



Mediaevalism and Myself

I DROPPED in to see the Editor the other day. He seemed to be very busy—I think he has his office staff trained to rush in on him breathlessly every two minutes when gullible-looking strangers are with him—but he is always willing to take a half-day off any time for the exquisite pleasure of telling me what he thinks of me. You have probably noticed this tendency in people—say, in boys when they get a bird they can torture. It shows that heredity is still struggling with civilization in us. Well, the Editor had a good time, I think, while I was there. And when at last he lighted a Christmas cigar—the kind that it is more blessed to give than to receive—as a gentle hint of what would happen me if I stayed any longer, I went. He watchfully saw me off the premises—they sometimes lose stray trifles, I understand—and, at the elevator, finished his enjoyable dissection of “yours truly” by remarking:

“Well, I always like to have a talk with you—it enables me to see how the people thought in the Middle Ages.”

NATURALLY, I treasured up that last “tit-bit.” It was the final word of wisdom from inspired

lips; and I felt that, if I were an alert and sagacious young man, I would strive to extract from it the wisdom which it doubtless contained. So my conversation was—Mediaeval! And, while I had remained back in the days of the portcullis and the jongleur and the knight-errant and the insane fanatics who died for the things in which they believed, the world about me had advanced into the white light of modernism when we no longer build castles but apartment houses, when the jongleur has given way to the “funny page” and the temperamental opera singer, when knight-errantry is known to be absurd and “distressed damsels” usually end in the grip of the White Slaver, and when no one is fanatical enough to believe anything worth dying for. Civilization had marched on—no, it had rolled on in a stately and stuffy “Pullman”—and I had come trudging along the highway, still crediting the realities of life and breathing deep the free airs of frankly admitted motives.

WELL, civilization is a great thing. Some cynic once said that the difference between it and barbarism is that barbarism kills a man with a club, whereas civilization does the trick with a rifle. That saying is rather obsolete now. Civilization has since invented the machine-gun and the aero-

plane and the hermetically-sealed street car, and the dusty shop with a thousand customers—most of them with contagious diseases. The poor old Mediaevalist lived a dull life. It was so difficult for him, for example, to change his address. If he wanted to go from London to Edinburgh, he had to spend days tooling along through the open country with the cool air on his cheek, and the bright verdure of the countryside tantalizing his eyes; and, at night, he climbed down, stiff and hungry, from the top of his coach to enter a low inn parlour with old oak furniture and a sanded floor and a heaped log fire in the roaring fire-place, and there he ate an enormous meal, washed down by waters which no one but the Dickens Society ever speaks of now, and stories went round the circle before the fire, and he tumbled off sleepily to bed at last, with never a steam-heated, cast-iron mattress of cushions beneath him nor a car-porter to wake him out of his smothered misery in the morning.

