



JACK BENNETT

JACK ARTHUR WALTER BENNETT

1911-1981

JACK BENNETT's name is best known to everyone interested in the study of the Middle Ages for his long editorship of *Medium Ævum*, in which he succeeded the first, and only preceding, editor, C. T. Onions, in 1956 and remained for twenty-five years. The journal, founded in 1932 as the organ of the Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, is concerned with all the major literature of medieval western Europe, and so demands of an editor a range of competence and sympathetic understanding so wide that few single individuals can compass it. In the first number under his control he quoted an appreciation of *Medium Ævum* published by *The Times Literary Supplement* on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary: 'a meeting ground for astringent scholarship and humane learning, a place where academic barriers between subjects disappeared, and where criticism was careful and untrammelled'. These qualities he maintained with conspicuous success, in the face of recurring anxiety about material resources, and indeed extended the journal's field of action by establishing a flourishing new series of monographs. At much the same time the Delegates of the Oxford University Press accepted his proposal to inaugurate, under his general editorship, a series of selective editions of medieval and Tudor texts which at the time were hard to obtain. Fourteen volumes, from *Lazamon* to *Surrey* and including religious lyrics and carols, appeared between 1958 and 1975. These and many other editorial activities, together with his teaching and writing, made him one of the most active and influential of the medieval scholars of his generation.

Jack Arthur Walter Bennett was born at Auckland, New Zealand, on 28 February 1911, the elder son of Ernest Bennett and his wife Alexandra. Both parents were born at Leicester in the early 1880s, Ernest's father a commercial traveller, Alexandra's employed in a shoe factory. Ernest also worked in shoe manufacture as a pattern cutter, but emigrated to New Zealand in 1907, continuing there in the shoe business. Finding that he liked Auckland he asked his future wife to join him. She arrived in the course of 1908, a date they remembered because he travelled to Wellington to meet her in the first train to run on the North Island

'main trunk' service between the two cities. They were married in Auckland in 1909. Both were brought up in the Church of England, and Jack was baptized accordingly; but not long afterwards Ernest was converted to the principles of the Plymouth Brethren, and his wife took the same step. Shortly before the First World War the family visited England, and had to stay longer than they had intended because return transport could not be found. Jack's brother Norman was born at Leicester in 1916, and Jack went to school there for two years, during which a teacher of more than ordinary foresight wrote in a report that he was 'a very smart, intelligent boy and shows great promise of a most successful scholastic career'. The family returned to New Zealand in January 1920, and Jack was soon afterwards enrolled at the new Kowhai Junior High School in Auckland, where he won a Junior National Scholarship. This took him to Mount Albert Grammar School, a relatively new and rising foundation, where he began to distinguish himself by winning school essay prizes in 1927 and 1928, and a Royal Empire Society prize in 1928. In the same year he was awarded a Lizzie Rathbone Scholarship in English and History, which enabled him to attend Auckland University College as a full-time student. He had at first hoped to study medicine, but the cost was too high for his parents to meet in those years of depression. He followed the type of Arts course usual in the New Zealand universities, modelled largely on the Scottish system but with a number of subjects in the early years leading to the BA degree and then concentrating on one for the MA. His professor in English was C. W. Egerton, but the most important formative influence on his work was that of P. S. Arden, who lectured on the medieval period as well as related fields such as Old Norse and Gothic. Arden had come to Oxford in 1903, soon after the appointment of A. S. Napier, a learned and exact philological scholar, to the new professorship of English, and on his return to New Zealand he promoted medieval and linguistic studies zealously and with great effect. When in 1972 Jack Bennett published his edition of the first part of *Piers Plowman* he wrote in the preface: 'My own interest in Langland was first kindled some forty years ago by lectures of the late P. S. Arden at Auckland University College. . . . A devoted teacher and an impeccable scholar, he worked in isolation and with few of the appurtenances of modern learning. Not to acknowledge his stimulus would be to ignore the poem's closing injunction: *Redde quod debes.*'

