think, in the letters to Bishop. At this time he had two new cares, business arising from Napier's death and the proofs of Bishop's *Liturgica Historica*, which began to come from the Clarendon Press early in May and continued until the end of the year. Sisam's part in seeing *Liturgica Historica* through the press is set out by Nigel Abercrombie in *The Life and Work of Edmund Bishop*, and his name is on the title-page as joint editor with Dom Hugh Conolly. The letters to Bishop from 17 May onwards are concerned with the proofs. At the end of Trinity term the vice-chancellor asked him if he would take on Napier's teaching for the academic year 1916–17 at a salary of £250. His answer must have been 'Yes, if I am well enough', otherwise there would have been no need for him to write again in September to say that he was not well enough to do the teaching in the Michaelmas term. The next news is in a letter from Cannan in July 1917: 'It is a great comfort that you report yourself to be getting stronger . . . Bradley and Craigie will be delighted to see you back at the Dictionary.' The great improvement in health came that summer, helped by some kind of electrical treatment, as Miss Sisam tells me, and perhaps by dieting: the rigorous diet he kept to in Oxford and Scilly, much milk, but little fruit or green vegetables, may have been started at this time. He and Naomi moved to London and he began work at the Ministry of Food early in November. There, Lady Welch remembers 'his fast striding-out athletic springing walk' down the long Ministry corridors. She noticed 'no signs whatever of ill health' and only learned of his illness much later from Naomi.

From this time Sisam was a part-time scholar. The decision to give up the 'cult of vellum', envisaged two years earlier (to

[1] Dr. R. W. Burchfield kindly tells me that the payments to Sisam for his work on the Dictionary were £31.10*s*. 0*d*. in 1915 and £25 in 1916.

Bishop, 20 June 1915), must have been unpleasant, but he knew that he did not have the strength of body or the eyes to do what he would have liked to do and he may have realized already that what he had learned as an Oxford lecturer and a reader in libraries could be put to good use in the end. The thirty-two years during which he worked in offices must be passed over briefly here. In Whitehall he found that he was someone whom colleagues liked working with and for and that he was good at administration and the running of an office—he kept office hours and liked others to keep them. Lady Welch wrote to me: 'At the M. of F. we would at tea time be a group of five or six; he would be the initiator and the centre of happy talk. . . . He was outgiving in all his ways.' He became Director of Bacon Contracts in August 1919. Three years later the Delegates of the Clarendon Press offered him a job as assistant to John Johnson who was himself Assistant Secretary to the Delegates. No doubt they had an eye to the future. They had come to know of Sisam's quality in the three years before he went to London and through the reports on books offered for publication which he had been writing for them in spare time in London. Johnson wrote in support in 1922: 'The best of Sisam's reports is that behind their severity they are constructive.... It is just that kind of severity by which the learned press would be most benefited.' Sisam admired the civil service, but he cannot have had much hesitation about accepting a post in an institution which he thought of as 'alert and unconventional' and 'a kind of island of good sense in the quagmire of loose thinking' (to Bishop, 7 January 1917). The appointment was made by the Delegates in October 1922. 15 October was his last day in Whitehall. He and Naomi went then on their first and last holiday in New Zealand. It was a shorter holiday than they had hoped for. In the spring he was back in London, giving witness in an arbitration over bacon contracts between the British Government and firms in Canada. His secretary, Mrs. Figgis, who was present, tells me that he was a formidably effective witness.

