

ET NUNC ET SEMPER

IN common, I suppose, with a large number of other people, I keep a press-cutting book; and, again in common with many others, I was prompted to inaugurate this book by a particular gem which caught my casual eye. My book is one wherein I paste cuttings which illustrate the practical imbecility of the people for whom our 'Great Dailies' are produced, and the practical inanity of a large number of those whose names make news for the editors of these papers.

My *pièce de resistance* is a paragraph from the *News-Chronicle* which is headed 'Sir H. Samuel and Germany,' and which says simply this: 'Sir Herbert Samuel, speaking at Montreal yesterday, said that Germany was morally dipping back into the Middle Ages.' That is all: that is the remark which, alone in a whole speech, was considered worth); of transmission across the Atlantic, and worthy, moreover, of being brought to the notice of the **British** public.

We shall not attempt here to decide quite what Sir Herbert meant by the word 'morally'; we shall assume that he intended to imply that the Middle Ages were times in which men so lacked a sense of **what** is right and what is wrong as to **shock** the righteous nation that we are to-day, and to lead Sir Herbert to hope that **we** British will never slip, **as** the Germans to-day are slipping? back into mediaeval corruption.

There is a strange belief abroad that it may be safely and sweepingly **said** that men who lived more than, **say**, two centuries ago were in some way inferior in intellect **or** in **culture** to ourselves; while the Mediaeval was no more than some remote barbarian. This, for example, from a fourth-form History of England: 'In **the** early days of the Church, when the world was full of vice **and** cruelty, it seemed hardly possible to live in the world without **being** dragged down **to its** wickedness. Men **and** women, therefore, who wished **to** keep themselves pure, withdrew to

hermitages or monasteries, where they might be removed from temptation, and might fit themselves for heaven by prayer and fasting.' Was the world more 'full of vice and cruelty' then than now? Was it less easy then than now to live 'without being dragged down to its wickedness'?

Distributists are frequently accused of 'putting back the clock,' inasmuch as they would take us from these days of enlightenment and 'plonk us back in them iggernerant Middle Ages'; inasmuch as they deplore our Talkies and our towns, our Jazz-bands and our Jerry-builders. But it is surely seldom that the Middle Ages are denounced as a period of vicious practice and of moral degeneracy such as can hardly be conceived by the guileless mind of one living in the London or the world of to-day. Sherlock Holmes, it is true, saw a hotbed of vice in every cluster of farm buildings as he travelled in a train through the Kent countryside, but his views were notoriously eccentric. I can understand a man who says that Germany is returning to the Middle Ages when Herr Hitler is working to settle Prussian families on the land as peasant proprietors, although I find him less easy to understand if he says it disparagingly; but I cannot for the life of me understand him if he says the same thing when he sees brutality and war-lust and barbarity abroad.

The time-honoured reply to the 'putting-back-the-clock' accusation is that of Mr. Chesterton, who pointed out the necessity of readjusting a clock that is fast. According, however to one of the theorists who are as gods in the eyes of the Modern, there is no such thing as time. Here is the alternative retort. Here is one big difference between the Mediaeval and the Modern. The Mediaeval was imaginative and a poet: the Modern has no glimmer of poetry in his soul, although he has discovered mathematically that Time is no more than an arbitrary convenience. For poetry is something essentially extraneous to Time, something of its nature eternal. In Shelley's words, 'A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not.'

BLACKFRIARS

The Mediaeval felt no need of many of those things without which so many people to-day feel that it is impossible to live. That is what is meant by a great deal of the general vague idea that he was 'uncivilized.' It was not necessary for his imagination to be spoon-fed; and to-day it is difficult *to* exist without music (of sorts) on tap in a wireless set or a gramophone, or without a Super Picture-Palace round the corner. If one does manage to carry on without these stimulations, one is regarded with some contempt as a yokel and an outsider. Indeed, as the *Daily Express* weightily remarked a week or two ago, 'Except for opening nights, first nights and dress shows, there is little doing in London to occupy the mind.'

That is another item from my scrap-book, and, moreover, it is not taken from Beachcomber's column.

Again 'consider,' a man will say, 'the case of anaesthetics: it took the nineteenth century to discover chloroform. Look at the tremendous progress made by medical science during the last hundred years.' It also took the twentieth century *to* invent a machine capable of transmitting Sir Herbert's fatuities from continent to continent. It never occurs to him that a lack of religion and a fear of death may have added a very real impulse to medical research. He is the son of a machine age, and he cannot understand the final poetry of death. He has forgotten that God is the Supreme Poet. More clearly than they show an inventive genius, the birth of modern medical science and the discoveries of doctors show a wrong sense of proportion, and an ignorance of the very nature of the life they are striving to preserve. With Mediaeval England went also the Catholic Church, and with the uneasy conscience of the Industrial money-grubber came a fear of death and a Dread of Final Things.

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