Though it was at Auckland University College that his interest in medieval studies was aroused, this was far from excluding

active concern with later literature. Among the undergraduates in English whom he met in his first year was James Bertram—whom indeed he could not fail to meet because seats at lectures were allocated in alphabetical order. Bertram, a few months older than Bennett, had already at school shown himself to be an original writer and a promising critic. He was keenly interested in contemporary literature, and the two friends edited *Open Windows*, a liberal Christian periodical published by the Student Christian Movement. This led, surprising as it now seems, to a considerable scandal and a sharp dispute with the Professorial Board of the College. D. H. Lawrence had died in 1930, and the journal printed commemorative articles discussing such matters as his attitude to sex in literature. Jack Bennett in all innocence sent copies of the number to the chairman of the Professorial Board, whose previous experience had not at all prepared him for that sort of thing. The editors were summoned before the Registrar and threatened with expulsion, and it was only thanks to friends among senior members, notably W. T. G. Airey, a historian who had been a Rhodes Scholar about ten years earlier, that they were reprieved. Bennett later said that the official attitude ‘exemplified the philistinism as much as the prudery of New Zealand in the thirties’. This incident did not discourage the literary aspirations of Auckland students of English. In addition to editorial notes in *Open Windows* Bennett was already thinking about larger questions of policy. In 1931 he contributed an article to the Auckland University College periodical *Kiwi* on the teaching of literature in New Zealand universities, in which he asserted that ‘a good University teacher is of necessity a productive scholar’—so at the age of 20 setting the course of his own career. In 1932 university circles throughout New Zealand were surprised and delighted by the appearance of a new literary and critical review of a kind not previously seen in those islands. It took its title, *The Phoenix*, from D. H. Lawrence, and was much concerned with him and with Middleton Murry, T. S. Eliot, and Katherine Mansfield, who at that time was one of few New Zealand-born writers to have made an international reputation. It published original writing as well as critical articles, its interests extended to the visual arts and public affairs, and it was well designed and printed. The editor was James Bertram, with a team of six associates. The first number included a brief article by Jack Bennett entitled ‘The Necessity of Criticism’. Thus it was that group of alert and intelligent young people in Auckland fifty years ago who provided Bennett with a platform for his earliest critical

writings. It was at this time, too, that he met Charles Brasch, who was to become known as a poet of distinction and the founder and editor of the important quarterly *Landfall*, and who remained a lifelong friend until his death in 1973.

The Phoenix survived for only four numbers, but it had a profound effect on the history of New Zealand literature. Both Bertram and Bennett, however, had left New Zealand in 1933, the former as a Rhodes Scholar, Bennett with a post-graduate scholarship for study abroad awarded after he had taken a first in the MA examination. New Zealand University examinations were then conducted by a time-consuming system of external examiners, intended to ensure that standards remained the same as those of British universities. Papers were set in this country, and the resulting scripts were sent, by sea of course, for marking by the examiners. Jack Bennett's scripts were set and read by F. W. Baxter, a New Zealander who had become a professor at Belfast, and by E. V. Gordon, a Canadian Rhodes Scholar who was a professor at Manchester. Gordon especially was known and much respected at Oxford—he had worked with J. R. R. Tolkien while he was at Leeds—and his favourable comments on Bennett's papers no doubt contributed towards his acceptance when he applied for admission. He came to Merton College, which had established something of a New Zealand connection especially in English—Kenneth Sisam, notably, had come up as a Rhodes Scholar in 1910 and had eventually become an influential figure in the University Press. At that time the Oxford English school offered three courses leading to the BA degree, of which one concentrated on philological studies and medieval literature. For someone who had made the broad survey of English language and literature that the New Zealand course provided, this gave a better opportunity of extending and deepening a knowledge of the medieval field than a specialized research degree would have done, and this was what Bennett chose to do. Merton numbered among its fellows two distinguished literary scholars, David Nichol Smith, who was Merton Professor of English Literature, and the poet Edmund Blunden, who was elected fellow and tutor in 1931. With both of them Jack Bennett came to be on cordial terms, and he owed much to their friendship over many years, but for most of his academic tuition in medieval subjects he was sent to C. L. Wrenn and, since he chose to offer all available options in Old Norse, to Gabriel Turville-Petre. He went to lectures by all the familiar names of the time—J. R. R. Tolkien, C. T. Onions, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Whitelock, N. R. Ker, Alistair Campbell.

