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The Lay Figure.

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The Lay Figure

THE LAY FIGURE.

SEATED in the stern of a river steamer bearing a crowd of Parisians and others from the Exhibition to the Pont-Royal is the Lay Figure, surrounded by his friends.

As the boat comes alongside the Quai des Nations, whence rise the "Pavillons Étrangers," sumptuous, original, grandiose, fantastic, the Belgian Painter asks:

"But where is the British building?"

"Well," exclaims the German Poet, "no one has yet been able to tell me. It must be a real marvel of modern decorative art . . ."

"There it is," sighs the Lay Figure, pointing contemptuously to an Elizabethan structure.

"This must be a joke," observes the Belgian Painter.

The Lay Figure makes a gesture of despair.

"I can understand his anger and his annoyance, which I share," observes the French Art Critic. "Why, you English have a School of Architecture which within the last twenty years has completely revived the art of building, and has created a style which the whole world admires—and imitates! So, to show all and sundry the progress you have made, and have inspired, in decorative art, you are content to reconstruct an old house, which, doubtless, would be well enough amid the proper surroundings of its ancient park but is absolutely out of place here. It is incomprehensible."

"And have you seen the English Applied Art section in the Esplanade des Invalides?" enquires the Belgian Painter of the German Poet.

"Not yet, but I am saving it up as a treat, for I am sure I shall find there all sorts of lovely things. It must be a marvellous collection."

"My dear man," cries the Lay Figure, "you are doomed to disappointment. There is nothing worth seeing there, or almost nothing. Not one of our great decorative draughtsmen is represented; nor any artistic group of modern tendency. You will find none of the lovely jewels, the fine window glass, the copper and silver and enamel work you seem to admire so greatly. One representative thing there is, and one only—the pavilion erected by the Peninsular and Oriental Company, the external decoration of which—delightful friezes in coloured low-relief—has been done by F. Lynn Jenkins, while the internal ornamentation is by Gerald Moira. This we have; and this is all."

"It's not excessive," observes the German Poet.

"You're quite right," says the Belgian Painter; "but I take it that in the Grand Palais des

Champs-Élysées the English display of Fine Art makes up for all that? Surely that display is calculated to give one a true impression of English painting and sculpture? Has any one seen it?"

The Lay Figure bends his head, and maintains a sorrowful silence.

"I've seen it," says the French Art Critic, "and it really grieved me. I am very fond of modern English painting, and I hoped to find a complete and characteristic display. I expected to see, side by side with the great painters of thirty or forty years ago, the big men of to-day; but, alas! the great masters are either not represented at all, or at best only their second-rate work is exhibited."

"At any rate," enquires the German Poet, "I suppose the young men are there in force, with strong, characteristic work?"

"Not at all," replies the French Art Critic. "The Glasgow School is practically absent; and, in fact, nearly all those who should be there are wanting."

"But who are there, then?" demanded the Belgian painter.

"There are the Academicians and the Mediocrities!"

"And, you must know," adds the Lay Figure, "that there was no 'Jury.' It was all done by invitation."

"But who drew up the list? How came it that so many men of merit were overlooked?" asks the French Art Critic. "How was it? Why?"

"Don't ask *me*," responds the Lay Figure sadly.

"As to the arrangement of the English Section," continues the French Art Critic, "it's simply pitiable. But we are just as badly off ourselves. Both the English and the French departments have their walls covered with the same horrible and vulgar red hangings."