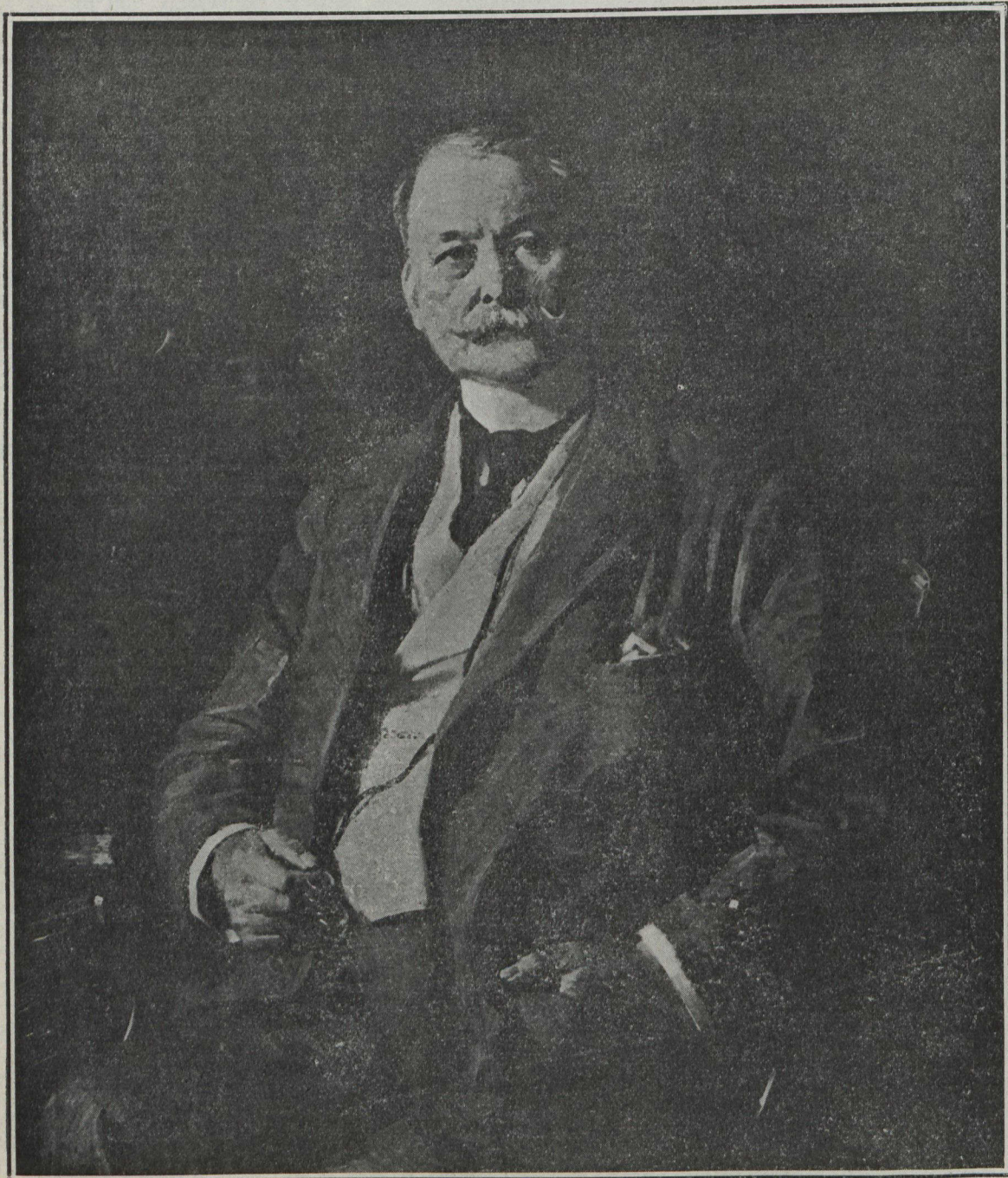
IT was tough. Then the Man of the Middle Ages had such crude moral ideas. I think that was what the Editor had in mind when he attached the label to me. If the Mediaeval gentleman wanted anything, he went and took it, if he were big enough. Now, that was no way to act. Think of holding up an honest merchant at a ford and taking a part of his goods from him. They were not the Mediaeval knight's goods. Yet, just because he had a lance and a charger and a coat of mail, he took them. Civilization does things much more delicately. The “gentry” of our day get a law passed by which the merchants are taxed to pay for the upkeep of a number of officials who await them at the “fords,” and take from them with due ceremony a part of their goods. It is much more genteel; and the “gentry” get more out of it, too, as a rule. In addition, it does not take up their time. They do not have to wait at the fords themselves—these officers, paid by the merchants, do the waiting for the “gentry.” We have long ago left far behind us the crude and brutal law that “might is right.” Our “gentry” have given up the “strong arm” business—partly because they no longer possess the “strong arm.” They go in for the “strong brain” method now. They fleece the weak-brained brethren just as their forefathers fleeced the weak-armed and the unarmed brethren; and they do it much better. They never kill anybody in cold blood now—they merely starve them to death, and inflict hideous diseases upon them, and grind them in the heartless wheels of industry. They never ravish any village maidens now—they merely tempt them to the cities, pay them three dollars a week when living costs six, and let economic law do the rest. Possibly their sons—if they happen to be “sowing wild oats” just then—assist economic law.

OH, we live in an age of progress. The bad old Middle Ages—when I should have lived—are dead, buried and condemned. In those times, nations went out to war and seized the territory of their victims—robbed the prostrate. We would not dream of that now—we who are enlightened by “Norman Angell” and inspired by Andrew Carnegie, the Hero of Homestead. When Germany occupies Alsace and Lorraine, she gives it back with a courteous apology. When Japan over-runs Korea, she invites the Koreans to choose their own form of government. When Britain marches to Pretoria, she sends for President Kruger and reinstates him with great ceremony. When France arrives at Fez, she retires gracefully in favour of the Sultan. When Italy conducts missionary operations in Tripoli, she is very careful to make it clear that she would not accept an inch of territory even as a souvenir. When the Balkan Allies meet the Turks in London, it is a case of “after you, my dear Alphonse,” each striving to be the first to give back to the Ottoman Government any provinces they may have thoughtlessly invaded. Holy Russia would not take Persia to-day, even if she got it as a gift. As for the United States—that most modern of modern nations where civilization and Christianity go hand in hand—it returned the Philippines and Porto Rico to Spain, kindly refused Panama as a Christmas present from Colombia, and insists that Cuba shall not dream of taking orders from Washington. Yet here am I, moving about among the sainted people of this beatific century, with all these examples of unselfishness and benevolence before my eyes, and yet retaining the spirit of the Middle Ages. They ought to put me in a museum.

THE MONOCLE MAN.

Intellectually a man of the world; enjoying life day in and day out, just as it is; for professional reasons a critic delighting in paradoxes in order that he may point out what a delightfully wicked world we inhabit nowadays: such is a certain type of very practical inconsistency.

A Financier as He is Painted



Mr. D. R. Wilkie, President and General Manager of the Imperial Bank, lately made President of the Canadian Bankers' Association.

This is not the first attempt made by an artist to make the portrait of a man interested in art and finance. Mr. E. Wyly Grier, R.C.A., has painted hundreds of men in nearly all walks of life. When he undertook lately to do the general manager of the Imperial Bank he discovered a few more possibilities in painting a man of the world. The picture was exhibited last month at the Royal Canadian Academy in Ottawa.