

*The Lay Figure***T**HE LAY FIGURE.

"I WILL lay it down as a general proposition," said the Lay Figure emphatically, "that no man makes a success in painting or sculpture, however great his talents may be, unless those talents happen to be associated with worldly wisdom and commercial astuteness."

"Come," said the Man with a Clay Pipe, incredulously, "you don't mean to say that there are no instances to be found among successful painters, ancient and modern, of men whose good fortune or prosperity may be attributed solely to the excellence of their work, and the direct appeal it made or makes to the discerning?"

"The falsity of the proposition is easily demonstrable," exclaimed the Journalist, who had been diving into the pigeonholes of his encyclopædic brain. "Now, there was——"

"We can dispense with your cut-and-dry learning," interjected the Lay Figure blandly. "Neither of you has taken the trouble to listen to what I actually said. I said that genius in painting—possibly the statement might be expanded so as to embrace all the arts—cannot succeed in a practical sense unless it be associated with businesslike qualities. I did not say these qualities and genius must necessarily be combined in the same person. I meant that genius must have these aids at its disposal, whether supplied personally or vicariously."

"Where portraiture is concerned," said the budding Portrait Painter, "the business qualities must, I should say, appertain to the individual, and cannot be supplied vicariously. You occasionally find a landscape painter ready to give a junior in whom he believes a helping hand, but it's rare indeed to encounter a portrait painter who'll do as much for a struggling youngster in his own line, and if his senior won't help him no one else can."

"Precisely," said the Landscape Painter, somewhat tartly. "The businesslike qualities are of course, as you say, the most necessary of possession in the case of a man who, in order to succeed, must make a direct appeal to the vanity of his patrons."

"That depends very much upon what you call success," said the Art Patron reflectively. "To all outward appearance it is success to have a palatial residence at Hampstead and to entertain right royally; but if the strain on your nerves and the demand on your pocket keep you all the time on tenterhooks, and you hover continually between bankruptcy on the one hand and imbecility on the other, there is not much gilt on the gingerbread."

"Poor devils!" said the Landscape Painter in a

tone in which compassion was well mixed with serve-them-right dismissal. "We all know too many of that brand."

"The fact of the matter is," said the Man with a Clay Pipe, "the really successful artist is the man who can go on painting just what he wants to paint, as the majority of landscape painters can."

"You forget the starvation business," answered the Landscape Painter ruefully.

"Oh, nonsense. You're like Russian Jews or Bengal coolies," interjected the Art Patron, who happened to be a millionaire and employer of labour. "You like starvation. It brings out the poetry in your art."

"That's a very comfortable doctrine for the likes of you," said the Landscape Painter, "and unfortunately is not without a germ of the truth."

"You cannot serve God and Mammon," said the Art Patron good-humouredly, a malicious twinkle in his eye.

"No; and I have been thinking," said the Journalist, "that the machinery of Mammon, which makes other successes, really makes the great artist. Whether he achieves fame during his lifetime or posthumously is a mere detail, and does not affect the issue. The commercial man, the dealer, and the patron really make the painter. His art does not make him. Leaving out imbeciles and duffers on the one hand, and a few giants on the other, when you come to capable painters there's not all the difference between them that interested parties would have you believe. It's just a question as to how much capital in money and in brains has been put into them. The critics, dealers, and patrons have really entered, unconsciously for the most part, no doubt, into a kind of partnership. They hallmark certain men, dead or living, and these men then get on to the official list, so to speak, and are quoted on the Stock Exchange—in other words, at Christie's—to be boomed by bulls and bears according to the exigencies of the market. In the long run, of course the exploited rubbish gets weeded out."

"You're perfectly right," assented the Man with a Clay Pipe. "The art sales of the century prove it. The system may operate all right in the long run, but it results in a good deal of mess attaining a high price during its painter's lifetime. Now, take the case of——"

"I think we had better draw the line at names," said the Lay Figure cautiously, glancing at the Art Patron, who had begun to look decidedly uncomfortable. He had already heard too much, and, having secured his hat, made his way to the door.

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