

14th January 2024

Me

“Something more than the face the model wears for that one day.”

James McNeill Whistler, *A letter to 'The World', (1878)*

Reminding myself of the variety of adverts in the 1889 *Year Book of the Church of Scotland* which I mentioned yesterday, I re-read an advertisement headed ***Portraiture***. This was clearly designed to encourage readers to indulge themselves by having a studio portrait photograph taken for posterity. Those who know church vestries up and down the country will be familiar with those proud, posed, somewhat stiff photographs of ministers through the ages, from as far back as the second half of the 19th century. Indeed, some may have been the work of:

W. CROOKE

Artist Photographer

103 Princes Street, Edinburgh

HIGHEST AWARD FOR PORTRAITS IN PLATINOTYPE

Edinburgh, 1886

GOLD MEDAL

King's Lynn, 1887

Price List on Application

If *we* were to use this award-winning service, would our portrait be as we expected it to be? James McNeill Whistler, the American-born, British-based painter from the same era, had something profound to say about portraits (forgiving the gender-bias of the language of his day):

If the man who paints only the tree, or flower, or other surface he sees before him were an artist, the king of artists would be the photographer [Edinburgh's W. Cooke would be pleased by this!] It is for the artist to do something beyond this: in portrait painting to put on canvas something more than the face the model wears for that one day: to paint the man, in short, as well as his features.

Can people see beyond *our* features, more than the face we wear for this one day? Today, I invite you into the studio of W. Crooke, 103 Princes Street Edinburgh, or to sit for a portrait by James McNeill Whistler, and to ask yourself, “What is the me that I would really like others to see?”

A prayer for today

Lord, I am known to you just as I am. Now it's my job to find out what that is. Amen

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