

## BAGSHOT'S MURAL DECORATIONS

Bagshot was rather proud of his new quarters until my uncle called upon him. Up to then he felt assured he was doing right; had, indeed, not the faintest doubt in the matter until my uncle unsettled him. "Nice carpet, Bagshot," said my uncle, "nice and soft. This chair certainly very comfortable. But what the mischief do you mean--you, with your pretence to culture--by hanging your dwelling with all those framed and glazed photograph and autograph dittoes? I should have thought you at least would have known better. Love and Life, and Love and Death, the Daphnephoria, Rembrandt's portrait--Wild Havoc, man! What were you thinking of?"

Bagshot seemed staggered. He ventured to intimate feebly his persuasion that the things were rather good.

"Good they certainly are, and well reproduced, but only the Bible and Shakspeare could stand this incessant reiteration, and not all Shakspeare. These things are in shop windows, man--drawing-rooms, offices, everywhere. They afflict me like popular songs--like popular quotations. They are good enough--as a matter of fact they are too good. Only, don't you know Willis has Love and Life and Love and Death? And so has Smith, and Bays has Rembrandt's portrait in his office, and my niece Euphemia has the Daphnephoria in her drawing-room. I can't understand, George, why you let it stay there. It is possible to have too much of a good thing. There is no getting away from these

all too popular triumphs. They cover up the walls everywhere. They consume all other art. I shall write a schedule some day of the Fifty Correct Pictures of the British People. And to find you, Bagshot, among the Philistines!"

"I thought they showed rather an improvement in the general taste," said Bagshot. "There is no reason why a thing should not be common, and yet very beautiful. Primroses, for instance----"

"That is true enough, but pictures are not primroses," said my uncle. "Besides, I think we like primroses all the better because they must soon be over; but these are perennial blossoms, like the everlasting flowers and dried grass of a lodging house. They may still be beautiful, but by this time, Bagshot, they are awfully dry and dusty. Who looks at them? I notice our eyes avoid them even while we talk about them. We have all noticed everything there is to be noticed, and said all the possible things that are to be said about them long ago. Surely a picture must be a little fresh to please. Else we shall come at last to the perfect picture, and art will have an end. Don't you see the mere popularity of these things of the pavement is enough to condemn them in the estimation of every right-minded person?"

"I don't see it," said Bagshot, making head against the torrent. "I cannot afford to go to these swells and get original work of theirs----"

"What do you want with 'these swells' and their original work?"

interrupted my uncle fiercely. "Haven't they used up all their originality ages ago? Is it not open to such men as yourself to discover new men? There are men pining in garrets now for you, Bagshot. Fancy the delight of having pictures that are unfamiliar, pictures that catch the eye and are actually to be looked at, pictures that suggest new remarks, pictures by a name that the stray visitor has never heard of and which therefore puzzle him dreadfully because he hasn't the faintest idea whether to praise or blame them! Isn't it worth hunting studios for, and even, maybe, going to the Academy? Besides, suppose your struggling artist comes to the front. What price the five-guinea specimen of his early style then? Your artistic virtue is indeed its own reward, and, besides, you can boast about finding him. The poor man of culture and the struggling artist live for one another, or at least they ought to--though I am afraid it is not much of a living for the struggling artist." He paused abruptly. "I suppose that autotype cost thirty shillings, and this carpet about five pounds?"

Bagshot assumed an elegant attitude against his bureau. He had discovered his reply. "You know you are bitten by the fashion for originality. Why should I make my room hideous with the work of third-rate mediocrity, or of men who are still learning to paint, simply in order to be unlike my neighbour?"

"Why," returned my uncle, "should you hang up things less interesting than your wall paper, in mere imitation of your neighbours? For this

on your walls, Bagshot, deny it though you may, is not art but fashion. I tell you, you do not care a rap for art. You think pictures are a part of virtue, like a silk hat--or evening dress at dinner. And in your choice of pictures you follow after your kind. I never met a true-born Briton yet who dared to buy a picture on his own accord--unless he was a dealer. And then usually he was not really a true-born Briton. He waits to see what is being hung. He has these things now because he thinks they are right, not because they are beautiful, just as he used to have the Stag at Bay and the Boastful Hound. It is Leighton now; it was Landseer then. Really I believe that very soon the ladies' papers will devote a column to pictures. Something in this style. 'Smart people are taking down their Rossetti's Annunciations now, and are hanging Gambler Bolton's new Hippopotamus in the place of it. This Hippopotamus is to be the correct thing in pictures this year, and no woman with any claim to be considered smart will fail to have it over her piano. Marcus Stone's new engraving will also be rather chic. Watts's Hope is now considered a little dowdy.' And so forth. This gregarious admiration is the very antithesis of artistic appreciation, which I tell you, simply must be individual."

"Go on," said Bagshot, "go on."

"And that," said my uncle, with the glow of discovery in his face, "that is where the vulgar critic goes wrong. He conceives an orthodoxy. He tries to explain why Velasquez is better than Raphael

and Raphael better than Gerard Dow. As well say why a cirrus cloud is better than a sycamore and a sycamore better than a scarlet hat. Every painter, unless he is a mere operative, must have his peculiar public. It is incredible that any painter can really satisfy the æsthetic needs of such a public as these reproductions indicate. True art is always sectarian. Why were Landseer and Sidney Cooper popular a few years ago, and why does every tea-table sneer at them now? There must be something admirable in them, or they would never have been admired. Then why has my niece Annie dropped admiring Poynter, and why does she pretend--and a very thin pretence it is--to admire Whistler?"

"You are wandering from my pictures," said Bagshot.

"I want to," said my uncle. "But why do you try and hide your taste under these mere formalities in frames? Why do you always say 'I pass' in the game of decoration? Better a mess of green amateurs and love therewith, than the richest autotypes and dull complacency. Have what you like. There is no such thing as absolute beauty. That is the Magna Charta of the world of art. What is beautiful to me is not beautiful to another man, in art as in women. But take care to get the art that fits you. Frankly, that 'Love and Death' suits you, Bagshot, about as much as a purple toga would. Orchardson is in your style. I tell you that the greengrocer who buys an original oil painting for sixteen shillings with frame complete is far nearer artistic salvation than the patron of the popular autotype. Surely you will wake up presently, Bagshot, and wonder what you have been about.

"Half-past four, by Jove! I must be getting on. Well, Bagshot, ta-ta. One must talk, you know. I really hope you will be comfortable in your new rooms."

And so good-bye to Bagshot, staring in a puzzled way at his reviled and desecrated walls.

#### ON SOCIAL MUSIC

My poor uncle came to me the other evening in a most distressful state, broken down to common blasphemy. His ample front was rumped with sorrow and his tie disorderly aslant. His hair had gone rough with his troubles. "The time I have had, George!" he panted. "Give me something to drink in the name of Holy Charity."

Since the Pall Mall Gazette took to reporting his little sayings about photographs and ornaments, ideals and fashions, he has been setting up as a conversationalist. He thinks he was designed by Providence to that end, and aids his destiny as much as he can by elaborately preparing remarks.

Yet this thing had happened. "They put," said my uncle, "a little chap