

The Lay Figure

THE LAY FIGURE: ON THE ARTIST AS A WAR HISTORIAN.

DOES it not seem to you that among the makers of a history of the war a place of special prominence ought to be assigned to the artist?" asked the Critic. "Is there not a leading part for him to play?"

"You appear to think that the artist ought to have a leading part in everything that is going on," objected the Plain Man. "What has he to do with the making of history?"

"A very great deal, I should say," returned the Critic. "In one sense he is the supreme historian, the chief maker of records, the one man who can keep alive the interest of history throughout the centuries."

"But history is something that is written down," argued the Plain Man. "You read it in books. The artist does not write; he paints pictures."

"You can learn very much more from pictures than you ever can from books," broke in the Man with the Red Tie. "To read a book properly you want to be able to imagine the pictures that the words suggest; the artist puts the pictures before you straight away."

"Yes, and because he has a trained imagination his pictures tell you the story that you may or may not be able to piece together from what you read in books," agreed the Critic. "He explains and illustrates written history and makes it intelligible to all men."

"But surely the history of this war does not want to be made intelligible by pictures," protested the Plain Man. "It is being written day by day in the newspapers, and it will be written all over again and in fuller detail in books. What more could you want?"

"Anything and everything I can get which will enable future generations to realize what this war means," declared the Man with the Red Tie, "that is what I want, and I believe that there is no one who can give it me so surely as the artist. He does not tell stories about the war to people who have never seen it, he shows them actually what it was like."

"That is right, that is what he does," cried the Critic. "He sees the war, and he puts his vision on permanent record, and this record will enable people centuries hence to see what he is seeing to-day."

76

"There is something in that," admitted the Plain Man. "I appreciate the argument that a faithful representation of what you have seen will help people to understand, but would not a photograph give you all that is required in that way?"

"No, it would not," replied the Critic. "A photograph will give you the facts, of course, but crudely and in a matter-of-fact way. The artist brings into the record the touch of sentiment that makes the facts convincing."

"And he adds the personal note, too, which is so persuasive and illuminating. Don't forget that," supplemented the Man with the Red Tie.

"I do not forget it; I count that as of the greatest importance," returned the Critic. "Nothing could be more convincing to future generations than the personal impressions of sensitive men who have seen the war in progress and been inspired by its realities. Nothing could explain more eloquently to our descendants what the war meant to us."

"Then I suppose you want our artists to be all set to work painting war pictures, and that a vast national collection should be formed of pictures of this type," observed the Plain Man.

"Certainly I want the nation to recognize that one of its first duties to posterity is to bring together now every form of art-work that is worthy of preservation as a war record," replied the Critic. "But what I desire more especially is that as many as possible of the drawings and sketches made by artists who are, or have been, serving in the various fields of operations should be carefully gathered together, and as carefully preserved in a public collection, instead of being hidden away in myriads of private collections. I think, too, that the best of the pictures painted by other artists and inspired by the sentiment of the nation in a period of unprecedented stress should find a place in such a collection. That is the way in which the most convincing history of the war can be compiled and to do it efficiently is surely a national obligation."

"But has not something already been done in that direction?" remarked the Man with the Red Tie.

"Yes, a start has been made, but the collection now being formed will have to be supplemented by a great deal more material before it can be considered complete," replied the Critic, "and all who can help to that end ought to do so."

THE LAY FIGURE.