

### *The Lay Figure*

## THE LAY FIGURE: ON NEW FIELDS FOR ARTISTS AND CRAFTSMEN.

“Do you not think that artists have been obliged hitherto to limit overmuch the scope of their practice?” asked the Art Critic. “Does it not occur to you that there are many directions in which the ingenuity and inventive power of the artist, and his capacity as a worker, could be usefully applied?”

“I cannot imagine that an artist would be much use in any kind of work which requires practical understanding,” said the Plain Man. “He is too much of a dreamer, too unmethodical, to help in business affairs, and he has, if I may say so, a much too inflated idea of his own importance.”

“You seem to look upon the artist as rather a worm,” laughed the Man with the Red Tie; “but don’t forget the proverb that even a worm will turn. It may be that under the new conditions forced upon us his turning is near at hand.”

“Yes, and it may be that people are going to discover that there are many kinds of practical business in which his assistance will be of very real value,” agreed the Critic. “I have, as you know, always protested against the popular misconception of the artist, and I do not consider that his idea of his own importance in the social scheme is at all exaggerated—therefore I want to see him doing his full share in the regeneration of his country.”

“But how can a man regenerate his country by painting pictures or carving statues?” protested the Plain Man. “Something much more energetic than that will be demanded of us in the near future when we set about the task of building up our trade again and reorganising our resources.”

“And do you not think that the help of the artist in this process of reconstruction will be worth having?” enquired the Critic. “Cannot you see what a number of ways there are in which his capacities can be utilised?”

“I confess, I cannot,” replied the Plain Man. “It seems to me that art, which is after all only one of the ornamental accessories of life, will have to stand aside until all the vital questions of rearrangement are settled.”

“Oh, good Lord! These dull business men!” cried the Man with the Red Tie. “Will they never learn how even their own affairs should be managed?”

“What has art to do with my affairs?” asked the Plain Man. “I have got along all right without it for a great many years.”

“That is the pity of it,” declared the Critic. “You and a lot more like you have got along without it so persistently that a very large part of the trade of this country has drifted abroad and fallen into the hands of our competitors. You have kept art so definitely out of your affairs that it has had to seek an asylum in countries which make the attack on our commerce an essential part of their policy, and in that asylum it is learning to fight against us.”

“Another proverb: Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,” suggested the Man with the Red Tie. “As art is feminine what else could you expect?”

“Of course we might have expected it,” returned the Critic; “but that is only another reason why we should try to amend our ways before it is too late.”

“You would really imply then that I ought to drag art from her foreign asylum and take her into partnership,” laughed the Plain Man. “How could she possibly be of any help to me?”

“In the same way in which she has been of assistance to other and much more astute countries,” insisted the Critic. “There are numberless fields of activity available for art in the industrial world if you will open them to her, and her co-operation would greatly enhance your prosperity. Give her a chance and see how she will respond.”

“And where, for example, do these fields lie?” asked the Plain Man.

“Great Heavens! They are all around you! Cannot you see them?” exclaimed the Critic. “Look at the toy-making industry: need the foreign artists always impose their taste upon us in that direction? Look at colour-printing: must we always be going abroad for that work because the foreign firms employ artists to direct it and we do not? Look at the trade in furniture and the accessories of the home: have we not men in this country who can design this sort of thing as well as anyone whom other countries can produce? Look at industries like the making of jewellery, the weaving of silks and other textile fabrics, the manufacture of decorative glass and ceramics, and so on *ad infinitum*: can we not reach in them an art standard which will not only secure to us the entire command of our own markets but will at the same time assure for us a leading place in the markets of the world? By snubbing art you are killing trade.”

“Well, perhaps there is something in that,” conceded the Plain Man. “If you put art as a business proposition, it may be worth thinking about.”

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