

GOLDWIN SMITH—DECEASED

BORN AUGUST 23rd, 1823; DIED JUNE 7th, 1910

*Scholar, Historian, Journalist and Litterateur—and
Fine Old English Gentleman*

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

THE death of Goldwin Smith came simply and naturally. The old man of letters and philosophy gradually slipped away, half unconscious for two days before the end. Some months ago—in February last—he had an accident which may have been the immediate cause of death. At any rate he never recovered fully from the fracture of his thigh-bone. He was so old a man that even with his unusual vitality the bone refused to set. So he gradually wore away; died without recognising a soul, unable to indulge in any further "guesses at the riddle of existence"; just a remarkable old man and much of an intellectual world-figure played out. That was all.

That was at three-twenty in the afternoon of Tuesday, June 7th. Evening papers of that day had full front page accounts of the event, the man and the career. They had been expecting it for months. Special writers for both newspapers and magazines had been preparing obituary articles framed up ready for immediate insertion at the psychological moment—different from the death of King Edward or Mark Twain, to whom the end came suddenly. For the time being the demise of Goldwin Smith made as much of a stir in Toronto at least as that of either the other two celebrities. Days after the event and until the imposing funeral on Saturday last the chief cities of Canada and some in the United States were concerned as over some natural phenomenon.

Goldwin Smith—was actually dead!

Hundreds of people went out to John Street to gaze at the old Georgian mansion half-obscured by the huge elms; the seven-acre retreat of a great intellect now these forty years; people who had never read a line of the man's writings; many who had never even seen him. Round about the Grange there have grown up battlements of boarding-houses four storeys high; such as gave the deceased Professor a good deal of grave concern for some years back. Hundreds of people in that congested part of Toronto into which the Jews have been crowding for years knew before night that the landlord of the classic seven-acres was dead. Hundreds who had never before seen the Grange went on a brief pilgrimage to gaze in past the ugly red fence, among the stately, shimmering elms and the wonderful greens at the faded brick house. People of many languages and nationalities; what did most of them know about the life of Goldwin Smith? Little or nothing. Themselves Canadians of yesterday and of tomorrow, they had sometimes seen the man as he rode out in his easy carriage for an afternoon turn over the hills to the north. Sunken under the rim of his fedora hat, that seemed of late to have got too large for him, they had regarded him with an eye of wonder; the old man of books—a strange, half-melancholy figure; a man apart from the scurrying crowd of a city, who now and then gave out some doctrine about men and politics and history and literature which the newspapers published as though it had been the voice of an oracle. In fact if Goldwin Smith had been charlatan

man who forty years ago when he came to the country had predicted that the day would come when Canada would be absorbed by the United States. To him the great movement of population from Europe to the new world was not national—but continental. And the common people wondered—if the old scholar really knew.

Now the old sage is dead; and we shall have no more *pronunciamentos*. He was buried on a day of much windy rain; when the grand old elms before his faded house were whispering of a new year of leaves; when the red peonies, his favourite flower, were at the full of bloom in the secluded spots of that old English garden; when the social columns of the newspapers were full of the chronicles of June weddings, and when the whole face of the country which for forty years Goldwin Smith had been studying through a glass was quivering with beautiful life; and while he lay dead in the Grange the University of Toronto held its convocation procession across the campus—Chancellor and President, professors and students; and for the first time in many, many years the venerable, tottering Professor, wisest of all, was not one of them. Last year he was helped across the campus to Convocation Hall by the professors. He sat upon the platform somewhat crunched down; a lean, wrinkled, dry figure whose face was lighted up with the pale cast of much thought. Day after Convocation this year there was another—much more solemn and slow; up to the edge of the campus to Convocation Hall; professors, news-



journalists who could teach Goldwin Smith the rudiments of modern journalism; perhaps a few writers who could much better express the sentiment of Canada; but the death of any of them could not have made quite the stir in Canada that the passing of this strange man did.

