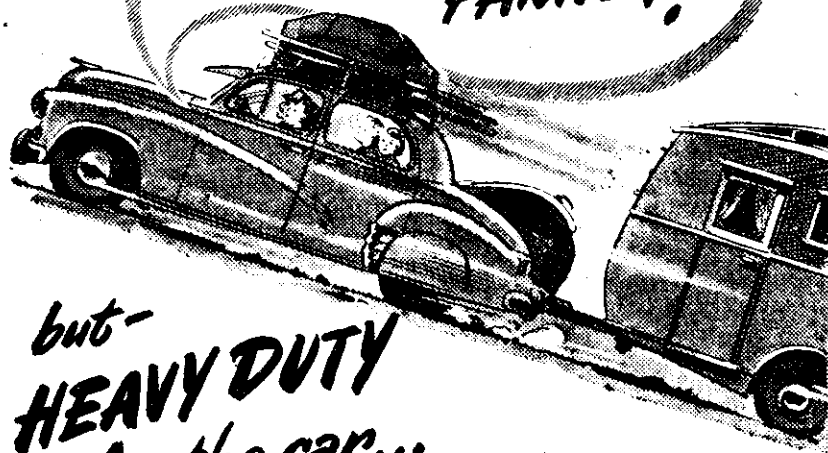




FUN FOR THE FAMILY!



**but-
HEAVY DUTY
for the car...**

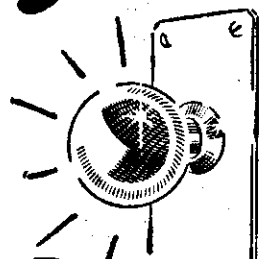


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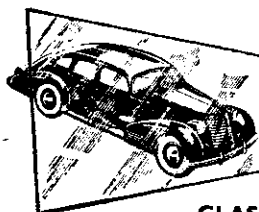
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THE BACKWARD LOOK

DOCTOR JACK BENNETT, an Auckland who went off 20 years ago on a research fellowship to Oxford and stayed to become a Fellow of Magdalen College and Lecturer in the University, is fond of quoting a remark by William Morris that a consciousness of the past is necessary for a true living of the present. While Dr. Bennett was in New Zealand the other day on a visit with his English wife, he talked about the Middle Ages and the various ways in which modern scholarship has been able to increase our knowledge of them, in an interview with *The Listener*.

"The more one studies the Middle Ages," he said, "the more sceptical one grows of the whole concept of the Renaissance as one is taught it at school. We no longer talk about the 'crude but sincere artists' of Anglo-Saxon England, for instance. In the South of England at least there was a highly developed culture."

"An interesting similarity between medieval man and ourselves," he said, "lies in their attitude towards progress. They didn't think that progress was the principle of the universe. The backward look was just as characteristic of the Middle Ages as it is of today. Chaucer thought of Virgil as the greatest poet. There was no suggestion that the older literature of the classics was barbaric and crude."

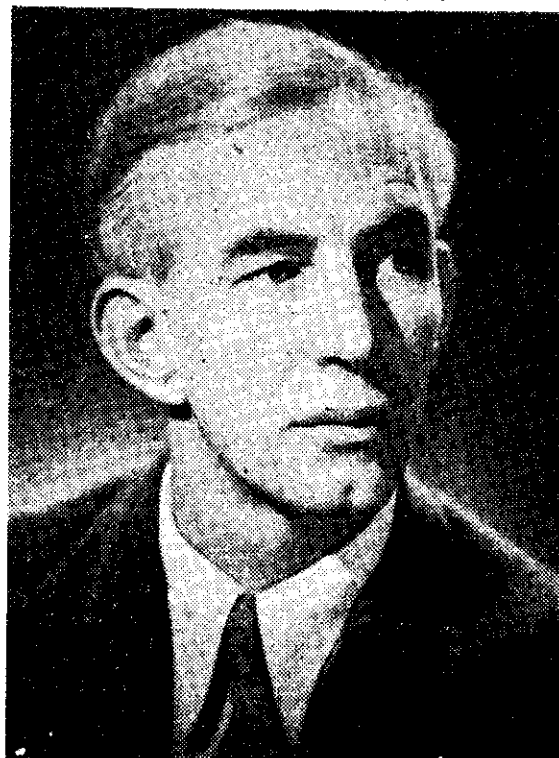
A misconception about the Middle Ages that modern scholarship had done much to clear up, he said, was that the classics were unknown to medieval thinkers and artists. For this mistaken notion we had in part to blame the Victorian attitude cultivated by men like Pater. While it was true that some of the

classics were not available, it had now been established that Chaucer, to take one example, had been a close student of the writings of Cicero and Ovid, and could not have written exactly as he did if he had not been. There had been a reassessment of medieval culture in recent years, and it was recognised that there was an established culture in the 10th Century at Winchester, where there was a school of manuscript writing and illumination, and also of sculpture, which had lasted until the 12th Century.

Anglo-Saxon Art

"Views on Anglo-Saxon art have also changed in the past five years," Dr. Bennett said. "It is now known, for instance, that there was a great deal of interchange of pattern, design and motif among the various parts of Europe, and in medieval England there were far greater influences from Byzantium than had previously been supposed. There were even Byzantine craftsmen working in England."

In some of its aspects, modern art and sculpture bore a noticeable resemblance to the best Anglo-Saxon art. Epstein's controversial *Lazarus*, in particular, could be compared with the panels of the raising of *Lazarus* in Chichester Cathedral. Eric Gill's art also had affinities with Anglo-Saxon and Romanesque art. Anglo-Saxon art was not provincial or barbaric. It had reached a high level of sophistication and had absorbed European influences. Yet so great had been our misconceptions about the culture of the Middle Ages that an outstanding example of Anglo-Saxon art such as the famous *Madonna in York Cathedral*, a perfect piece of sculpture showing Byzantine influences, had for centuries gone unrecognised for what it was because no one believed it possible for a medieval artist to have fashioned it.



The impetus towards this reassessment of medieval art and culture had come from abroad, he said, particularly from French research into Romanesque art, which had led to similar investigations in England. Formerly it had been the custom to think of Gothic as the high pinnacle of art in the Middle Ages, and everything before or since as either decadent or immature, largely because of the propaganda influence of Ruskin. In the past fifty years there had been a rediscovery of the importance to Western culture of Romanesque and Byzantine art, partly because only now had it been possible to work from exact and true photographs instead of the sometimes crude or misleading copies made by artists.

Freedom to Speculate

"Our whole notion of the scope and significance of the Renaissance (continued on next page)"

Spencer Digby photograph

DR. JACK BENNETT
"Human nature hasn't changed"

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 27, 1953.