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IN MEMORIAM

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Abram Elting Bennett  
1898-1985

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Dr. Abram Elting Bennett was born in Alliance, Nebraska on January 12, 1898 and died in Herrick Memorial Hospital, Berkeley, California on March 7, 1985. He had married at the age of 24, and had two daughters and a son. He received both his Bachelor of Science and his M. D. degrees from the University of Nebraska. He interned at the University Hospital in Omaha in 1920-1921 and then at the Philadelphia General Hospital from 1922 to 1923. Thereafter he was resident at the Philadelphia Orthopedic and Nervous Infirmary Hospital 1923-1924, and then at the Phipps Psychiatric Clinic, Johns Hopkins University, in 1924. Upon completion of his residency he became Assistant Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Nebraska and later Professor and Chairman of the Department until his move to California in 1948. During that period he not only conducted a busy private practice, but organized and directed the Psychiatric Department at the Clarkson Memorial Hospital in Omaha, held responsible posts in several other

hospitals, including the Lincoln State Mental Hospital, and started a Fever Therapy Research unit at the University. In 1942 he founded and directed the A. E. Bennett Research Foundation for Research in Neurology and Psychiatry.

In 1948 Bennett accepted the directorship of the Psychiatric Department at the Herrick Hospital in Berkeley, California and simultaneously became Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California. Throughout this period he was an active member of numerous professional organizations, among which were the American Psychiatric Association, the American Neurological Association, the Central Society for Clinical Research, and the Central Neuropsychiatric Association, of which he was President in 1944. He was an early member of the Society of Biological Psychiatry, served as its President 1952-1953, earned its prestigious Gold Medal Award in 1973, and was one of its four Honorary Members. He received three special Awards from the American Medical Association in 1941, 1946, and 1958. As token of recognition he was made Fellow of the National Academy of Medicine in Mexico City.

Starting in 1958 Bennett inaugurated the Annual A. E. Bennett Awards of the Society of Biological Psychiatry, which proved to be a stimulating and motivating influence in the lives of young research workers in neurology and psychiatry, many of whom later went on to great achievements. As a memorial to his son Bennett also initiated an annual lectureship at the American Neurological Association.

Bennett had a particular interest in physiological treatment modalities, starting with the fever treatment of general paresis, and later with insulin and convulsive treatment. He was the first to introduce the Indian arrow poison curare as a muscle relaxant to minimize injury in convulsive treatment. Though it was scoffed at, the use of such relaxants soon became standard practice. He had a special interest in all aspects of alcoholism, and made numerous contributions in that area. He pioneered the establishment of psychiatric units in general hospitals. One of his greatest contributions was his missionary work in the field of biological psychiatry. He traveled widely in many countries, including the backward countries of the Third World, always promoting and aiding the development of biological psychiatry, and often assisting in the creation of societies of biological psychiatry. As a descendent of an old Huguenot family he was much interested in tracing the migratory paths of the Huguenots and wrote a book on the subject.

Bennett was a prolific writer and not only produced some 250 scientific papers and five books, but frequently contributed to the newspapers on both medical and political themes. His book subjects were: psychiatric nursing, psychiatry in general hospitals, alcoholism, and a retrospective volume on the past half century of psychiatry. After 20 years of service Herrick Hospital honored him for his pioneering introduction of psychiatry into the general hospital, for his introduction of relaxants in EST, for his promotion of a medical approach to alcoholism, for his own research in that field, and for his promotion of EST, especially in its application to manic-depressive psychoses and the depressions of late middle and old age.

The constant and untiring efforts of Abram Elting Bennett to advance the cause of a scientific psychiatry brought him wide recognition all over the world: Few individuals have contributed so much to a single field. He will be long remembered by students and colleagues alike. Though he is grievously missed, his place as a leader remains secure. All of us owe him a profound debt of gratitude.

*George N. Thompson*