Sisam began work at the Press on 1 June 1923 and remained there for twenty-six years. A good view of him in this busy and happy period of his life is in Mr. Peter Spicer's memoir in *The Record*, which sums him up in the words 'Fundamentally, for all his mental powers, he was a simple man, with a countryman's values derived from his boyhood in New Zealand. That was the secret of his common touch, which enabled him to win and keep the affection, as well as the respect, of so many.' At first he

cannot have felt quite settled and satisfied, or he would not have been a candidate for the Rawlinson and Bosworth professorship of Anglo-Saxon in 1925. But from 1925 onwards, as Assistant Secretary, after Johnson became Printer, and as Secretary to the Delegates of the Press, after R. W. Chapman retired in 1942, he was in a position to use his skill for business and administration by overseeing the production of scholarly books. He is remembered at the Press for three things in particular: his instinctive know-how about book production which enabled the Press to become publishers of important series of scientific books in and after 1930 when they brought out Dirac's *Principles of Quantum Mechanics*; his interest on the arts side in making knowledge accessible through maintaining and adding to the number of good reference books, the Oxford Companions, the Oxford Dictionaries, and the Oxford Books of Verse; and his championship of refugee scholars, if they had something of real value to offer: as he said in a letter, 'We are bound to limit that particular form of help to books which are not themselves a burden on the publisher.' I would like to mention Paul Maas (1880–1964) in particular here. Sisam wrote about him on 11 March 1940, 'Professor Maas for whom we have already a real affection' and 'I have to think over the problem of keeping Maas gainfully employed.' He wrote to Maas on 6 November 1940 that he had been reading Housman's introduction to Manilius and found it distasteful: 'I should have prescribed for him a daily reading in the life of some great scholar who was also not wrapped up in himself, e.g. Mabillon.' But Maas did not accept this as valid criticism of Housman. Miss Sisam tells me that 'He used to have tea with us every Tuesday, without fail; except that every fourth Tuesday he went to the Murrays instead.'

The files of correspondence at the Press show the amount of trouble Sisam took with his authors. That he was not always successful goes without saying: there are valuable books in existence which the Press hoped to publish and did not publish for one reason or another. As an officer he disallowed expressions of thanks for the help and encouragement he gave. People writing after 1948 have been glad to take the opportunity of saying what they felt: thus, Rudolf Pfeiffer in his *Callimachus* (1949), 'exstitit patronus vigoris et caritatis plenus Delegatorum nuper Secretarius Kenneth Sisam, qui cunctanti mihi persuasit, ut Callimachi non solum "Fragmenta", sed quae supersunt omnia ederem'; Fritz Schulz in his *Classical Roman Law* (1951), that Sisam 'suggested the book and greatly contributed to

making it a reality'; Mrs. Heseltine in her and Sir Paul Harvey's long-delayed *Oxford Companion to French Literature* (1959), that Harvey 'could not indefinitely withstand the persuasive enthusiasm of Mr. Kenneth Sisam'; Eugene Vinaver's long passage in the preface to his *Malory* (1970). Eilert Ekwall wrote to Sisam in February 1960, when a new edition of his *Oxford Dictionary of Place-Names* was planned, 'It should not be forgotten that the idea for the book was yours; if you had not made the suggestion it would hardly have been written.'

Sisam's work as a publisher was interrupted on two occasions, once briefly in 1926 when Whitehall borrowed him back to help keep down grocery prices at the time of the general strike, and again for a longer time in 1930, when he served as secretary of the Bodleian Commission. The Commissioners had a busy time of it. They were in Rome from 8 to 17 April, visited libraries in Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, and Sweden from 9 to 25 July, and saw thirty-nine libraries in the eastern United States, the Middle West, and Canada in forty days' travelling between 5 September and 1 November. Their 150-page report, *Library Provision in Oxford*, was printed in 1931.

His work in London and Oxford left Sisam very little time for English language and literature. One of the few letters of the London period I have seen is to John Johnson in July 1920 telling him that he could not prepare Napier's English Historical Syntax for the Press: 'I cannot help feeling some amusement at the belief that I am a gentleman of leisure.' He did, however, manage one important piece of work immediately after the war, with his wife's help. It had its origin in a letter from Charles Cannan, 31 October 1918. The result, *Fourteenth Century English Verse and Prose*, an anthology of texts, with notes and a 33-page introduction, was published by the Clarendon Press in 1921. J. R. R. Tolkien contributed a glossary, at first printed separately and later combined in one volume. More than 60,000 copies have been sold. Sisam's introduction, the most widely read of his writings, is an admirable example of the 'haute popularisation' which he encouraged later in others. For half a century it has been a stimulating guide to Middle English literature. Probably the amount of work in Whitehall declined and Sisam was able to be a little more in libraries in 1922. He used British Museum and Oxford manuscripts for a paper and a review printed in 1923. The envelope of a letter to him from Max Förster survives, with postmark 26 June 1922 and address '17 St. Michael's Street, Oxford'.