His undergraduate years at Merton were rewarding but taxing. His scholarship provided only just enough to live on—for of course he could not go home for vacations—and he subsisted frugally in the cheapest room in college, an ancient low-ceilinged room in Mob Quad. It was a beautiful environment, particularly for medieval tastes such as his, but it was undeniably austere; and it seemed to his friends that he did not always have enough to eat. He worked exceedingly hard. For recreation he mostly walked in the country, visiting churches; but he did find time to go to London with friends to see the Russian Ballet from Monte Carlo.

When the time came for Final Schools in 1935 he was tired and nervous, and was afraid he had not written enough to satisfy the examiners. But the examiners, among whom were C. T. Onions and E. V. Gordon, already knew something of his quality; and they gave him a very long viva which exhausted him but more than satisfied them, and they duly awarded the first that everyone knew he deserved. There was no reason why he should return to New Zealand immediately. Merton elected him to a Harmsworth Senior Scholarship, so that anxieties about maintenance were at an end for some years. His father had died early in the same year. He had thought of embarking on a full-scale commentary on *Piers Plowman*, but, guided by Sisam, he decided instead that he would read for a D.Phil. on 'a history of Old English and Old Norse studies in England from the time of Francis Junius till the end of the eighteenth century'. This proved a rewarding subject, partly because it embraced the scholarship of the seventeenth century, a period to which he had long been particularly drawn. In 1937 he married one of his pupils from Somerville. He completed his thesis and took the degree in 1938, and had intended to prepare the text for publication, but events took a different turn. In the same year he was elected to a Junior Research Fellowship by Queen's College—an unexpected appointment because English was not one of the subjects usually favoured there, but the Provost, R. H. Hodgkin, had lately completed his *History of the Anglo-Saxons* and knew something of the 'Saxonists' who flourished at Queen's in the seventeenth century, and it seems likely that he influenced the choice. Bennett began to lecture in the Schools on *Piers Plowman* and on the medieval lyric; and at this time also he wrote articles of a very different kind for the New Zealand periodical *Tomorrow*, describing conditions in this country as events in Europe developed ominously. He distrusted the British Government's measures to prepare for a possible war, describing National Service, for

example, as 'the first stage of totalitarianism'. Late in the year he and his wife set out on a visit to New Zealand, perhaps partly hoping that in spite of his attachment to Oxford there might be a post for him there. But nothing was offered, and after the outbreak of war they arranged to return to England via the United States. They went to New York by way of California, where Jack took the opportunity to see the *Piers Plowman* manuscripts in the Huntington Library. While waiting in New York for a ship he was asked to help 'for a few weeks' in the British Information Service, but the weeks lengthened into years and he eventually remained until September 1945. He was employed on 'research' on a vast range of topics on which newspapers and periodicals sought information, from the size of Churchill's hats to the operation of Citizens' Advice Bureaux. The department had sometimes to provide material for speeches to be made by the Ambassador, Lord Halifax. Jack told how this once led him to read John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, for the first time, at high speed because Halifax was to present a first edition to Harvard Library and needed his speech in a hurry; and on another occasion to spend a month's leave reading Burke in order to draft a preface to an edition that might merit the Ambassadorial signature. Part of his time in New York was more congenially spent with the medieval manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library, the paintings in the Metropolitan Museum, and the sculptures at the Cloisters, so that he was able to say that 'he perhaps learnt more about medieval art in general from those unexpected years in the most modern of metropolises than if he had stayed among the spires and common rooms of Oxford'. To the spires, however, he duly returned late in 1945, and resumed his fellowship at Queen's. It was a time when undergraduates were coming up in large numbers, some after years of military service, and tutors were still very scarce. Colleges sent their undergraduates wherever they could find someone able and willing to teach them, even if the tutor was less than expert in the particular field. Some tutors accepted inordinate burdens, taking pupils for forty and more hours a week. Bennett was at once drawn into this intense activity, and at one time was teaching every paper in the Honour School to men and women from eighteen different colleges. This involved wildly long hours, and in the early years after his return he often did not finish his week's work until lunch-time on Sunday. The hope that he had long nourished of putting his thesis into publishable form had to be abandoned, but Nichol Smith in part made up for this by asking him to take over his course on the history of English studies

