

*The Lay Figure*

## THE LAY FIGURE: ON SOME MATTERS OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE.

"I WANT to make a protest," said the Art Critic, "against the inartistic spirit of our Government officials. I have, I consider, a just cause of complaint against people in high places; and I would like to know how the matter strikes you."

"Go ahead," laughed the Man with the Red Tie. "I always enjoy an attack on men in authority. It is a mistake to let them think they are infallible."

"Well, has it not occurred to you that the Treasury notes, which we have had to carry about since the war started, are from the artistic point of view a disgrace to the country which has produced them?" asked the Critic. "Did you ever see anything more commonplace or more hopelessly wanting in any idea of design?"

"I regret to say that I have seen so few of them lately that they have not offended me as much as I should like," sighed the Man with the Red Tie. "But I entirely agree with you that, apart from their money value, they have no claims whatever to consideration. Artistically they are about as bad as they could be."

"What does that matter?" broke in the Business Man. "Who wants a bank-note to be a work of art? So long as things of that sort are practical and convenient who cares what they look like?"

"I do, for one," returned the Critic. "Things of that sort, as you put it, enter intimately into the lives of us all and do something to mark the standard of taste in the country which produces and uses them. If a nation tolerates a currency, whether in paper or metal, which is ugly and ill-designed it stamps itself as devoid of taste."

"Yes, and as the currency of a nation is not entirely for home consumption the want of taste of the people concerned is advertised all over the world," supplemented the Man with the Red Tie.

"Certainly! We cannot hide our shame," agreed the Critic. "We are convicted of indifference to our artistic obligations by one of our chief articles of export. If our money is so bad our customers abroad are justified in believing that all our art is false currency."

"No, that is nonsense," cried the Business Man. "Our artistic products stand or fall in the markets of the world by their own merit.

If they meet the public demand they are saleable, if they do not they are left on our hands. That is a very simple business position."

"So it may be," said the Critic. "But you do not quite see the point of my argument. The public demand in commerce is very much affected by prejudice, and if you create a prejudice by failure in one direction you will find that it operates harmfully in others. If you prove that you are indifferent to artistic considerations in your domestic affairs you will not find it easy to convince other people that the art you offer them is either sound or sincere."

"Do you look upon the currency of a country as a sort of advertising medium?" inquired the Business Man.

"Most decidedly I do," replied the Critic; "and I regard attention to artistic details in such matters as a real factor in commercial success. What view will other nations take of us if they think that we are satisfied with the things which our Treasury officials have lately imposed upon us?"

"But are any other nations more particular on this point than we are?" asked the Business Man.

"Good Heavens! Yes!" exclaimed the Man with the Red Tie. "I should say that there is hardly any other country in the world where the things we are talking about would be tolerated."

"Without going quite as far as that I can assure you that we do not compare at all well with most of the other nations. In America, for instance, the note-engravings—and the postage-stamps too, by the way—are admirable examples of well-considered production. In Japan the Government bonds are delightful things, as attractive in design as they are excellent in printing; and I could quote other examples of thought and taste bestowed upon such official documents. My point is that if other countries take pains to secure artistic collaboration in things of this sort we cannot afford to be so lax and careless. We must show that we are not behind the rest of the world."

"I will take your word for it," scoffed the Business Man; "but it seems to me that you are making a great fuss about nothing."

"That is apparently the view taken by the Treasury officials," commented the Man with the Red Tie; "and that is the view we want to alter."

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