After the Sisams moved to Oxford in 1923 the new house, Yatsden, built for them on Boars Hill, the new garden there, and two young children—Hugh was born in 1923 and Celia in 1926—were time-consuming. Work at the Press had absolute precedence over writing and holidays were for recreation; except in 1935 and during the war, they were always, after 1931, spent in Scilly which he said reminded him of New Zealand. Sisam refused to give the series of Ford's lectures at Oxford 1940–1: 'conditions in this strange war, as they affect the Press, are occupying all my mind'. But he felt able to give two single public lectures, the Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture in 1933, and a lecture on Humfrey Wanley at Oxford in 1935. In 1929 he gave the Society for Pure English a paper on word-division. The Society was the creation of Robert Bridges, whom Sisam hac first met when he was staying on Boars Hill in 1915. He was on its standing committee from 1923 and wound up its affairs in 1948. He was a regular Sunday visitor at Chilswell in the last years of Bridges's life and Bridges made him his literary executor. The longest piece he wrote in the Press period, on Ælfric's Catholic Homilies and in particular the Bodleian copy of the Homilies, appeared in successive numbers of the *Review of English Studies* in the three years from 1930 to 1932. It commends 'the irregular study of Old English manuscripts' and 'foraging among manuscripts' and concludes, 'The manuscripts at least have still plenty to offer.' These words influenced the present writer.

In London Sisam got to know two people who remained his friends as long as they lived and whose scholarly work influenced him. One was Robin Flower (1881–1946) at the British Museum. Mr. Davin tells me that when Flower visited Oxford Sisam scrubbed all his appointments: there was the mere pleasure of being with him and 'he knew that he would learn more in a day's talk with Robin Flower than he would learn in a month's talk with anyone else'. The other friend was Dom André Wilmart (1876–1941). He was in France for most of the war, but came to London in 1917 and was there, working for the Mission Militaire Française attached to the War Office, until January 1919. Sisam knew his work through Bishop, whose disciple he was. It is probable that they saw much of one another in the last year of the war.

Sisam was elected to the British Academy in 1941, when his sponsors were Allen Mawer, R. W. Chambers, Flower, and William Craigie. The recommendation mentions Sisam's skill

in palaeography, so perhaps Flower wrote it. In the year of his retirement from the Press he was given an honorary degree by Reading University and became a Grand Knight of the Icelandic Falcon.

Sisam was just sixty-two when he left Oxford for Scilly. From then on Middle Carn was his home. Except in the first year or two he hardly ever left St. Mary's and was never further east on the mainland than Cornwall. Efforts to get him to Oxford and Cambridge did not succeed. In a letter to Dorothy Whitelock in February 1953 he said: 'The Press is always urging me to make the journey; but I feel my infirmities: the minimum of Oxford hospitality would be too much after years on milk diet here; and besides, I am like the ass who knows his stall, easily worried by change.' The white house he had had built for him in 1937 he named after the carn which rises immediately behind it. It stands on the east side of Old Town Bay, facing south-west across the bay, and is separated from a shore of low rocks only by a narrow strip of garden and a narrow road unused by cars beyond the house. Middle Carn fish is gutted among the shore rocks, but for his boat Sisam had to go nearly to Old Town: the 200 yards was about the extent of his walking. His abiding pleasure was to go out in his boat whenever possible from boat-launching day at Easter to boat-hauling-up day in October and to take what he could from the sea, mainly pollock and mackerel. He wrote to Miss Whitelock on boat-launching day, 24 April 1951: 'We are like those little beach sandhoppers, which the high tides of summer throw into wild excitement; and I doubt I shall do much more work for a long time.' Mrs. Sisam died in March 1958 and from this time Celia, with a job at Oxford, kept house for her father in vacation time. In summer visitors came, his friends from the Press and Celia's friends: in early October 1958 Celia and D. M. Davin were with him 'and my incompetent housekeeping takes up all my time on such pleasant occasions' (letter to D. W., 6 October). In winter one may suspect that he was lonely from 1958 onwards, but if he was he made up for it. There was talk with Old Town friends and especially Mr. Roland Gibson, his nearest neighbour, Mr. Alfred Jenkins, who looked after his boat, and Mrs. Arthur Sherris, who helped him in the house and on whom, more than anyone else, he depended in his latter years: also with the workmen who came to do repairs to house and boat and figure in the letters as a cause of distraction. He had his garden and the

