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T.P.'s WEEKLY.

May 16, 1914.

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WHO'S THE FUTURIST - WELLS OR MARINETTI? By Holbrook Jackson.

In the year 1909 the Futurists of Milan, headed and inspired by F. T. Marinetti, a poet and writer of that city, issued their first Manifesto, and, in the astonishingly short space of five years, the ideas expressed in the document have encircled the earth, setting up a vigorous discussion which shows no sign of dying down, but, on the contrary, grows in force, with every indication of leaving lasting marks on human thought. The curious thing about this new idea which Marinetti calls Futurism is the fact that it deals particularly with the immediate present. It is modernism triumphant. I can find no inclination in Futurist literature or Futurist painting to probe, interpret or anticipate the future. The main concern of the revolt against the past (what they call Passéism) is the expression of the dynamic life of the moment. Here are the principles of Futurism as expressed in the eleven opening statements of the initial Manifesto:—

1. We shall sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and boldness.
2. The essential elements of our poetry shall be courage, daring, and rebellion.
3. Literature has hitherto glorified thoughtful immobility, ecstacy and sleep; we shall extol aggressive movement, feverish insomnia, the double quick step, the somersault, the box on the ear, the fisticuff.
4. We declare that the world's splendour has been enriched by a new beauty; the beauty of speed. A racing motor-car, its frame adorned with great pipes, like snakes with explosive breath... a tacking motor-car, which looks as though running on straps, is more beautiful than the victors of BARRICADE.
5. We shall sing of the man at the steering wheel, whose ideal stem transfixes the Earth, rushing over the circuit of her orbit.
6. The poet must give himself with frenzy, with splendour and with lavishness, in order to increase the enthusiastic fervour of the primordial elements.
7. There is no more beauty except in strife. No masterpiece without aggressiveness. Poetry must be a violent onslaught upon the unknown forces, to command them to bow before man.
8. We stand upon the extreme promontory of the centuries!... Why should we look behind us, when we have to break in the mysterious portals of the impossible? Time and space died yesterday. Already we live in speed, eternal and ever present.
9. We wish to glorify—the only health-giver of the world—the militant, patriotic, the destructive arm of the Anarchist, the beautiful ideas that kill, the contempt for woman.
10. We wish to destroy the museums, the libraries, the fight against moralism, feminism and all opportunistic and utilitarian meanesses.
11. We shall sing of the great crowds in the excitement of labour, pleasure or rebellion; of the multi-coloured and polyphonic art of revolutions in modern capital cities; of the neutral vibration of arsenals and workshops beneath their voice electric moons, of the

greedy stations swallowing smoky snakes; of factories suspended from the clouds by their strings of smoke; of bridges leaping like gymnasts over the diabolical cutters of sun-bathed rivers; of adventurous liners scenting the horizon; of broad-chested locomotives prancing on the rails, like huge steel horses bridled with long tubes; and of the gliding flight of aeroplanes, the sound of whose screws is like the flapping of flags, and the applause of an enthusiastic crowd.

I have quoted the eleven statements at length because they are already historical, and because they show most clearly the composite nature of the Futurist idea. Marinetti has not, as the title of his philosophy might have led us to expect, dipped into the future and brought back to the present some "vision of the world and all the wonder that would be," he has dived into the past and dipped into the present and co-ordinating his discoveries, has created for us a new mental view (an idea-vision) of the momentous Now. All the ideas in the Manifesto may be found scattered through the literature of the modern world. Marinetti has selected, sorted, synthesised, but added nothing. He has simply organised a certain type of modern thought. He is not, therefore, entitled to the designation, Futurist, any more than one could label him Passéist, both of which words he has added to literature, one to describe himself and his followers, the other to describe the rest. Since Modernism is already hopelessly harnessed by connotations of its own, that word hardly describes him, so I should like to present him with a new term: Courantist. It is definitely related to the terms Passéist and Futurist, bridging the two. The Passéist would thus be the clinger to tradition, custom, convention and the Past. The Courantist, the interpreter and expresser of the Present, the iconoclast and the creator of new forms and symbols. The Futurist would be other-worldly, prophetic, turning his back alike on Past and Present, as he yearns towards the unknown—not necessarily the temporal unknown which has been for centuries the plaything of the Utopist-Futurist, but the psychological and metaphysical unknown which existed equally in the Past as it exists in the Present, but must obviously remain in the Future until we are conscious of it.

Surely it is H. G. Wells rather than Marinetti who deserves the title of Futurist. True, his methods are Passéist, but so are those of Marinetti

and his followers when they desire to be comprehensible. The so-called Futurist writings and paintings (particularly the latter) need a great deal of Passéist exposition before their ambiguities are explained away; and in some cases they remain mysteries after much attempted elucidation in the prose of our fathers. On the other hand H. G. Wells is so easily understood that a genuinely class-conscious Futurist from Milan might be inclined to treat him with contempt. Still, it is this very English master of scientific romance who has made us more conscious of the Future than any other living writer or painter. He has dreamed in steel-girders and imagined in speed; he has pictured a world dominated by the motor and destroyed it for our instruction and delight by radio-active shocks and atomic bombs. As far back as 1895 he fashioned a Time Machine, which propelled itself further than human eye could see; he has shown us worlds a-dying and mankind in the making; he has baited the Future with dream cities of a thousand ingenuities and super-orderlinesses, and he has bridged the interim between now and then with wars so rapid and so ferocious that even the heart of a Marinetti ought to be song-stricken for very joy. And above all he has faced machinery with the courage of the child of the race which invented the machine, and he has glorified every mechanical splendour.

True to his futurist quest his latest book seeks the beyond-realm anew. "The World Set Free" (Macmillan, 6s.) discovers H. G. Wells once more leaping the loop with the Future as his apogee. This time, however, this insatiable builder of Utopias is not content with the reconstruction of kingdoms or even continents; his prophetic soul embraces the world. He permits civilisation to run its destined course for several years and then pre-destinate doom overtakes our naughty old world to live in the form of the Last War. Here is a peep of Leicester Square as seen through a Futurist window just before the war:—

"In the centre was a garden raised on arches lit by festoons of lights and connected with the Rows by eight graceful bridges, beneath which hummed the interlocking streams of motor traffic, pulsating as the current alternated between east and west and north and south. Above rose great frontages of intricate rather than beautiful reinforced porcelain, studded with lights, barred by bold illuminated advertisements, and glowing with reflections. There were the two historical music halls of the place, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, in which the municipal players revolved perpetually through the cycle of Shakespeare's plays, and four other great houses of refreshment and entertainment, whose pinnacles streamed up into the blue obscurity of the night. Which is all very Wellsian—but I am somehow glad that the Last War put an end to it—at least I hope it did. Mr. Wells does not make it quite clear. Anyway here is Futurism at work, and I hope my words will encourage Signor Marinetti to leap into the unknown and give us the result of his experiences. I shall have more faith in his Futurism when he has tried it on Utopia. Indeed, I invite the famous Italian poet to give us a dynamic fiction of the world to be—it would test him and us.

Handwritten notes and stamps at the bottom left of the page, including "L. E. H." and "May 16, 1914".