which he offered to B.Litt. and D.Phil. students and which was much enjoyed. He also made a number of broadcasts on the Third Programme on topics ranging from Chaucer and Langland to *The Great Gatsby*. Before the war he had begun to write notes and reviews in journals, the earliest in 1936, and these he resumed so actively that substantial contributions appeared every year. At the same time he was preparing the ground for the volume of selections, *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, that Kenneth Sisam, just about to retire from the Clarendon Press, had proposed that he should edit. This was to be approximately on the same lines as Sisam's own fourteenth-century volume, which had been a great success ever since its publication in 1922, and covering much of the same period as the first part of the old *Specimens of Early English* edited by Morris and Skeat and published by the Press in 1886, but with greater attention to the literary interest of the extracts. Bennett accepted Sisam's suggestion but wanted a collaborator, and invited G. V. Smithers to join him. They divided texts and notes roughly equally; Smithers wrote the linguistic descriptions and the chapter on the development of the language and Bennett contributed the introduction on the history of literature—an excellent though all too brief summary. This book was a long time in the making, owing largely to Bennett's precarious health. The first edition did not appear until 1966, the second two years later; a corrected issue appeared in 1974, and this was put into paperback in 1982. Meanwhile the first of Bennett's editorial enterprises, Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* in Harrap's English Classics series, came out in 1954, a revised edition in 1958. He was not even at this time wholly occupied with the Middle Ages. He had begun in 1938 to work on the poems of Bishop Corbett (1582–1635), his edition of which, in collaboration with H. R. Trevor-Roper, was not published until 1955, and his interest in the seventeenth century continued to compete with the attraction of the earlier period for several years after that. An early interest in Gavin Douglas had brought him in touch with Sir William Craigie, who had retired to Christmas Common near Watlington, and it was Craigie who encouraged him to edit *Devotional Pieces in Verse and Prose from MS Arundel 285 and MS Harleian 6919*, which was published by the Scottish Text Society in 1955. Craigie had also induced him to edit some entries for the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, from slips some fifty years old.

In 1947 Magdalen College elected him to a fellowship, and he moved there from Queen's. He delighted in the company of the large number of distinguished and congenial men who were

fellows—among others Onions himself, C. S. Lewis, Neil Ker, the philosophers Gilbert Ryle and J. L. Austin, the historians Bruce McFarlane (whose rooms were opposite Bennett's) and A. J. P. Taylor, and, particularly important to Bennett, the Dante scholar Colin Hardie. It was at this stage that Onions recruited Bennett to the committee of the Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, and began to delegate to him editorial tasks for *Medium Ævum*. In 1955 he brought him on to the council of the Early English Text Society, of which Onions was Director. During the American interlude Bennett's marriage had come to an end, and in 1950 he married Gwyneth Nicholas, who brought him great happiness and had a profound effect on his life. He relied greatly on her in many things. They, with their two sons, went to live in a spacious house beautifully set on Hinksey Hill, with sufficient room for Jack's already very large and expanding library. It was at some distance from Magdalen, but from 1960 this was of rather less account because he was appointed to the University Lecturership in English Language, which imposed a limit on tutorial hours.

His most important work at this period was devoted to Chaucer, especially his reading in Latin, French, and Italian literature and the ways in which his familiarity with the European tradition influenced his writing. It was not a matter of simple source-hunting, but rather an endeavour to understand how the rich variety of continental authors came to be assimilated and modified to meet the needs of his art. Bennett's knowledge and subtle understanding of major currents of literary thought were rare among students of medieval English. The three main studies he published on Chaucer, spread over many years, taken together amount to the most distinguished and original of all his work. The first was *The Parlement of Foules: An Interpretation*, of which the first draft had been written during a visit to his native shores 'by the long wash of Australasian seas, far from libraries and the accessories of learning'. It was evident that he spent much time in libraries on his return, for the book, which the Clarendon Press published in 1957, is extraordinarily wide-ranging in its reference. He finds comparisons in many styles and places—to take a few names at random, he mentions *The Sorrows of Werther*, *La Cousine Bette*, *Anna Karenina*, Camoens, even Amanda Ros, and takes illustrations from sculptures and pictures from Autun to *Esquire*. The discussion is much fuller and more penetrating than any previous work on the poem, treating it not as an occasional poem of uncertain application but a serious exposition of the paradoxical