wireless and books and a succession of beloved black cats: the cat the Sisams brought with them from Oxford figures delightfully in a letter to Miss Whitelock, 4 March 1951: 'The rough and noisy journey down, and the horror of emerging on a bare sea-coast . . . caused something like a nervous break-down at first. In this time, he comforted himself by treating me to all the conversation of a cat family, and it is very curious . . . he watches tyrannically to see that I never get up late in the morning.' He had also his interest in the people, the history, and the stories of Scilly. His voice—and his laugh—can still be heard telling some of the stories in recordings made by Mr. R. M. Baxter. He contributed nine pieces to *The Scillonian* between 1949 and 1962, four of them appreciations of Old Town people, Richard Phillips, Israel Pender, Frank Phillips, and Edgar Ashford. Richard Phillips who died aged 92 in 1950, interested him particularly: 'he could hardly read, but had a fine sense of the distinction between what he had witnessed and what he had heard tell. I doubt if an educated man could ever attain it' (to D. W., 16 July 1950). He liked people to get their rights and was used as a sort of poor man's lawyer in Scilly. Some Scillonians supposed that he was a retired lawyer.

Finally, there was his continuing interest in Old English literature. The hour for writing was early in the day. Not much of it was done after 9.30. Dislike of the physical process is a recurrent theme in letters: 'I hate writing with a pen.' Pencil was better. He did not type and said he had been spoilt for writing by his good secretaries in London and Oxford. He thought of his hand as an illegible scrawl, but wrongly. It is quick scholarly writing, with more or less of an upward slope and remained essentially clear to the last. Papers intended for printing were sent to Mrs. Bull, his former secretary at the Press, or, if short, to Celia.

In discussing the scholarly work Sisam did in Scilly a distinction should be made between the first eleven years and the last twelve. In the first period there was always something on hand and especially four things, the papers, old and new, which went to make up *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*, the long paper 'Anglo-Saxon Genealogies', the long paper combating Sherman Kuhn's ideas about the Vespasian Psalter, and *The Salisbury Psalter. Studies*—'most of them are concerned with problems of textual transmission'—consists of five papers and parts of two reviews published in journals between 1916 and 1946, a first printing of the lecture on Wanley, and six other

