

The Lay Figure

THE LAY FIGURE: ON THE IMPORTANCE OF LITTLE THINGS.

"I AM afraid that there is in existence a considerable misconception about what is desirable for the proper encouragement of art," said the Art Critic. "People seem to have very vague ideas on the subject, and to be quite uncertain what they ought to do."

"People in this country always have had vague ideas about art," sighed the Young Artist. "There is hardly anyone who understands it or takes it seriously."

"Well, is not art itself rather a vague thing?" asked the Plain Man. "I know that you think me a hopeless idiot when I offer any opinions on artistic questions, but really I can find nothing of practical importance, nothing to lay hold of, in them."

"And you are nothing if not practical!" interposed the Man with the Red Tie. "Oh, we all know your attitude towards existence and we are prepared to make allowances for your obvious limitations."

"But I do not want to make allowances for limitations which cramp the activities of other people," cried the Young Artist. "On the contrary I resent them, and I say they ought to be got rid of. The business man is the enemy of art, because with his limited intelligence and narrow outlook he cannot grasp either its meaning or its importance."

"It is, as you have just heard, because he can find in it nothing that corresponds to his notion of what is practical," commented the Man with the Red Tie.

"Ah, yes! That is just the point," broke in the Critic. "The business man's imagination is bounded always by a balance-sheet, and his profit and loss account forms his horizon. He cannot conceive an idea which goes beyond these boundaries, and he dismisses as unpractical everything that cannot be handled by the clerks in his counting-house."

"But surely that is the right attitude for the business man to take up," argued the Plain Man. "He has to deal with the realities of life, with the little everyday details, if you like to put it in that way, and he has no time to spare for the fanciful abstractions which seem big things to other people."

"They do not *seem* big things, they *are* big," declared the Young Artist. "They are the things

which determine the national character and are of paramount importance in directing the development of the country."

"That is so," agreed the Critic. "But the big things can to a very great extent take care of themselves—their bigness will carry them through. What I want the business man to appreciate is that art enters intimately into the little things of life and comes therefore definitely within the scope of his limitations."

"How can it enter into my life?" asked the Plain Man. "I am not an art dealer and I do not buy and sell art objects."

"Are you sure about that?" answered the Critic. "You are a trader and you handle many things in the production of which a great deal of artistic ingenuity is displayed. In that sense you are certainly an art dealer, and it is your duty to see that the art in which you deal is of the best possible quality."

"Ah! That comes as a shock to you," laughed the Man with the Red Tie. "You see, you have been touching the unclean thing after all, and didn't know it."

"But surely you are joking when you say that the odds and ends which the trader handles are art objects," expostulated the Plain Man. "They are ordinary articles of commerce; how can they be artistic?"

"Because every article, no matter how small and trivial it may appear to be, is an art product if in the making of it artistic skill is required," returned the Critic. "These little things are of the utmost importance in the general scheme of art production, and the more their artistic significance is recognised by those concerned in their exploitation the more likely are they to fulfil their commercial purpose."

"Yes, their commercial purpose is to be sold at a profit," agreed the Young Artist; "and the better they are artistically the more saleable they become."

"Exactly! The trader who encourages the artistic quality in the little, commonplace, everyday commodities which everybody wants, benefits himself," declared the Critic; "because he increases the demand for his wares. His profits increase with the increase in the artistic merit of the things he offers for sale. If he neglects art he hurts his own business and endangers his commercial success."

"That is quite a new point of view to me!" gasped the Plain Man.

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