nature of human love. This close analytical work on Chaucer he continued, but the substance of it appeared in print only a good many years later, after the circumstances of his life had altered considerably. His interests remained very wide—a particularly characteristic piece was his contribution to the volume of essays presented to J. R. R. Tolkien on his seventieth birthday in 1962. Starting from Joseph Glanvill's use of the phrase 'climates of opinions', in which *climates* means 'regions' and *opinions* means received and customary beliefs, he follows with subtle precision the figurative development of 'climate of opinion' in English to its present status of a worn cliché and the application of *climate* itself, as of *climat* in French, to morals, politics, and fashion in general. The essay he called 'a by-product of random reading', which only shows the rich and varied nature of his reading in modern authors from Teilhard de Chardin and Marc Bloch to Boris Pasternak and Nancy Mitford. He remained actively engaged in the production of the Clarendon Medieval and Tudor series of texts, a long-term enterprise which was similar in aim to the Middle English reader, 'to make available extensive selections from some of the best of our early writers in cheap, compact, and authoritative volumes'. Bennett took a close interest in his editors' work, and in later years edited two of the volumes himself—Gower in 1968 and Langland in 1972, the latter notably learned in its commentary even for him. In 1963, also, he edited a volume of essays on Malory, with contributions by Walter Oakeshott, C. S. Lewis, Eugène Vinaver, and others.

In addition to all this activity in teaching, writing, and editing, Jack Bennett made his mark on the organization of English graduate studies in Oxford. The B.Litt. degree had long existed (it was established in 1895) for graduate students who wished to pursue a piece of research shorter and less exacting than that required for the D.Phil. Bennett thought there should also be a different kind of graduate degree, to be awarded not for single-minded research into a limited field but for the advanced study of a group of related topics, which would give candidates an opportunity to think, read, and inquire, and so improve their capacity for effective teaching. The sub-faculty of philosophy had already established a course of this kind, calling the degree a B.Phil., with considerable success, and Bennett saw that the policy could readily be applied to English studies. He later published, in *The Listener* of 21 January 1961, the text of a broadcast talk entitled 'Research: the Tyrant', in which he argued against the trend to require a 'research' degree as a qualification for university

teaching. Meanwhile he addressed a memorandum on the subject to the Board of the Faculty, proposing a degree in medieval English studies which would offer options in such matters as history, philosophy, and a number of languages. Once the suggestion was made it was welcomed. In October 1959 the Board set up a committee to examine the proposal. All went smoothly: after the statutory submission to the administrative bodies concerned the detailed plan was approved by Congregation on 24 January 1961 and the first examination was set for Trinity Term 1962. This first step covered the medieval period only, but at the outset the view was expressed that a similar B.Phil. in modern studies might also be desirable, and this was put into effect not much later. (The title of the degree was later altered to M.Phil.)

At about the same time Bennett took a momentous step in his religious life, encouraged by Gwyneth: he was received into the Roman Catholic Church, to which he had for some time increasingly inclined. He was deeply interested in the history of the liturgy, and the preservation of the Latin mass was a cause to which he gave much time and effort. In 1974 the Association for Latin Liturgy published his *Ordo Missae: Order of the Mass*, described as 'a translation into traditional liturgical English of the New Order of the Mass'. The power of this tradition is a pervasive feature of his last published book.

In November 1963 C. S. Lewis, the first holder of the professorship of Medieval and Renaissance English in Cambridge, and a fellow of Magdalene, died. Bennett, who had of course known him well at Magdalen, was elected to succeed him. He did not at first remove his household to Cambridge, but stayed on at Hinksey and travelled; but the acquisition of a fine large house in Adams Road enabled him soon to dispense with this taxing and time-consuming process. His health constantly gave cause for anxiety, but it was evidently much improved by an operation for the ulcer which had long troubled him. He did not wholly enjoy Cambridge. Magdalene College he found welcoming and rewarding, especially after he was made Keeper of the Old Library in 1968; but the English Faculty was less receptive to his ideas than he had hoped, and he found his undergraduate audiences ill equipped to relish his admittedly rather advanced material. His successor in the professorship recalls that 'his formal lecturing became for most undergraduates a medium of impenetrable difficulty'. Somewhat to his surprise he discovered a lively sympathy and understanding with I. A. Richards, who had come to live in Cambridge on his retirement, and greatly enjoyed his company.

