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The Lay Figure. Sport, Art, And Art Students.

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The Lay Figure

THE LAY FIGURE. SPORT, ART, AND ART STUDENTS.

“DON'T talk to me about sport,” lisped the Minor Poet; “it's a hateful thing—a form of war, indeed, having its own lists of killed, wounded, and maimed. When men have become gentler, thoroughly civilised, they won't harm one another for the sake of exercise, nor will women—”

“Leave the women alone,” sneered the Journalist. “Man alive! the gentler sex happens to be also ‘the belligerent sex,’ as Mr. Lang warns you, and you'll get yourself into boiling hot water if you attack their sports.”

“Why be rude in a discussion?” the Philosopher asked calmly. “The Poet is perfectly right in his remark that sport is a form of war; only he forgets, like most of us, that all human pleasures and businesses exact the same battle-toll of maimed, wounded, and killed. Yes, like it or not, the sum of life is war in a thousand forms; and peace—well, peace is but a dream, a delusion of minds which do not try to think truly. Our friend the Poet has clearly a good inkling of the truth, and he is also right when he says that, as civilisation advances and men become more sensitive, the love of sport grows tamer in its manifestations.”

“Tamer, yes!” said the Lay Figure, “but not necessarily nobler. For example, when in Italy and Spain a bull fight was a sort of tournament between knights of the best families and savage bulls, and when, as happened usually, the knights fared much worse than their antagonists, the pluck displayed in this form of sport had something admirable about it; but that something certainly vanished when the knights, to save their own skins, became heroes at second-hand, paying men of the lower classes to do their fighting. And, by the way, our British delight in sport has begun to exhibit itself more in gate money than in games. We, too, are becoming athletes by proxy.”

“Still, that's better than nothing,” said the Art Critic, “and I wish *all* our artists had even a second-hand interest in sports and games; for their work would gain in vigour—would, in fact, lose the tendency it now has towards a boudoir-like sentiment—if they took pleasure in watching those games which require great physical strength and stamina.”

“I have thought myself,” said the Lay Figure, “that in all schools of art great encouragement should be given to cricket, tennis, football, racquets, and fives.”

“Surely, football would be too dangerous for the

painting arm,” suggested the Man with a Clay Pipe. “Hockey would be better. It's a ladies' game now, and I'm old enough to play it myself.”

“But,” continued the Lay Figure, “what I am driving at is this: that the atmosphere of a painting class, with its dead heat and its smell of oil paint drying, is a bad thing for students; so let its unwholesome influence be counteracted by regular exercise in the open air. The aim of a school of art should be that of turning youngsters of real talent into healthy as well as clever craftsfolk; but at present, unhappily, the health part of this programme is neglected, all kinds of temptations to overwork being thrust upon the attention of ambitious students.”

“How true that is!” cried the Art Critic. “I could name case after case in which temptations to overwork have had the effect of ruining the health of students. Clever girls are the first to suffer.”

“Naturally,” said the Lay Figure. “Women never do anything by halves. Indeed, it is commonly their misfortune to defeat their own ends by doing too much, by being far too enthusiastic; and certainly it is high time that public attention should be drawn to the encouraged excess of work from which girls suffer in some schools of art. South Kensington should look into this matter.”

“I agree with you there,” said the Art Critic, “but the whole truth has yet to be spoken. Here in England the system of art education is bad throughout, for it is in absolute antagonism with all other kinds of education. Instead of bringing students into close touch with their country's life and traditions, it isolates them from the outside world, and confines them in a mere hothouse of academicism, where they are apt to sprout rapidly into prigs of the least amusing type.”

“In other words,” said the Lay Figure, “we need in art schools a public spirit of manliness equal to that which is found at Oxford and Cambridge. And this is all the more necessary because the artistic temperament in men is not a masculine gift; it is androgynous, as Coleridge pointed out. At the present moment its feminine qualities are being pampered far too much in the art schools; and so I should like to see it invigorated by the influences of sport.”

“Stunning!” cried the Journalist. “Think of a cricket match between the Students of the Royal Academy and Eton or Harrow! That would indeed help to popularise art in England.”

“And in all countries that have national sports,” said

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The Art of Evelyn De Morgan

THE ART OF MRS. WILLIAM DE MORGAN. BY W. SHAW SPARROW.

THE maiden name of Mrs. William De Morgan was Evelyn Pickering, and twenty-three years have passed since that name appeared for the first time in the catalogue of an important exhibition of pictures. A painting in oil was hung then (1877) at the Grosvenor Gallery; it had for its subject *Ariadne in Naxos*; it was close in drawing, thoughtful and precise in composition; and its style, its general character, was Pre-Raphaelite, but not as yet in what may be called a Victorian manner. Its painter, that is to say, was not in 1877 a devoted follower of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Miss Pickering, indeed—the maiden name seems the right one to employ when speaking of the artist's early work—had in those days barely scraped acquaintance with the most noted men of genius who had been influenced by the modern Pre-Raphaelite movement. She had not seen the pictures that Millais painted in his first period, nor had she a chance of becoming familiar with them till they were brought once more to public notice by the Millais Exhibition of 1886. With Rossetti's poetry, in 1877, Miss Pickering was well acquainted, but of his genius in painting she knew scarcely anything at all, and it remained almost unknown to her till she visited that fine show of Rossetti's pictures which was held after his death. As regards Burne-Jones, she certainly had seen a few of his paintings, and had certainly been moved by their peculiar greatness; but the influence of Burne-Jones had not then appeared in her work and become what it was

soon to be—a determinant factor in the formation of her settled character as an artist. The short of the matter is that Miss Pickering's style had come to her at first-hand, a natural expression of her spiritual nature. She understood the great predecessors of Raphael; she and they were congenial: "across the great gulf of time they exchanged smiles and a salute." Even as a child she made friends with those who were represented in the National Gallery; it was from their pictures that her inborn love of art received its earliest encouragement.

Other aesthetic influences came soon afterwards, the first of these being the wise sympathy and the rich, suggestive art of her uncle, Mr. Roddam Spencer Stanhope. Then followed a course of academic study. It began at the Slade



"MATER DOLOROSA"

BY EVELYN DE MORGAN

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"LUNA"
FROM A DRAWING BY
EVELYN DE MORGAN.

