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NOTTE

By G. K. CHESTERTON.

THERE are still people talking about Futurism, though I should have thought it was now a powder train of progressive theory. If a man only believed the world was round because his grandmother said it was flat, another man had only to say it was spiral in order to be a more advanced idiot than either of them. But, after all, the world is one shape and not another (I don't care which myself, but certainly one), and will be when we all die, and would have been if no worm or weed had ever lived. And it amuses me to notice that the very Agnostics who still quote Galileo's phrase about the earth "And yet it moves" are the very people who talk as if truth could be different from age to age—as if the whole world was a different shape when you or I were in a different frame of mind. Progressives of this kind cannot say "And yet it moves" save in the sense that their own foot can roll it about like a football, or that their own finger can stop it as Joshua's stopped the moon. They may control Nature like witches; but they cannot appeal to Nature like Galileo. They have no abiding objective fact to which to appeal. On the mere progressive theory there is no more immortality about the astronomy of Galileo than the medicine of Galen.

like poor baby-laden charwomen after a motor-bus. Their deduction is this: As his favourite song recalls the friend, though it contains none of his grunts, snorts, or sneezes, so his portrait would better recall his appearance if it contained no trace of his eyes, nose, mouth, hair (if any), masculine form, erect posture, or any other oddity by which his friends were in the habit of distinguishing him from a lamp-post or a large whale, or from the works of Creation in general. Mr. Nevinson says that the most pungent and passionate emotions (such, presumably, as we have about friendship and even about love) can be conveyed by planes, mathematical proportions, arbitrary or abstract colours, arrangements of line, and all the things we most of us instinctively associate with carpets, if not with oil-cloth. "It is possible," he says. It is. It is not a contradiction in terms.

The quite simple fallacy is this. The only thing we know about the things we call the Arts is that when they are good they all stir the soul in a somewhat similar way. Their roots in savagery or civilization are so different and so dark, their relations to utility or practical life are so prodigiously contrasted, the mere time or space they occupy is so unequal in every case, the psychological explanations of their very existence are so inconsistent and anarchic, that we simply do not know whether in one single point we can argue from one art to another. We do not know enough about it, and there is an end of the matter. For instance, many have compared classic poetry with classic architecture; and anyone who has ever felt the virginity and dignity of either will know what such a comparison means. Milton spoke of "building" a line of poetry; and nobody seems able to talk about sonnets without talking about marble. But in technical fact the analogy is only a fancy, after all. Treat it for one moment as Mr. Nevinson treats the analogy between music and painting, and it is pure, preposterous nonsense—like Futurism.

Who will deny that height, or the appearance of height, is one of the effects of architecture? Who has not read or said or felt that some wall seemed too enormous for any mortals to have made, that some domes seemed to occupy heaven, or that some spire seemed to strike him out of the sky? But who, on the other hand, ever said that his sonnet was printed higher up on the page than somebody else's sonnet? Who ever either praised or disliked a piece of verse according to its vertical longitude? Who ever said, "My sonnet occupied five volumes of the Times, but you should see it pasted all in one piece"? Who ever said, "I have written the tallest triquet on earth"?

Mr. Nevinson will bring a tear to my eye by exhibiting a pattern and calling it a picture on the same day when he induces me to read two hundred leading articles in the Times simply by calling them a tower. They have many of the qualities of a tower: they are long; they are symmetrical; they are all built out of the same old bricks; they sometimes stand upright, like the Tower of Giotto; they more often lean very much, like the Tower of Pisa; they most frequently fall down altogether; and fall on the wrong people, like the Tower of Sloam. One could pursue such abstract fancies for ever, but the simple fact remains—and it is a fact of the senses. The thing is not a tower, because it does not tower. And the Futurist picture is not a picture, because it does not depict. Why one art can do without shapes, and another without words, and another without movement, and another without massiveness, and why each of these is necessary to one or other of them separately—all this we shall know when we know what art means. And I cannot say that the Futurists have helped us much in finding out.

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chietti di Napoleone mandavano scintille di giubilo e (trattandosi di Napoleone) di entusiasmo. Allora anche Danton, si alzò e disse: "Ladri cocciuti, smettete! Prima che la Ditta GOBBI avesse i pole infallibili avrete fatto ridere anche i topi... ma ora, ora fat qui dentro! Tentate con altre cassette, tagliate!"

— A questo punto, un rumore sordo desto tutti i nichelini so perché di bassa... (aga). Erano i tori che i notturni malfattori av esclamazioni d'ira contro la Casa PELTZ, che del resto è superiore.

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But one or two interesting ideas can be found in Futurist speculations, essays, lectures, books, etc.—indeed, the Futurists can be interesting everywhere but in their pictures. And this is the difficulty of all such movements—the lack of the final fulfilment. I will not put it offensively, as by saying that they write a beautiful prospectus, but there are no funds. I do not mean it like that. I will put it poetically by saying that there are beautiful leaves and flowers, but there is no fruit. There are leaves of learning enough to fill a library; there are flowers of rhetoric enough to last a session. They are all about a picture; and there is no picture. Thus Mr. Nevinson, the eminent English Futurist, has explained that pictorial art should be as independent of natural facts as music is; it should not imitate, but utter. Of music, of course, the remark is true, and fairly familiar. Certainly three notes on a piano can bring tears to the eyes by reminding us of a dead friend: though certainly the first noise is not the noise he made when whistling to his dog, nor the second the noise he made when kicking his boots off, nor the third the noise he made when blowing his nose. Perhaps the three notes are noises he could never have made: perhaps he was unmusical, like many magnificent people—I am unmusical myself. Perhaps, I say, he was unmusical: yet music can express him. This is an interesting fact; but it is only one fact, and the examination of a few others would have shown Mr. Nevinson the shallowness of his artistic philosophy.

But Mr. Nevinson and the Futurists, having never seen a fact before in their lives, clutch hold of this one and rush after the car of progress

But if I say, "It is possible by arranging a ton, ten pearl buttons, a copy of the second and last number of a Tariff Reform weekly, one wooden leg, three odd boots, and a bag with a hole in it, to induce your worst enemy to burst into tears and give you a million pounds in conscience money," then, if you are a Monist and a fool, you will answer that it could not happen. But if you are an Agnostic and a Christian, you will answer that you tried it on with your worst creditor, and it didn't work with him. Nor would the planes, angles, abstract colours work with him; they don't work with you; they don't work with simply is that these philosophers, like so many modern philosophers, do not possess the patience to see what they are talking for granted. Have you ever seen a fellow fail at the high jump because he had not gone far enough back for his run? That is Modern Thought. It is so confident of where it is going to that it does not know where it comes from.

They have many of the qualities of a tower: they are long; they are symmetrical; they are all built out of the same old bricks; they sometimes stand upright, like the Tower of Giotto; they more often lean very much, like the Tower of Pisa; they most frequently fall down altogether; and fall on the wrong people, like the Tower of Sloam. One could pursue such abstract fancies for ever, but the simple fact remains—and it is a fact of the senses. The thing is not a tower, because it does not tower. And the Futurist picture is not a picture, because it does not depict. Why one art can do without shapes, and another without words, and another without movement, and another without massiveness, and why each of these is necessary to one or other of them separately—all this we shall know when we know what art means. And I cannot say that the Futurists have helped us much in finding out.