pieces. In the newly written pieces there are some passages which refer to manuscript readings and problems: for them Sisam either had his old notes to go on (pp. 110, 125) or had to get his information at second hand (pp. 143, 146). *Studies* was assembled and got into shape mostly in 1950 and 1951. He was working on 'Seasons of Fasting', the last piece to be written, in February 1952. When it was finished with he turned to the, as he said, 'crazy' subject of Anglo-Saxon genealogies, begun before he left Oxford, taken up again in January 1949, when he was settled in at Middle Carn, and put aside soon afterwards in favour of *Studies*. It was a main occupation of 1952 and the first half of 1953. In 1952 a new subject for work appeared as a result of Miss Whitelock's suggestion that he should refer in the *Studies* reprint of 'Cynewulf and his Poetry' to what Professor Kuhn had written about the Vespasian Psalter. Sisam resisted this—'*littera impressa manet*'—(to D. W., 1 March 1952), but the suggestion bore fruit in the end in 'Canterbury, Lichfield, and the Vespasian Psalter', published in 1956: he was working on it in 1954 when he wrote to me (in May) about the date of the added word *nostro* in Tiberius C. ii. The last major task was the Salisbury Psalter. The time had come when his daughter could give him substantial help with the work he had begun as a B.Litt. student and had given up in 1915. In June 1954 he told me in a letter that 'Celia is—or is supposed to be—immersed in Salisbury Psalter 150 which was too long for me. But I hope she will see it through at last. My part will be to counsel her against perfectionism and other bars to publication.' His part was a good deal more than that. On 12th October 1958 he was in a position to write to Dorothy Whitelock: 'As you know, Celia and I have done with the Salisbury Psalter—a very narrow and technical piece of work. . . . We do throw some light on the behaviour of scribes in good scriptoria . . . and on the number of MSS. of a common text that must be reckoned with. I think the tendency is to bring obviously related MSS. too closely together.'

Two principal pieces of work come into the final period of Sisam's life. The letter from which I have just quoted continues 'Next we propose to work on an *Oxford Book of English Verse 1100–1500*, to which my contribution will be little more than experience.' The *Oxford Book* came out in 1970. Miss Sisam tells me that the translations of Layamon and the Gawain poet are her father's and that he revised texts, glosses, and preface and 'confirmed the selection. . . . He was the arbiter, whenever there was a difficulty.' In March 1961 Sisam told Dorothy Whitelock

that he was not doing anything at the moment, 'But from time to time I think about *Beowulf*.' His thoughts took printed form in *The Structure of Beowulf*, 'too short for a booklet, too long for an article' (to D. W., 4 August 1963), which appeared as a small book in 1965. His last published work, written when he was close on 80, was a review for *RES*. There was no failure at this time of his skill in clear exposition, as I know from the letters and long notes he sent me in 1966 and 1967. At least two pages I wrote then about his old teacher, Napier, are direct quotations of what he sent to me.

Sisam had been a fellow of Merton College when he was Secretary to the Delegates. In 1964 he was made an honorary fellow. His election as a Foreign Member of the Finnish Societas Scientiarum Fennica in 1970 gave him pleasure in the last year of his life.

In a letter to me on 24 June 1953 Sisam said of Dorothy Everett, 'She had good judgement as well as learning, and judgement is among the rarer gifts.' As a rule, he too judged rightly. It was part of his strength as a man of affairs. For example, when war broke out, he saw that the Press ought to lay in as large a stock of paper as possible: paper would never again be as cheap as it was in 1939. In his writing he often made telling points about simple things which other people had misjudged or passed over without reflecting on the difficulties. Was it likely that the early kings in Anglo-Saxon England named their sons so as to produce a 'perfect verse pedigree' ('Genealogies', pp. 300–1); or that King Athelstan specified a *ram* as the monthly food of a pauper (*Studies*, p. 240); or that abbot Brihtnoth of Ely was murdered by having heated sword-thongs thrust into his bowels: 'It is not easy to realize this process' (*Medium Ævum*, xxii. 24)? Are there not easy explanations for the use of the words 'gepalmtwigoda' and 'stefn' (*Medium Ævum*, xiii. 34; *RES*, N.S. xiii. 282)? Many of his papers are arguments for views which he held strongly or thought very probably right: that certain texts in Lambard's *Archaionomia* are not authentic (*Studies*, pp. 232–58); that there is no reason to suppose that the Vespasian Psalter and other manuscripts associated with it by Professor Kuhn come from Lichfield (*RES*, N.S. vii); that the Anglo-Saxon genealogies are not primitive documents, but fabrications made probably in the late eighth century ('Genealogies'); that the Beowulf manuscript is a collection of marvellous stories, a 'Liber Monstrorum', put together deliber-

ately in the second half of the tenth century (*Studies*, pp. 65–96); that the Vercelli book was taken to Italy in the first half of the eleventh century (*Studies*, pp. 113–18); that Anglo-Saxon poetry was not accurately transmitted (*Studies*, pp. 29–34); that VI Æthelred is Wulfstan's 'exposition of the laws in V Æthelred and L for parish priests in the diocese of York' soon after V Æthelred was issued in 1008 (*Studies*, pp. 278–87).