In 1964 an important bibliographical discovery caused a stir among all medievalists. The manuscript of the first nine books of Caxton's rendering of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, from a French translation, was found among the Phillipps manuscripts which were gradually being sold. Books 10 to 15 had long been in the Magdalene library, because Samuel Pepys had acquired them and had left them to the college with the rest of his books. It was obviously highly desirable that the two parts should be reunited, but this seemed impossible when the Phillipps part was sold for £90,000, at that time the highest price ever paid at auction for a single manuscript. Nevertheless, while export was delayed by the Reviewing Committee a group of fellows of Magdalene, among whom Jack Bennett was prominent, organized a public appeal in *The Times* and Bennett wrote an article about it in the *Literary Supplement*. These moves led to the generous proposal of Mr George Braziller of New York to publish a facsimile of the manuscript to help to raise money, and a handsome offer of a large loan by Mr Eugene Power of Ann Arbor. In the event the plan succeeded in its main aim. The Phillipps manuscript came to Magdalene and the facsimile edition was published. Yet a disappointment clouded the success. Bennett had made plans to issue a companion volume containing chapters on various aspects of the manuscript and the translation, describing its form, technique, associations, and language, and a good deal of this was done; but an essential part had been a discussion of Caxton's text and its relation to the French from which the translation was made, and this was never completed, so the volume never appeared.

1968 saw the publication of the second of Bennett's close interpretations of Chaucer's lesser poems, *Chaucer's Book of Fame*, which expounded *The House of Fame* in a way similar to his treatment of *The Parlement of Foules*—indeed the opening chapter, on Venus and Virgil, took up part of the same theme. The third book on Chaucer, published in 1974, was of a different kind, expository rather than interpretative and briefer though no less learned. It was called *Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge*, and printed the text, expanded by notes and appendixes, of the Alexander lectures which Bennett had delivered at Toronto in 1970. The emphasis here was on factual matters of records and books, greatly illuminating conditions of life and study in the university towns in the fourteenth century. The three volumes display a depth of understanding of the world of Chaucer that is hard to parallel. It was mainly in recognition of their importance that in 1979 he was awarded the Sir Israel Gollancz prize of the British Academy, of

which he had been elected a Fellow in 1971. Another example of his skill in this field appears in his contribution to a series of three lectures on Chaucer given before a large Italian audience in Rome in 1976 at the invitation of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and the British Academy. He spoke with his customary learning and elegance on 'Chaucer, Dante, and Boccaccio', the text of which was published by the Accademia in 1977. But though Chaucer remained close to the centre of his interests, and he continued to hope that the Oxford University Press might some day undertake a new edition of the complete works to succeed Skeat's old one of the 1890s, other major authors of the late Middle Ages also occupied him. From 1972 to 1976 he published four sets of *Supplementary Notes on Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, amounting in all to a hundred pages, which were notes to his Cambridge lectures privately printed at the Cambridge University Library.

The capacity for effective practical action that he showed in the Oxford B.Phil. proposal and the affair of the Caxton manuscript was again applied in his handling of the crisis in the production of *Medium Ævum* which came about in 1976. Since its inception 45 years earlier the journal had been published by B. H. Blackwell Ltd., and Sir Basil Blackwell had been treasurer of the Society. After his retirement the firm decided that it would not continue the arrangement, and in view of the difficulty of finding another publisher at reasonable cost the best course appeared to be for the Society to take it over. Bennett had experience of the printing done by the Cambridge University Library, which had produced his lecture notes, and he was able to negotiate satisfactory terms for the Library to print *Medium Ævum*, the Society acting as its own publisher. This made possible the continuing existence of the journal, which had seemed in doubt. This businesslike side of Bennett was unexpected by some who had endured occasionally considerable delays in seeing their contributions to *Medium Ævum* published, for his editorial methods, though they achieved high quality, did not always, it must be admitted, match it in expedition.

