

On Narrowness of Mind

(From The Studio.)

"I WOULD like to preach a sermon," said the Man with the Red Tie, "on the curious narrowness of view with which people are afflicted in their dealing with artistic questions. Has it never occurred to you that the general public regard pictures as practically the only things worthy to be reckoned as works of art? A few abnormally enlightened persons go so far as to count sculpture as an art, but the great majority recognise painting, and painting alone, as the medium for artistic expression."

"Is there anything surprising in that?" asked the Plain Man. "Painting, dealing as it does with form and colour, is the one complete art. Sculpture is cold and lifeless; it makes no appeal to the higher aesthetic emotions, and it leaves one unconvinced. It is only half an art at best."

"What do you know about the higher aesthetic emotions?" cried the man with the Red Tie. "Where did you pick up that phrase? You imply that form and colour are the most important things in art. If I admit that, for the sake of argument, would you tell me whether you do not find them in other things besides pictures?"

"Not in the same degree," replied the Plain Man. "Of course you will find form and colour in examples of the applied arts, but work of this kind is so much easier that you cannot put it on the same level as painting; and surely you would not call the craftsman an artist."

"Why not?" broke in the Art Critic. "Does he not possess imagination and technical skill, and if he has these and applies them worthily, in what does he fall short of the artist's rank?"

"Well, his work tells no story," returned the Plain Man; "it has no meaning. It does not set one thinking in any way, and it satisfies no intellectual demand."

"It does not set you thinking," interrupted the Man with the Red Tie, "because you are incapable of understanding it. Your art tastes, such as they are, do not go far enough to enable you to realise what art means. You like pictures, not because they are works of art, but because they tell you stories. It is the matter of them, not the manner, that attracts you, and a bad painting with a popular subject seems to you much better than a fine piece of work the meaning of which you are mentally incapable of appreciating."

"Perhaps that is so," sneered the Plain Man; "but, at any rate, my mental incapacity is shared by the artists themselves. Can you tell me of any of our leading art societies which admit to their exhibitions other works besides pictures, except in a half-hearted way. Art exhibitions are mainly picture shows, and if there are any incidental things in them, like sculpture or examples of the applied arts, you can plainly see that they are held to be there only on sufferance."

"He has you there," laughed the Critic. "I am afraid the narrowness of mind of which you complain is not limited to the public. I quite feel that exhibitions are too much picture shows, and that things quite as important artistically are excluded, or, at best, only let in under protest."

"Well, then, I will extend the scope of my argument," said the Man with the Red Tie, "and I will say that not only the public, but many artists as well, look upon painting as the only fine art. I am not a supporter of established institutions, and like to attack them if necessary."

"Attack them by all means," replied the Critic, "for they are open to attack. I, of course, do not agree that any one form of artistic expression is the only one worthy to be counted as a fine art. Painting is one of the arts, and a great one; but there are many others worthy to rank beside it, and it is narrowness of mind indeed not to give them their right place."

"But can you tell me of any art society which has not this narrowness of mind?" asked the Plain Man.

"Not many in this country, I am afraid," sighed the Critic. "I am sorry for it. Abroad, I admit there is a wider outlook; but we are still under the influence of prejudice. Our Royal Academy, the chief of our art institutions, is one of the worst offenders; the only arts it recognises are painting first, sculpture second, and engraving a very bad third. It has annually two picture exhibitions, one of which is superfluous, and to the other it admits a few things besides paintings—of all the other arts it takes no cognizance whatever. I would like to see one of its shows devoted to the work of those other artists who are every bit as important as the picture painters; to the productions of the designers, the metal workers, the enamellers, and all those other craftsmen who are keeping alive great artistic traditions. In past centuries men of this type ranked among the masters; that they do not do so now in this country is partly the fault of that Academy which teaches the public to undervalue them."

THE LAY FIGURE.

The Name of Quebec

IN connection with the Quebec tricentennial celebration it is worth while to remember that Thoreau's "A Yankee in Canada" gives an interesting account of Quebec and the St. Lawrence country. This title is no longer to be found on the cover of any of Thoreau's books, but the story itself forms a large section of the volume entitled "Excursions." Thoreau quotes two explanations of the origin of the word "Quebec." One is that Jacques Cartier's pilot exclaimed in Norman French at first sight of its lofty headland, "*Que bec!*" (what a beak!) The other was given by a St. Francis Indian, Tahmunt by name, whom Thoreau came across in the Maine woods in 1853. He said, "When the English ships came up the river they could not go any farther, it was so narrow there; they must go back—go back—that's Quebec"; which, as Thoreau intimates, is more than doubtful etymology.

Scythe Song

BY ANDREW LANG.

Mowers, weary and brown and blithe,
What is the word methinks ye know,

Endless over-word that the scythe
Sings to the blades of the grass below?

Scythes that swing in the grass and clover,
Something, still, they say as they pass;

What is the word that, over and over,
Sings the Scythe to the flowers and grass?

Hush, ah hush, the Scythes are saying,

Hush, and heed not, and fall asleep;
Hush, they say to the grasses swaying,
Hush, they sing to the clover deep!

Hush—'tis the lullaby Time is singing
Hush, and heed not, for all things pass,

Hush, ah hush! and the Scythes are swinging

Over the clover, over the grass!

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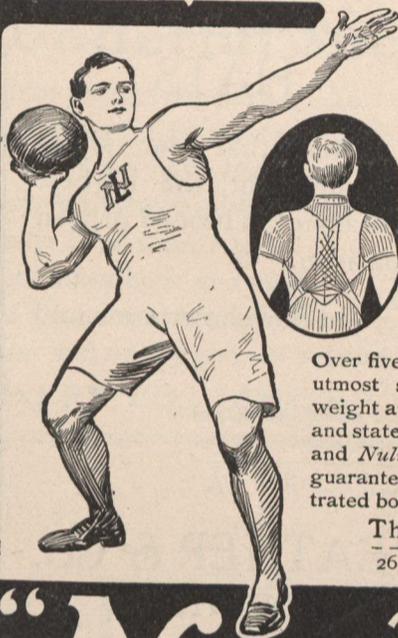
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