

## In Memoriam: Francis Lee Utley, 1907-1974

**I**F, AS COLERIDGE HAS TAUGHT US ALL, a poem adds up to more than the sum of its parts, then surely the life of a man, always far more complex than any work of art, means more than the sum of his accomplishments. When the man has been a major scholar and teacher, the discrepancy between what he *did*, however significant, and what he *was* seems somehow all the greater. This is so with Francis Lee Utley.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the thing to say about Professor Utley above all else is that he was a student of George Lyman Kittredge. This circumstance doubtless helped him obtain his first academic appointment late in 1935—a depression year as difficult for academics as for anyone else. As an Instructor at Ohio State University that year, he earned \$1,800.00. He went on to become one of the best known faculty members there, gaining an international reputation and attracting many graduate students over the next 39 years. He helped to build a university library with outstanding collections in medieval literature, he instituted the University's folklore programs, and he established the Folklore Archive. In his later years he helped in establishing on campus the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and in arranging its annual conferences.

As great as Kittredge's formal achievements were, it may well be that in the long run his greatest accomplishment lay in the inspiration he gave his graduate students. No one could know Professor Utley very long without hearing Kittredgian stories and anecdotes, and the affection he held for his master came to be held for him by his own students, many of whom called him "Papa" when talking among themselves. Professor Utley somehow always had time for his students, whether to help them on academic matters, to encourage them when they needed encouraging, or just to talk with them. All of us who were his students remember the many fruitful hours spent in his office and at his home as well.

Indeed, the distinction between office and home eventually broke down almost altogether, and students attended more and more classes at his home in the years just before his death. Even in the early 1960's, our two-quarter Seminar in Arthurian Literature and International Folklore, which met on campus, continued to meet for a third quarter at his home. The instructor was not paid and the students received no academic credit, but for weeks after the course formally ended we profit-

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<sup>1</sup> For their help in preparing this tribute, I wish to thank Mark Amsler, John Gabel, Ernest Moyne, and Mrs. Utley.

ably studied and talked about Malory, and that was the important thing. The other most memorable class was perhaps the *Troilus and Criseyde* Seminar; to hear Professor Utley read and discuss the ending of Chaucer's masterwork was an emotional as well as an intellectual experience.

Among the things one can never forget about Professor Utley is that he was a man of books. One can scarcely think of him without thinking of books. In the mid-1960's he and his family were forced to move to a larger house on London Drive because the smaller house could no longer hold both the books and the Utleys. By then books were everywhere, filling even the kitchen and the bathroom. Although library stacks were built in the basement of the new house, books were still stacked on the floor along the walls in Professor Utley's study, and his desk in Denney Hall seemed always to have from four to eight piles of books on it, each several feet high. The working space on his desk was about the size of a piece of stationery. For those of us who knew him at Ohio State, surely one of the most vivid memories is of him walking across campus, sometimes with one shopping bag, sometimes with two shopping bags filled with books. He collected, altogether, an estimated 21,000 volumes.

As a true student of Kittredge, Professor Utley published a great deal and on a wide variety of subjects, as the nearly two-and-a-half hundred items in his bibliography make clear. Of special significance is his work on the *Clerk's Tale*, which includes re-evaluating the meaning of the poem as well as the discovery and publication of otherwise inaccessible oriental analogues. His extensive materials on the Noah legend represent many years of patient and scholarly collecting and are surely the largest such collection in the world. His major book is *The Crooked Rib*, a work essential to the study of medieval attitudes toward women, and he also edited and co-edited several other books, including the *Ninth Supplement to a Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400*; *The Forward Movement of the Fourteenth Century*; *Studies in Bibliography and Jewish Folklore*; *Bear, Man, and God*; and *Placenames of Georgia*.

Professor Utley left behind a large collection of material on Johannes Annius of Viterbo, literary forger of the fifteenth century, and at the time of his death he was working on the variorum edition of Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* and on a book of analogues, with extensive commentary, to the *Canterbury Tales*. His materials on Ohio speech are also of considerable importance. One of his most valuable contributions to the scholarly world stemmed from his lifelong devotion to the field of folklore. More than almost anyone else of his generation, he helped define and establish folklore studies as a respected academic discipline in this country. In recognition of this contribution, his colleagues at Ohio State voted several years ago to confer upon him a title specially created for him, Professor of English and Folklore.

His relationship with his colleagues and his students was remarkable

in a variety of ways, especially in his ability to stimulate everyone he knew. A man of great energy himself, he continually encouraged those around him to attend academic meetings, to read scholarly papers, to join professional societies. This encouragement resulted both from his own example and from his great generosity. He seemed always to find the time to read and criticize colleagues' manuscripts, to raise money for the study of Ohio speech, to plan for the establishment of a commission to survey place-names in the United States, or to take a carload of doctoral candidates to Kentucky for a Foreign Language Conference.

When he was not attending an onomastics meeting in Europe, teaching Chaucer at Harvard, giving a folklore course at Virginia, or otherwise serving as visiting professor at UCLA, Columbia, or Berkeley, he was functioning as President of the American Folklore Society (1951-52), of the College English Association (1969), and of the American Name Society (1966). At various times he was Fulbright Lecturer in Italy, a member of the Fulbright Commission for the United Kingdom, and a holder of three Guggenheim fellowships. He seemed especially to enjoy serving on the Executive Council of the Modern Language Association (1969-72), on which, in a time of academic and political unrest, he struggled with organizational problems of the Association. One could not be complacent around Fran Utley.

For his contributions to academe, and for his generosity as well, Professor Utley was often repaid, I am sure, by the esteem in which he was widely held. The happiest I ever saw him, I believe, was at the MLA convention in New York at which he was presented with a *Festschrift* in honor of his sixty-fifth birthday.<sup>2</sup> The presentation took place at a dinner for him attended by many of the country's most distinguished medievalists and folklorists and by a number of his students. Just how pleased he was I didn't realize until the next day when I saw him carrying the book with him in the halls and lobby of the hotel telling friends with schoolboy enthusiasm, "Look what they gave me!"

What Professor Utley *did*, of course, was considerable, and that is what we must primarily be concerned with here, since what he did is what the academic world will ultimately remember him for. But we who knew him—his friends, colleagues, and students—will remember him mainly for what he *was*, and *that*, although harder to define, was a great deal more.

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<sup>2</sup> *Medieval Literature and Folklore Studies: Essays in Honor of Francis Lee Utley*, ed. Jerome Mandel and Bruce A. Rosenberg (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1970).