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VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

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PIANO

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"The Goat and the Bottle"

CABLED reports of the "sensation" caused in Paris by Pablo Picasso and his piece of sculpture, "The Goat and the Bottle," came recently like the first cool breeze of a controversy. They were followed by photographs which enabled newspaper readers to see the group in two dimensions. The head of the goat, made from "corrugated bronze, old nails, iron bolts, and the handlebars from a child's bicycle," was enigmatic and a little smug. Beside it stood the bottle, shaped in old iron and smeared with paint. And between these two objects could be seen the face of the Master. He was clearly pleased, though we can only guess whether his satisfaction came from the work of his hands, or from the discovery that he was once again the centre of argument.

It is always a relief when the newspapers bring excitements which have no immediate connection with politics. Controversies in the arts can be ferocious; but they have no effect on the state of trade or the balance of power. And they are open to everybody. "The Goat and the Bottle" will be attacked and defended, not only in the salons and cafes of Paris, but throughout the world. Critics will have to declare themselves; and it may not be easy for them to decide whether Picasso is revealing a flash of his undoubted genius or merely enjoying himself at the expense of the credulous. Ordinary people can afford to have simpler reactions, and many of them will feel strongly. They need not be afraid of placing themselves among the Philistines if this time, they ask why they should be invited to admire work that is more eccentric than interesting. The pieces were shown at a salon which devotes itself to abstract art, so that only the simple-minded will dare to ask what the artist has been trying to say. It is well known that abstract

sculpture is never what it seems to be. If a framework of wire, curiously devised, can be offered to the world—and rewarded with a large cash prize—as a symbolical representation of an unknown political prisoner, Picasso's group could be almost anything. We may think we are looking at the head of a goat and a large bottle, created in a mood leaning towards the primitive; but these figures may have a Freudian symbolism: they may even be saying what Picasso thinks of the present state of the world.

It can at least be said that he has chosen his materials appropriately. If artists in other ages thought it fitting to scratch their drawings on rock, to work with clay and marble, cannot an artist nowadays express the spirit of the times through what can be found on the scrap-heap? Old iron, rusty nails, bolts and handlebars are the refuse of a machine-made culture. Not even Picasso can turn them into something beautiful: he would say, perhaps, that he was more concerned with truth, or with the kind of satire in which truth is dimly reflected. But he could also have been amusing himself. It is easy to overlook the sportive element in art. Fine work has been done by men whose sole purpose was enjoyment; and serious artists like sometimes to unbend for a frolic, to the surprise of their admirers. Picasso has always been unpredictable, keeping nimbly ahead of his critics; and he would not be dismayed if it were said that he has produced nonsense as well as masterpieces. If, however, "The Goat and the Bottle" is merely a joke, it may not be greatly enjoyed outside the artist's own circle. It seems to have been thrown off too much in the mood of one who says that the world wants and deserves nothing better. Fortunately there are still sculptors like Henry Moore who can prove that he is wrong.

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