Why? In a country which is above all things practical and progressive and utilitarian—what magic had this austere Professor that he was able

to furnish pages to the newspapers even when his own pen was forever laid down? Nobody quite knows. Canada has never had quite such a distinguished intellectual citizen as Goldwin Smith; never one whose life doctrines were so opposed to the whole trend of modern progress and sentiment. Goldwin Smith had lived forty years—packed with thought—in Canada. He had never seen half or quarter of it. He had never quite understood it. To the country a riddle, he saw Canada as a somewhat self-willed young thing who would persist in having sentiments about empire and government with which he could not agree. Never in his forty years here did he once flatter Canada—as do many distinguished Englishmen visiting here nowadays. Our politics rarely pleased him. He criticised our party government; quarrelled with our systems of election; chided us for municipal mismanagement; rated us about our lack of civic spirit; criticised us more than any man that ever lived. Yet we took off our hats to Goldwin Smith and read every word he chose to put in the newspapers; a good deal of what he put into books; listened almost reverently when he got up to speak on a platform. Why?

Well, we scarcely know; except that we are fond of kings—and in the world of intellect Goldwin Smith was something of a king. He was a thinker. What he thought he was not afraid to say—out loud. We respected him for his convictions. He was a man of many intellectual interests. He studied life at many points. He was never in a rut. He was not a mere professor; not only a writer of books; not simply a great political

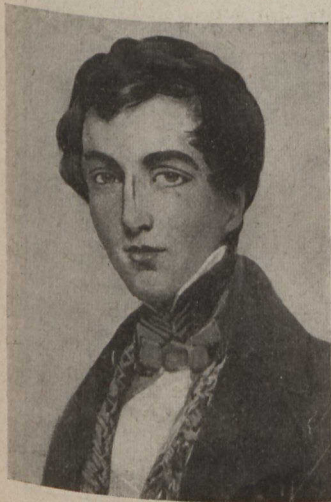
journalist and a publicist. He was a singular, fascinating, unconquerable intellectual man who with a rare command of language had a habit of dignifying the pettiest squabbles of our public life into something like a national issue. So we paid court to him; because in all the world we



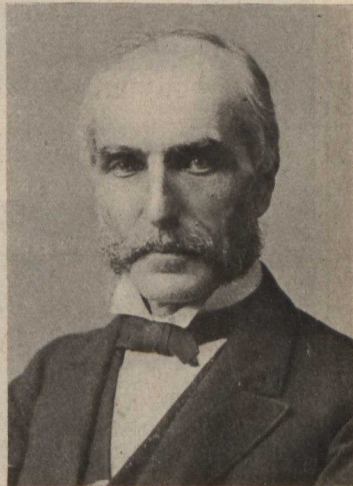
Hallway of the Grange—Almost every litterateur, diplomatist and statesman who has visited Canada in the last half century has been "interviewed" in this distinguished portion of a most interesting residence.

paper men, charity workers, labourites—and ordinary citizens. Goldwin Smith was there; again the centre of interest—but he was dead. In place of the University Latin, the rites of the church. Chancellor and President were there—but only as chief public mourners. And they said that this wise man who in life "guessed at the riddle of existence" had much religion after all.

Not in many years has there been a death and funeral in Canada so notable and imposing as that of Goldwin Smith; not at any rate since the death of Sir John Macdonald. But when Macdonald died in 1891 it was a smaller Canada than the twentieth century land that now speaks with regret and much veneration of the dead Professor. Yet we have hundreds of professors in Canada; hundreds of political opinionists—and some thinkers; scores of



Goldwin Smith at 17
From a Portrait at the Grange.



Goldwin Smith in Middle Life
From a photo by Ellicott & Fry.

But amid the bewildering, half-vague ideas the plain people had of this man there was one which most of them never forgot—being themselves Canadians of to-day and to-morrow as this man was a great Englishman in Canada. He was the