

## A MAN OF THE WEEK

### Marinetti

MARINETTI'S CLAIM to great notice is hardly an individual one. One sees, as though in some Futurist mirror, a thousand arms rise behind his when he raises his hand in witty and violent demonstration. Just as his group of Painters fall more or less into line, so he is identified with an old and disciplined, and suddenly renewed, sensibility. One can say that he is much more of an Italian than it is possible for any Englishman to be an Englishman. Most English characteristics are negative — absence of gesture, for instance, instead of highly developed race mimicry. It has always seemed unnecessary to be individual where the common mode is so good as the Italian. The Englishman, in this way, escapes a danger, too.

Were it not for the fact that you know Marinetti as an individual crackling with good sense, so abundant as to be rare, as the inventor of genial tags, such as his excellent one, "Futuriste," and recognize in him one of the personal landmarks of our time, you would be apt to regard him as a chiffre, or sign, signboard, if you like, of conscious and clamorous modernity, of a Europe gradually pushing away from the timidity of first Revolutions, and finding itself grown used to its arms.

He would be flattered at this perception of the impersonal character of his success.

All Marinetti's significance is included in the word the Painters stamp on their frames, "Futuriste."

The Past, Present, and Future exist, always in different quantities, and more or less naïvely. The Future is represented by the most living men, who live too quickly. The Present is made up of the half-alive. The Past is made up of those who have bitterly and enviously exceeded their allotted span, and still stalk or scurry about in any Present, tripping up the living, mysteriously congesting the traffic, confusing values in Art and manners.



It is with reference to these three categories that Marinetti has invented his terms "Futuriste," on the one hand, and "Passéiste," on the other.

The "Presentistes" are ignored by him, for the dead are far more powerful than they. There is only the Past and the Future. The most technically "living" people are really the handful of corpses, contemporary humanity, between the Past and the Future.

The Past is composed of a brilliant cohort of mortals who determined not to die, but to remain on this earth. Every new generation finds this *fine fleur* of mankind in possession of the land they come to occupy.

In Italy, more than in any other country, they hold impregnable positions in the many strongholds they have built for themselves — museums, churches, and libraries.

Marinetti is the very able general of the most living in that country, with his Headquarters' Staff at Milan.

He is the intellectual Cromwell of our time. He has taken quite lately, even, to chanting while on the march — among his audience. He has his Ironsides. The picture is complete.

Michelangelo is at the present moment living over in Italy. So is Dante. Their death was a "canard," merely; rather like Zuloaga's telegram to Buenos Aires (where he was holding an Exhibition, with little success) saying he was dead. All his paintings immediately were bought.

A great Artist sometimes would get as much "life" as he wants out of the chemical adventures of his bones and flesh after death. His public decease, were it not always a physiological fact, would have to be regarded as a trick. It is the signal for the pure explosion of his appalling vitality.

When a great Artist begins his work, as things are today, he should be struck off the list of the living, and he should be publicly recognized as dead. Any woman attempting to marry him, and so openly draw attention to the fact of his palpable existence, should be restrained by law. This is the only way to curb his dishonest and posthumous activities. And his physical existence is not of the faintest importance to anybody.

But as it is he is compelled, by knowledge of the fact that he cannot exercise a full influence while still alive; to conspire against the Future, and begin thinking of posterity and his "after-life" on earth. He develops into a bitter and meddlesome ghost. He knows his best life will begin at his fleshly demise, and he works accordingly, with the sinister determination not to be done out of complete and triumphant existence, but to get it at the expense of the next generation.



This is obviously not his fault.

We must learn, provisionally, to treat the Artist as a dead man, and give him the honours of the dead. For among the dead only the dead are honoured.

We must acquire a facility for overlooking the compromising fact of an Artist's existence.

At the sight of anything fine in Art, people must learn to say: "Only the dead paint or write like that. This Artist is evidently dead. He is not dead, you say? Nonsense. I refuse to admit the possibility of such a great Artist being alive! He is dead! His work is splendid! Amen!"

With the great Artist, still alive, the living cannot get over the fact that he is in their category; this degrading similarity to themselves makes them incapable of recognizing his importance.

But the living become, happily, less humble every day. When they have at last got rid of this idea of there being something shameful and derogatory about existence, and become increasingly cocky and pleased with themselves for being alive, the Artist will no longer have to think of posterity, or, as an alternative, pretend he is dead in his time.

One of the functions of a man like Marinetti is to instil into people the importance of the Present, the immense importance of Life. The healthy fame and real existence of the Artist is bound up with humanity's way of regarding Life. It is necessary, in the profoundest sense, that humanity should live, and place their living above everything else, for Art to arrive at its goal.

No self-respecting man should want to be a bogey, a parasite on another age, and hanger-about, life's term over. This surviving into another age has been, though, hardly part of the programme of many forced into this position.

Museums and Galleries should be very strictly kept for students and Artists only. In fact, it would be a cowardly and foolish thing for the Futurists to destroy the Museums. They should be seized, rather, and kept as the private property of the Artists. It is only women and canaille that destroy beautiful things. The true Futurist will not destroy fine paintings in Museums, because they will belong to him exclusively some day.

All people not irretrievably *cabotin* romantic and indirect are in agreement with Marinetti as to the absolute necessity of *being*, and not *playing at*; of simple and instinctive life, as opposed to self-conscious and phlegmatic life; of getting rid of the abysmal, endless snobbery of the Past; of not thinking yourself a finer fellow because you are wearing the coat or hat of 1818 or 1420.

May the top hat, the bowler hat, never appear intensely romantic



to some "Slade" student of two centuries hence! But to us nothing should appear so admirable, in its geometric blackness, so simple and apropos.

Why should not *being* equally include dreaming of the Past, or why should not a contemporary man wear a Georgian hat, knickerbockers like Bunthorne in *Patience*, or some Borrovian costume of the schoolboy imagination?

These wardrobes are chiefly stupid because their adoption depends on the stimulus of a snobbish or romantic humanity, and people are not, happily, so easily amused today: become, in fact, every day less easily delighted. I do not mean that *cabotinage* is not a very genuine thing. A man who gets himself up as Napoleon or Beethoven is not solely occupied with his audience, or "posing" merely — the explanatory word vulgarly used. Only he is apeing with direct reference to humanity, and is not being in the least like Napoleon or Beethoven in actual fact; any more than the Artist who does squatting figures of a massive god, or tragic female contortionists à la Fuseli, like that tiresome Russian painter, Van Anrep, is being like William Blake.

Blake today would not have been in the least like Blake of 100 years ago. That is the whole point about being Blake. And if a man is not Blake, he will be far more alive in imitating a live Blake than a dead one.

Optimism is very permissible. England appears to be recovering. And, after all, in Victorianism she touched bottom in the matter of national degradation.

Climate plays the same *rôle* as Time. There is one actuality for Newcastle, and another one for Milan. A Futurism of Place is as important as a temporal one. Artists in this country should attempt to find a more exact expression of the Northern character. Much of Marinetti's vitality is untranslatable; and there are many advantages in not hailing from the South.

"Futurism" is largely Anglo-Saxon civilization. It should not rest with others to be the Artists of this revolution and new possibilities in life. As modern life is the invention of the English, they should have something profounder to say on it than anybody else.

But England has needed these foreign auxiliaries to put her energies to rights and restore order. Marinetti's services, in this home of aestheticism, crass snobbery and languors of distinguished phlegm, are great.