

*The Lay Figure***T**HE LAY FIGURE: ON COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHY.

"You painters are going to have the conceit taken out of you directly," said the Practical Man: "I see that the recent discoveries in colour photography have made possible the exact reproduction of nature. No one will want to have pictures now."

"Really! Is that your idea?" inquired the Man with the Red Tie. "You actually imagine that a mechanical process like photography can drive painting off the field entirely! Are you serious?"

"Of course I am," replied the Practical Man. "Why should anyone continue to take the smallest interest in painted things which may or may not be like nature, when there is available a process which will give the facts of a subject, colour and all, with absolute accuracy? Now that colour can be photographed the last reason for the existence of the painter has disappeared. We have no longer any use for him, because this mechanical process that you sneer at can do his work cheaper and better than he can."

"But painting is an art," objected the Man with the Red Tie, "and, therefore, it must always hold a higher position than any process like photography, no matter how skilfully this process may be applied."

"Not at all," laughed the Practical Man; "you are so blinded by your prejudices that you cannot understand what the public wants. We common-sense people have only put up with paintings because we have hitherto had nothing better, because nothing else would give us the colour of the things we see. We recognised long ago how much better photography is for black-and-white illustrations than an artist's drawings, as you can see for yourself if you look at any of the illustrated papers; and now we have the chance we shall soon come to the same conclusion with regard to colour work. In a few years' time there will be no painters left—they will have discovered that it is no use trying to compete with photography and will have abandoned their palettes if they have any sense at all."

"Your prophecy might come true if all people thought as you do," broke in the Art Critic. "But you assume too much when you suggest that you, and you alone, know what the public wants. Your range of knowledge, my friend, is a little limited, and if you would take the trouble to learn a little more about this subject you would not talk such arrant nonsense."

338

"Oh, indeed!" sneered the Practical Man. "I know that all people with any business capacities and practical intelligence, all who are not dreamers and fanatics, would agree with me. You are behind the times, and are quite out of touch with modern ideas."

"Then I thank Heaven that there still remains quite a large number of dreamers and fanatics," replied the Critic, "if the development of a practical intelligence leads to such stupid convictions as you possess. Your friends, no doubt, want the same sort of stuff that pleases you because, like you, they are so satisfied to be ignorant that they refuse to learn even the rudiments of artistic knowledge. Outside the narrow bounds of your business capacities you are an illiterate lot, and, as illiterate people always do, you substitute blatant assertion for argument."

"What on earth has this got to do with colour photography, I should like to know?" interrupted the Practical Man.

"Keep quiet," laughed the Man with the Red Tie; "you are hearing some useful truths."

"It has everything to do with colour photography, as that is the subject you have chosen to talk nonsense about," continued the Critic. "You said that the process of photographing in colour is going to kill painting and extinguish artists. Now this is not even an original stupidity, for it is merely a repetition of what your predecessors in ignorance said when photography was first invented. The photograph was certain to oust the portrait painter—has it done anything of the sort? Colour photography is going to destroy painting—it will not. What will happen to it is this. A few men, very few, of real artistic power will use it properly and will attain fine results with it, but the majority of the men into whose hands it will fall will produce the cheap art, literal art, commonplace art, stupid art, that satisfies you and your dull-witted friends who find pleasure in silly snapshots. It will be the joy of the raw amateur, and it will record coarsely the features of the seaside tripper. But, meanwhile, the painter's art will continue on its way unharmed by any mechanical competition and encouraged by everyone who has the intelligence to distinguish between true and false art and to appreciate noble, personal, human craftsmanship. That you will not be in this company of art lovers I can well believe; your practical, illiterate mind cannot rise to such heights. But you need not advertise your folly now."

THE LAY FIGURE.