An unexpected excursion into a later field was the small volume of *Essays on Gibbon* which he had privately printed in 1980, another learned discussion principally concerned with Gibbon's books and reading. Bennett's last published book, *Poetry of the Passion*, which was left unprinted but almost ready for press, and appeared a few months after his death, went back for its inspiration to the earliest Christian literature of England. It traces the theme of the

Crucifixion as poets have treated it from *The Dream of the Rood* to David Jones's *Anathemata*, 'to expose a vein that runs right through our poetic history, and to indicate how poems cradled in the Age of Faith can still speak to our condition'. The book was based on the last set of lectures that Bennett delivered at Cambridge, and he regarded it as embodying the best of his work and thought. For many years he had been working on the Middle English volume of the Oxford History of English Literature. At his death he had completed a first draft of nearly all of it, and it is expected to be published after some revision and rearrangement. His other great enterprise, a commentary on *Piers Plowman*, unfortunately does not seem to have been far enough advanced to be brought into publishable form. He kept up a flow of occasional writings—notes and essays aptly and elegantly expressed; and he had an especially graceful touch in writing memoirs. His account of C. T. Onions in volume lxxv of these *Proceedings*, and that of David Nichol Smith written in 1980 and published after his death by the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University, are recent examples.

There was a good deal of the absent-minded don in his make-up—he would never learn to drive a car or to use a typewriter, though his handwriting was a sore trial to many who had to try to read it. In later years, with his fine sensitive face, abundant hair which had early turned white, and slight stoop, he looked the part. His speech was especially characteristic—precise, though sometimes hesitant as he weighed his words, individual in enunciation, and revealing little of the 'Southern Cross' voice-quality or intonation that might have been expected from his New Zealand upbringing. This was remarked even by some who knew him before he left New Zealand, and there is no obvious explanation. In other respects, in spite of his profound feeling for medieval Europe and his special ties with Oxford and Cambridge, New Zealand remained extraordinarily close to his heart. He visited it as often as he could—partly to see his mother, who lived to be 96, partly to savour again the peculiar quality of the land and the light. He was always deeply attached to his oldest New Zealand friends, and it was typical of him that he felt an obligation to contribute to the growing body of New Zealand writing for which the young periodical *Landfall* provided an outlet.

His last years were greatly saddened by the severe illness of Gwyneth, who was often in hospital and painfully incapacitated before her too early death in March 1980. His own health had improved, but he still suffered at intervals from cardiac asthma.

He had always looked frail, and it seemed remarkable that he should so resiliently withstand persistent affliction. He was working actively to the last, and it was on his way to New Zealand that he died, in Los Angeles, on 29 January 1981.

Note. A volume of studies in honour of J. A. W. Bennett, designed to mark his seventieth birthday, was edited by P. L. Heyworth and published by the Clarendon Press in 1981. It contains a biographical chapter by the editor, based largely on notes left by Bennett, which Professor Heyworth has generously lent me. There is also an appreciation by D. M. Davin of Bennett's work as an adviser to the Clarendon Press, and a full bibliography of his published writings. Brief tributes by N. Davis and J. E. Stevens were printed in *Medium Ævum* vol. 1 (1981), no. 1, and an appreciation of his work as editor by Douglas Gray in no. 2. There are numerous references to him, especially in early years, in *Indirections* by Charles Brasch (Oxford, 1980). To all these I am much indebted. For family information I am very grateful to Mr Norman Bennett of Wanganui, Jack's brother; Mr Edmund Bennett, his son; and the Principal of Brasenose, his brother-in-law. I owe thanks also to Professor James Bertram, who wrote an obituary in the *New Zealand Listener* and sent me personal information as well; to Miss Nesta Lloyd Thomas, who knew Jack in his New York years; to Professor Ian Donaldson of the Australian National University, who sent Jack's *Recollections of David Nichol Smith*; to Professor J. E. Stevens, who sent his notice in the *Magdalene College Magazine and Record*; to the Oxford English Faculty Board for permission to use its minutes of 1959-60; and for help on particular matters to the Revd Canon S. Barrington-Ward; Mr R. C. Latham, and Miss Celia Sisam.

NORMAN DAVIS