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Every Picture Tells a Story.

SOME of the artists who contrive to show us their sitters' faces as well as their souls are the subject of equally candid and searching portraits—word portraits—in a book by Mr. James Laver, which is aptly called "Portraits in Oil and Vinegar" (John Castle, 10s. 6d.), and comes at an apt moment.

For these studies of "twenty-five contemporary artists, from right to left in modern art" are notable for their candour, and an occasional tartness which very well justifies their title. Mr. Laver is a shrewd critic and something of an iconoclast. He himself, one judges, tends to the Left: though he is no extremist. But he is likely to seem unpleasantly candid to old-fashioned folk who like the picture that tells a story and find much comfort in the Academy. His own defence is characteristic of his book.

"There is the merely superfluous in art (he says) and the plainly deleterious, and I have tried to distinguish between them": a task which he has approached, one feels, with some gusto, especially in dealing with the Right, as represented here by Sir Frank Dicksee, of whom he remarks: "The titles of Sir Frank Dicksee's pictures tell their own story, even if it is usually someone's else story."

No Titles Needed.

"Nowadays (he also remarks) it is only in advertisements of kidney pills that 'every picture tells a story': fifty years ago it was the accepted ideal of British art." Art and the public taste may have made great advances in fifty years; but surely the Academy still shows every year a few works to please those who like pictures that need no titles, and bring a lump to the throat?

It is not only in old numbers of "The Academy Illustrated" that you will find "shaggy dogs gazing mournfully at the coffins of their masters, angelic children . . . giving away their dolls to ragamuffins, the wives of fishermen or the mother of prodigals (how little it matters which!) eternally peering out of windows into darkness, or lighting moderator oil lamps to guide the wanderers' return . . . old women in church, gamblers' wives, fallen idols, thatched cottages, dying children; in fact, the whole torrent of mawkish sentiment, smooth-paint and anemic flapdoodle which goes so far to justify the worst excesses of the most eccentric of the modernist schools."

There is no room here to show how shrewdly and with what understanding—and, it must be added, with an occasional cocksureness—Mr. Laver deals with all the twenty-four, who range, comparatively speaking, from ancient to modern. One cannot even name them all. But one cannot refrain from quoting part of his estimate of Ambrose McEvoy: not so much for what he

says about that artist, but for the thumbnail criticisms of others which he presents for purposes of comparison.

"If I were a young and charming woman, and somebody offered me a portrait of myself as a twentieth birthday present, no one should paint me but Mr. Ambrose McEvoy. Mr. John makes his women look too tigerish, and besides, they have such abominable dressmakers and wear no corsets. This is not to say that Mr. John is not a great artist, but he is a little too ruthless in his psychological probing, and people of uncertain character, people who do not even know their own mind, let alone their own soul, would do better not to trust him.

Too Truthful.

"I should not go to Mr. Sargent lest he should show that I had drunk champagne the night before and had a headache; nor to Sir John Lavery, for he would flatter my *modiste*, and not me. I do not think I should employ Sir William Orpen, much as I admire him, lest I should be nothing but a high-light amid my own bric-a-brac; nor Mr. Roberts, because I dislike being draped in wet tissue paper; nor Mr. de Lazlo, because it would bore me to look distinguished; nor Mr. Brockhurst, for I should never have the patience to sit to him. Mr. Sickert, I am sure, would refuse me because I am too well-bred, and Mr. Steer, because I should insist on wearing too many clothes. I should certainly never allow Mr. Mark Gertler to compress me into a triangle, and Mr. Wyndham Lewis would paint me sharp featured, which I am not (which I should not be if I were a young and charming woman)."

Of these and others, Mr. Laver has interesting and often provocative things to say; and the style of each artist is illustrated with a characteristic specimen of his work. His book is to be commended to all real art lovers; and as much to those who "don't know anything about art but know what they like."

PRINCE SIXTUS AND POLAND.

PARIS, Tuesday.
According to the Warsaw correspondent of the "New York Herald" (Paris), Prince Sixtus of Bourbon-Parme, brother of the ex-Empress Zita of Austria, is a candidate for the Throne of Poland.

Although the decision of the recent secret Monarchist conference at Posen has not been announced, it is persistently rumoured that they will support the claims of Prince Sixtus.—Central News.

Surgeon Vice-admiral J. Chambers has been appointed an hon. physician to the King.