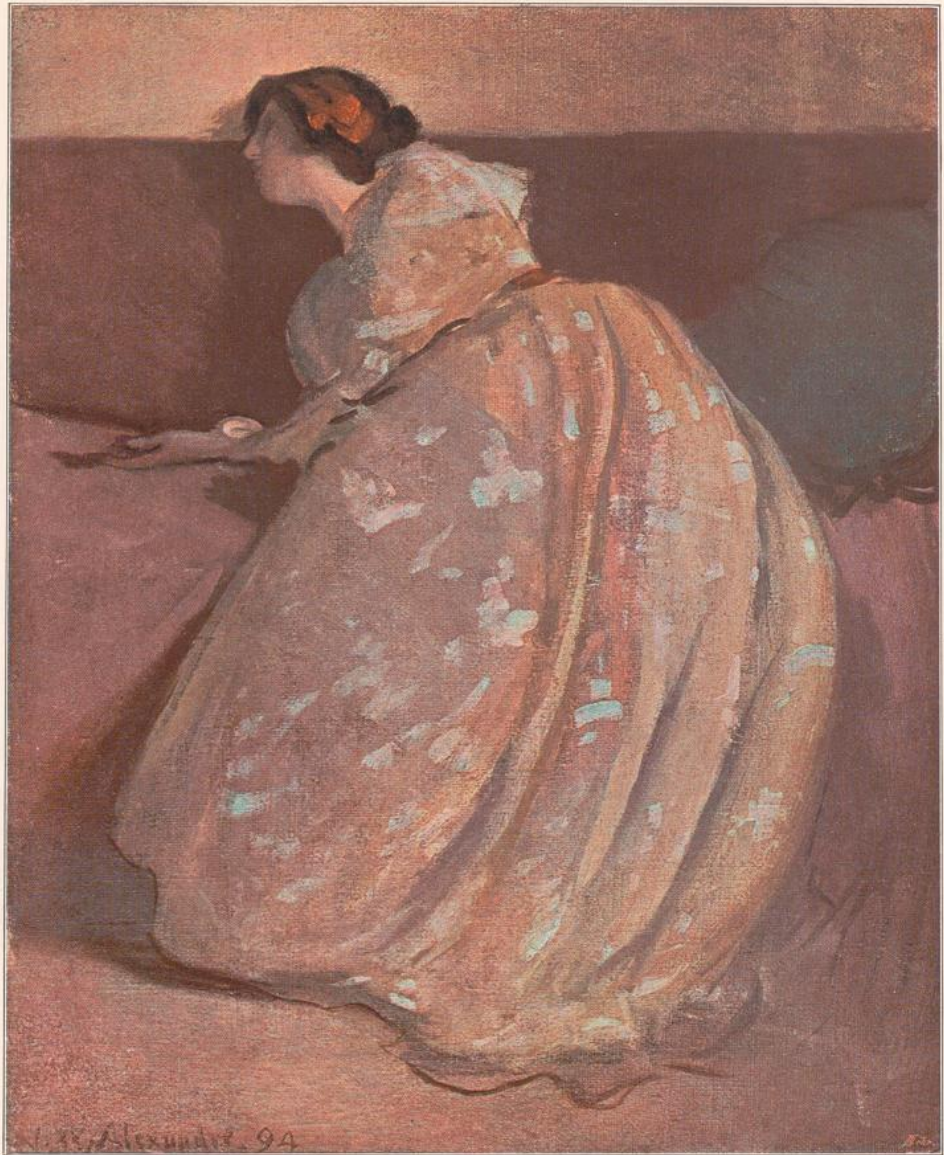
"I've heard it said," observes the Belgian Artist, timidly, "that this is due to the smallness of the space reserved to Great Britain."

"Not a bit of it," declared the Lay Figure, excitedly. "Germany's display is no bigger than ours, yet it is disposed in the most tasteful manner possible. And even though we haven't much room, surely that is the greater reason why we should make an effort to have at least as good a show as the others."

And on the French Art Critic, the German Poet and the Belgian Painter once more demanding—in unison—to know "Why is this?"

The Lay Figure raises his hands, and exclaims, "Heaven only knows!"





John W. Alexander

AN AMERICAN PAINTER IN
PARIS: JOHN W. ALEXANDER.
BY GABRIEL MOUREY.

A VERY special sense of feminine grace, at once most decorative and intensely modern, characterizes the art of Mr. John White Alexander, and invests his works with a charm which proves irresistible even to those who are incapable of recognizing his other merits. There springs from his drawing, from his colour, from his method of composition, and, to my mind, above all, from his genius for restraint, a sort of magical fascination. At once the eye is flattered and caressed, so that one feels a gentle delight which intoxicates the vision on seeing these lines and these tints of his. The sensation experienced in presence of some of his portraits of women, some of his *fantaisies*, is near akin to that produced by certain poems whose music enchants one quite apart from the significance of the words of which they are composed; and therein often lies the secret of the apparent superiority of verse over prose. A mere congregation of harmonious syllables, poor as they may be in actual meaning, will serve to inspire the masses; whereas if one goes to the root of it the nothingness will be revealed. It would be altogether unjust to level a reproach of this sort against Mr. Alexander's art, and my only reason for employing this comparison is that I may the better define the attraction his canvases have for a certain section of the public, content with a superficial impression of things. Many an artist would be well satisfied with that degree of success, even that alone; but the strange thing is that Mr. Alexander, while triumphing in this manner, remains, without making any sort of concession to popular taste, the subtle and sincere artist of refinement and delicacy we know him to be. There is nothing loud or extravagant in his vision of things, nothing excessive or violent in his execution. He delights in nothing but the most delicate and complex harmonies, all his tones being as it were veiled. Beyond

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all else he loves the effects of a dim, softened light, with something rare and mysterious in it; indeed, were it not for his sure judgment and his splendid executive skill, he would at times run the risk—such is his horror of the coarse and the commonplace—of becoming lost in a cloud of quintessential abstractions. There was a time, some years back, when Mr. Alexander's best friends had reason to feel some little uneasiness in this respect, for he was on the point—on the point only—of lapsing into eccentricity. Happily, the crisis was brief; he soon regained his self-command, and now he has only



"THE MIRROR"

BY J. W. ALEXANDER.

"THE DIVAN"
FROM A PAINTING BY
JOHN W. ALEXANDER