Sisam's opinions about some things, the importance of manuscripts, perfectionism, proof-correcting, have been touched upon already. I add here some passages, mostly from letters to Dorothy Whitelock. 'I work mostly by thinking of possibilities and later testing them' (to N. R. K., 31 May 1932). 'I think editors should edit, and not produce inferior "photographs" of MSS.' (to D. W., 4 February 1950, on manuscript punctuation). On a subject on which you are not an expert, 'don't quote with approval or back the opinions of others . . . I was taught the lesson painfully by Edmund Bishop' (to D. W., 13 September 1954, on the work of a younger scholar). Translations 'invaluable, whether or not one knows medieval Latin' and 'Translation helps one to cover a lot of ground easily' (to D. W., 28 January and 9 March 1955, apropos of her *English Historical Documents*). 'I was never a good note-taker and never looked forward to the day I couldn't see a Bodleian MS.' (to N. R. K., 20 July 1955). 'I like some textual problems that have no more practical usefulness than a problem in pure mathematics' (to D. W., 12 October 1958, about the introduction to the Salisbury Psalter). 'Often we must be content with probabilities' (to D. W., 11 July 1960: this was something he had from Edmund Bishop). 'I feel myself drawn to the factual and obvious things that don't make for novelty' (to D. W., 4 July 1963, when he was thinking about Beowulf). 'On *Beowulf* I am deliberately controversial. I think we must have speculations to make any broad advance, and they are the better if they are clearly stated as opinions or inferences from assumptions' (to D. W., 9 May 1965, on *The Structure of Beowulf*). Passages in his *Medium Ævum* review of the edition of *Salomon and Saturn* by Robert Menner (of whom he had a high opinion) help us to appreciate how he became, as B. J. Timmer said in a letter to him, 1 June 1956, 'a past-master in working out and presenting . . . a long sustained argument'. He found in the edition some signs of 'the modern fault of sprawling over all the fields of scholarship that border on Old English Studies', 'an inclination to follow interest beyond the limits of relevance, and a reluctance to sharpen the edges of

hypotheses and to press them home until it can be seen whether they fit together cleanly'. He noted that 'scholars like Sweet, Sievers, Zupitza and Napier who defined with professional strictness the field in which they were expert, had the advantage, I think, in rigorous and penetrative methods'; Napier had learned about *fach* from the Germans and Sisam had learned from Napier. And he put in a plea for 'more rigorous methods, more concentration, more pruning of those unsuccessful investigations which are so profitable to the investigator himself'.

