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The Lay Figure On A New Book.

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The Lay Figure

THE LAY FIGURE. ON A NEW BOOK.

"Who wants to read a truly genuine first-hand book on French painters?" asked the Lay Figure.

"We all do, I suppose," the Art Historian replied. "But are you thinking of *Nos Peintres du Siècle*, the book by Jules Breton?"

"Yes."

"Then," continued the other, "I've perused it twice already."

"Jove! how dull the book must be!" the Journalist muttered.

"To my mind," said the Lay Figure, "it has a homeliness of character that makes it even more readable than Fromentin's great volume, *Les Maîtres d'Autrefois*."

"True," said the Man with a Clay Pipe. "The book came into my hands some weeks ago, and one cannot speak too highly of its kindliness, its good fresh criticisms, and its beautiful sympathy for peasant life."

"There's no lack of good things," the Art Historian assented. "The author himself lives in every page. He can say, with Montaigne, 'Ce ne sont mes gestes que j'écris: c'est moy, c'est mon essence.' His book is himself."

"And that disarms criticism," mused the Lay Figure. "Among his remarks there are some that plainly invite opposition, and yet I could no more oppose them than I could quarrel with Montaigne's little vanities."

"Let that be as it may," said the Man with a Clay Pipe. "What I think most admirable is Breton's reasonableness—a quality, mark you, that writers on art don't give us very often. As a rule, indeed, they are frankly *unreasonable*. This is why they so frequently speak of their subject as though it were not affected by the action of the influences of life on the sensitive æsthetic temperament. They seem to believe that art is a miraculous thing having no connection with any type of society. Jules Breton sees how foolish it is to consider art in this unscientific manner, and one feels throughout his book that he and his painters are indeed children of the nineteenth century."

"That's good," said the Lay Figure. "You remind me of the author's remarks on the after-effects of the French Revolution, which cannot but be helpful to all who understand how necessary it is not to dissociate men of genius from their epochal environment."

"Then we have Breton's attitude to the milk-and-water idealists," remarked the Art Historian. "You will remember what he says to those weak painters who believe that in a picture where the subject is supernatural the style must be nebulous, the colour bloodless. He tells them, among many other truthful things, that 'Rembrandt, le peintre de l'invisible, est le plus puissant des peintres visibles.' And he adds: 'Pour peindre le surnaturel, il faut toute l'étendue et toute l'intensité du naturel.'"

"Shakespeare teaches the same lesson," said Lay Figure; "but some men are so constituted that they cannot profit by it."

"So let us pass on to something gay," yawned the Journalist. "Does your author laugh at times? Can he tell characteristic stories about his painters?"

"You shall judge," answered the Man with the Clay Pipe. "One year Puvis de Chavannes sent to the Salon a little picture so rudimentary in form that the members of the committee of selection knew not what to do. 'We cannot refuse Puvis,' they said helplessly to one another, and yet they were all quite certain that it was their duty to refuse him. At last Delaunay volunteered to be the leader of a forlorn hope. He was on the best of terms with Puvis, and he would advise the great man to withdraw the painting. This was done, but Puvis saw in the whole affair a hostile *parti pris*, and for a long time afterwards he cut every member of the committee."

"There is also a characteristic story about Courbet," said the Art Historian. "Courbet's vanity was at once so great and so ingenuous that it caused him to put on a frank air of protection when speaking of even the greatest Old Masters. One day, for instance, a friend told him that a certain picture of his—a rather ill-drawn torso of a nude girl—was equal to a Titian. 'Eh ben,' he replied with disdain, 'c'est ça qui l'aurait embêté vot' Titien!' This was drawled out softly, and the tone of disdain in Courbet's voice was rendered the more comic by the franc-comtois accent."

"But these stories are not told unkindly," said the Lay Figure; "and there are others of a quite different sort. Take the one in which it is related how Jules Dupré, himself a poor man, hired for young Theodore Rousseau a studio fit to paint in. Among the French artists of that period there existed a beautiful generosity, and Jules Breton represents it worthily."

THE LAY FIGURE.



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THE ART OF BALDRY

THE BIRTH OF APHRODITE
A WIFE IN SILVER AND BRASS

BY

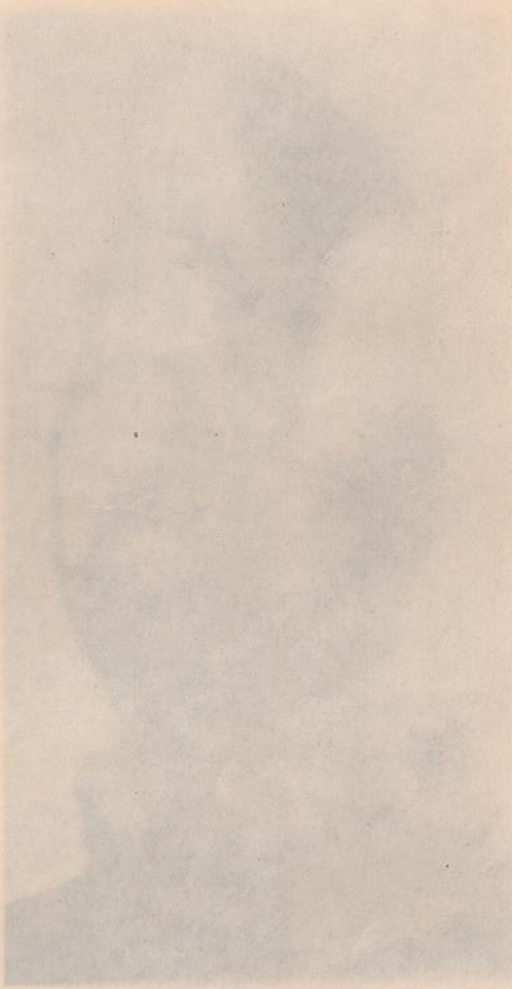
ALEXANDER FISHER

THE ART OF BALDRY.



There is a well-known effect that one swallow does not make a summer, which is often used to check the enthusiasm of those sanguine people who are in the habit of building a massive enthusiasm on a very small basis. The aphorism serves as a kind of warning against enthusiasms that are not justified by circumstances and not directed by common sense, but it does not go far enough in the direction of instruction. To learn how many swallows ought to be put in evidence to prove that summer has really arrived would save many minds from the waste of vague speculation. It would be comforting to feel that they knew where they were, and that there was no risk of committing themselves by arguing on an insufficient premise. They would stand on safe ground at all events, comfortably relieved from the necessity of studying rules of proportion and subtleties of cause and effect.

It is just this sort of knowledge that is anxiously desired by the great army of people who cannot, without assistance, read the signs which mark the coming of a full harvest of artistic effort. They have been told so often that one fine picture does not make a great school, and have been on so many occasions scolded for being enthusiastic without sufficient cause, that they have acquired a timid view. What natural instincts they may have they are afraid to express for fear they should be taken to task and ridiculed for their simple self-satisfaction. Some other help must be given them, some explanation of the course they ought to follow to arrive at a proper attitude on aesthetic questions, and to reach that safe harbour of comfortable conviction where they will be able to hide



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