

*The Lay Figure***T**HE LAY FIGURE: ON THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CRAFTSMAN.

"It occurs to me that in our discussions about the claims which the craftsman has to attention, and the chances which should be open to him professionally, we have not sufficiently taken into account the responsibilities which lie upon him as a worker in art," said the Art Critic. "He has responsibilities, has he not?"

"Of course he has," replied the Craftsman, "and the greatest of them all is the obligation to make the most of his artistic capacities, and to prove that, being a craftsman, he is worthy to be counted as an artist."

"Quite so! I am glad you recognise that," returned the Critic, "because it seems to me important. The craftsman has to prove his right to be counted as an artist. He is not necessarily one because he is a clever executant, or because he can turn out things neatly and daintily: he must have more than mere skill of hand to justify his position in the art world."

"I thought the argument was that the public did not allow him to have any position at all," broke in the Man with the Red Tie. "Have we not come to the conclusion that he is neglected by the public and snubbed by the art societies? What position does he hold?"

"Not the one that he has a right to expect, I am afraid," sighed the Craftsman; "but still one that has possibilities, and that carries obligations."

"Yes, indeed!" cried the Critic; "and it is only by the full acceptance of his obligations that he can hope to realise these possibilities. The craftsman in this country does not have his fair share of chances, I am quite prepared to admit; but that makes it doubly necessary for him to take the utmost advantage of every possible opportunity."

"But you cannot take advantage of what does not exist," objected the Man with the Red Tie. "You cannot make chances."

"I am not so sure about that," returned the Critic; "but, anyhow, you can often convert an unlikely opportunity into one that is productive of important results."

"You mean that the man who wants to get on must always be prepared to risk the discovery that what he took to be an opening is, after all, only a blind alley," said the Craftsman, "and that he must never be disheartened when he runs his head against a blank wall. There I agree with you; he must go on fighting, no matter what happens."

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"But where is he to find these possible openings in this country?" asked the Man with the Red Tie.

"Well, there is one before him at this very moment," answered the Critic. "The greatest nation of artist-craftsmen in the world—the Japanese, I mean—are about to prove to us what they are capable of achieving. Will our craftsmen refuse to pit themselves against such competitors? Surely not, if they have any proper sense of their responsibilities."

"But suppose they suffer by comparison with the picked artists of Japan, how will that help them?" inquired the Man with the Red Tie.

"It will teach them, at all events, that they have still much to learn before they can hope to take their right position," said the Critic, "and if they have the right artistic sense it will show them why they have failed."

"And it will show them, too, how to make failure impossible on another occasion," commented the Craftsman. "Yes, the risk is worth taking."

"Of course it is," agreed the Critic; "we must never be afraid to measure ourselves against others. And, mind you, I believe that we can learn from the Japanese one of the greatest lessons of all—the impossibility of separating design from craftsmanship. The craftsman must be a designer if he is ever to hold fully the artist's rank."

"You mean that the designer must be able to execute what he designs?" asked the Craftsman.

"Certainly I do," replied the Critic. "So long as our craftsmen are divided into two classes—designers and workmen—we can never hope to excel in artistic craftsmanship. Invention and production must be united in the same individual if the highest result is to be attained. Here is, I feel, the greatest responsibility for the craftsman; he must know by actual experience, by the personal exercise of his own executive skill, whether the things he imagines can be realised, and he can only test the æsthetic value and artistic fitness of his design by seeing how he himself can carry it out. If he trusts the expression of his ideas to another man he enters upon a conflict between two types of temperament or between two types of ignorance; he, ignorant of craftsmanship, has to depend upon someone who is ignorant of design. How can the product of such an unhappy partnership be anything but a lifeless and unmeaning compromise? How can it ever be, in the best sense of the term, a work of art? Has it even a right to exist?"

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