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The Lay Figure. On Medals And Their Uses.

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THE LAY FIGURE. ON MEDALS AND THEIR USES.

“THEY do these things better in France,” remarked the Art Critic sadly. “In France alone a just value is placed on the importance of the glyptic art. Yet medals have a mission so clearly defined that its utility ought to be recognised by all nations.”

“Why employ the word ‘mission,’” the Philosopher asked sharply, with a covert sneer. “It implies that medals are sentient and articulate, that they think beyond the moment and beyond themselves, have charitable hearts and minds, and act with premeditation for the good of mankind. You critics often make use of terms that endow works of art with a self-conscious anxiety about the public weal. Beautiful medals have, no doubt, an artistic *influence*: it is your business to say so, and not to prattle about missions.”

“A Daniel come to judgment! yea, a Daniel!” laughed the Journalist.

“But I deserved his censure,” said the Critic. “Let us, then, consider the artistic influence of medals. In France, unquestionably, this influence is far more potent, far more spread among the people, than in any other country. It is felt there by persons of every age, station and condition; for French medallists, thanks to the wise assistance they receive from the Ministry of Fine Arts and the Directors of the Mint, are able to put into circulation such beautiful things as commemorate the joys and sorrows of home, and the changing fortunes of the nation’s history.”

“Quite true,” said the Man with a Clay Pipe. “At the Salon this year there are portrait medals, marriage medals, and medals devoted to charity, to religion, to art (like Yencesse’s *Van Dyck*), to literature (like the same artist’s fine *Bossuet*), to history (like Mouchon’s *Jeanne d’Arc*), and to shooting, agriculture, and what not besides.”

“Remember, too,” said the Critic, that there are medals for school prizes, and medals to remind children of their First Communion. I suppose you have seen Coudray’s *Orpheus*, an exquisite medal for music, as exquisite in conception as it is lovely in execution. You can buy his work, as well as many others, at the Mint in Paris. You go there, you are received with the greatest courtesy, and for trivial sums of money, ranging from 2 francs 50 to 10 francs, you buy what pleases you best, and return home with the medals carefully packed in neat little cases. Would that we could do as much here!”

The Lay Figure nodded approval. “That is a good thought,” he said. “What a blessing it would be if musical societies and schoolmasters could buy such prizes at the Bank of England!”

“Don’t forget the sporting clubs,” cried the Journalist. “If fine medals could be bought for a few shillings, they would be very popular as sporting prizes. The awards now given are often ridiculously inappropriate. I know a lad of thirteen who received last week a brandy flask for being third in a mile handicap. The fourth prize, given by the schoolmaster’s maiden aunt, was a tea-cosy, or something equally useful to a boy.”

“The absurdity of such prizes,” said the Critic, “caused a friend of mine to ask a well-known sculptor if he had time to make a medal for some athletic sports. The sculptor was quite willing to undertake the work, but his terms were prohibitive. He asked £100!”

“Oh! it is out of the question to have special medals made for every occasion,” said the Philosopher, “and there would be no sense in requiring it to be done.”

“What a chance lies open to some enterprising firm of medallists!” said the Man with a Clay Pipe,—“some firm wishing to associate itself with the Art Movement. Half-a-dozen good medals designed by some of our best sculptors—real little works of art—would be eagerly sought after by the givers of prizes and by collectors. There’s not only money in it, but plenty of *kudos*. If I were not too lazy—and it were not so hot,” he perspiringly added, “I would start the business myself.”

“To-day, moreover,” said the Critic, “the art schools are becoming ever the more wideawake to the fact that they cannot educate too many efficient craftsmen. They have given but little attention to the glyptic art, but I see no reason why attractive medals for many purposes should not be made in all Government art schools, and then sold by some agency appointed by the State. Why should not this be done in all countries? It would benefit the public at large, and it would be of the utmost service to students of ability, who, on leaving their academies, would be known by name and respected.”

“Whatever may be said about your suggestion,” remarked the Lay Figure, “something ought to be done to popularise medals, especially in England, America, and Germany. In France it is already *un fait accompli*.”

THE LAY FIGURE.