NEIL KER

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1912 'Havelok notes', *ANS*, cxxviii. 194–9.
1913 'To *Seafarer* ll. 72 ff.', *Englische Studien*, xlvi. 336.
1913 'Epenthesis in the consonant groups *sl, sn*', *ANS*, cxxxi. 305–10.
1915 *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*, ed. W. W. Skeat; 2nd edn. revised by K. Sisam, Oxford.
1916 *'The "Beowulf" Manuscript', *MLR*, xi. 335–7.
1917 'The Caedmonian *Exodus* 492', *MLN*, xxxii. 48.
1918 'Notes on the West-Saxon Psalms', *MLN*, xxxiii. 474–6.
1919 'Textual Notes on the Old English "Epistola Alexandri"' (with Henry Bradley), *MLR*, xiv. 202–5.
1921 *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*, Oxford.
1922 Review of *Exameron Anglice*, ed. S. J. Crawford, *MLR*, xvii. 299–300.
1923 *'An Old English translation of a letter from Wynfrith to Eadburga (A.D. 716–17) in Cotton MS. Otho C. i', *MLR*, xviii. 253–72.
1923 *Review of F. L. Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, *MLR*, xviii. 98–104.
1923 Edition of Chaucer's *The Clerkes Tale of Oxenford.*
1925 *'The authenticity of certain texts in Lambard's "Archaionomia" 1568', *MLR*, xx. 253–69.
1927 Edition of Chaucer's *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, Oxford.
1927 Article on W. W. Skeat in *Dictionary of National Biography, Twentieth Century 1912–1921*, pp. 495–6.
1929 *Word-division*, Pt. (4) of Society for Pure English, Tract No. xxxiii (pp. 436–49 in a pagination which is continuous over Tracts xxi–xl).
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1932 'Cynewulf and his Poetry', *PBA*, xviii. 303–31.
1934 *Review of the facsimile edition of the Exeter Book of Old English Poetry, *RES*, x. 338–42.
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1944 Review of R. J. Menner, *The Poetical Dialogues of Salomon and Saturn*, *Medium Ævum*, xiii. 28–36.
1946 *'Notes on Old English Poetry', *RES*, xxii. 257–68.
1949 'Tolman', *The Scillonian*, xcvii. 54–7.
1950 'Sir Gawain, lines 147–50', *Notes and Queries*, cxcv. 239.
1950 'Richard Phillips 1858–1950', *The Scillonian*, ciii. 157–9.
1951 'A gloss to Gregory's *Dialogues*', *RES*, N.S. ii. 48.
1951 'Genesis B, lines 273–4', *RES*, N.S. ii. 371–2.
1952 'Troy Town', *The Scillonian*, cxi. 189–92.
1953 *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*, Oxford.
1953 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *PBA*, xxxix. 287–348.

[1] Asterisked items were reprinted, in whole or in part, in *Studies*, 1953. *ANS: Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen. MLN: Modern Language Notes. MLR: Modern Language Review. PBA: Proceedings of the British Academy. RES: Review of English Studies.*

1953 'A secret murder', *Medium Ævum*, xxii. 24.
1955 'An old map of Scilly', *The Scillonian*, cxxii. 109–17.
1956 'Canterbury, Lichfield, and the Vespasian Psalter', *RES*, N.S. vii. 1–10, 113–31.
1956 'An appreciation of an Old Scillonian (Mr. Israel Pender)', *The Scillonian*, cxxvii. 132.
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1957 'The Name Scilly', *The Scillonian*, cxxix. 51–4.
1958 'Beowulf's Fight with the Dragon', *RES*, N.S. ix. 129–40.
1958 (With C. Sisam) pp. 15–17 of the introduction to *The Paris Psalter* (Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile, viii).
1959 *The Salisbury Psalter*, ed. C. Sisam and K. Sisam (Early English Text Society, 242). [K. S. was primarily responsible for pp. 1–12, 39–75, sections I, II, IX of the introduction, and Appendices I, II].
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1959 Review of N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon*, *RES*, N.S. x. 68–71.
1960 'Mr. Edgar Ashford', *The Scillonian*, cxliii. 153–4.
1962 'OE *stefn*, *stefna* "stem"', *RES*, N.S. xiii. 282–3.
1962 'Changes in Sea Level', *The Scillonian*, cxlix. 43–45.
1965 *The Structure of Beowulf*, Oxford.
1967 Review of D. J. Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies*, *RES*, N.S. xviii. 229–31.
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The Times, 2 Sept. 1971 (Professor E. Vinaver).
The Bookseller, 11 Sept. 1971 (Mr. D. M. Davin).
The Record (Oxford University Press), 16 Dec. 1971, pp. 1, 2 (Mr. Peter Spicer).
Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, lxii (1971), 762 (Professor Norman Davis).
Árbók Landsbóksafns 1971 (Reykjavik 1972), pp. 143–56 (Snæbjörn Jónsson).