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Science and Poetry

WITH several pages of this issue devoted to communications on science and poetry, *Science* for good measure is reprinting here—by permission of the author and the publisher—two stanzas from Phyllis McGinley's 17-stanza poem, "In praise of diversity," taken from her latest book of light verse, *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley* (Viking Press, 1954). We have not checked, but this may well be the first time that verse has appeared on an editorial page of *Science*. However, this would seem strange in view of the role that great poetry of the past has played in communicating to people new scientific points of view, concepts, generalizations, and even whole conceptual schemes.

*There's white, there's black; no tint between.
Truth is a plane that was a prism.
All's Blanshard that's not Bishop Sheen.
All's treason that's not patriotism.
Faith, charity, hope—now all must fit
One pattern or its opposite.*

Greater even than the greatest discovery is it to keep open the way to future discovery. This can only be done when the investigator freely dares, moved by an inner propulsion, to attack problems not because they give promise of immediate value to the human race, but because they make an irresistible appeal by reason of an inner beauty. . . . In short, there should be in research work a cultural character, an artistic quality, elements that give to painting, music and poetry their high place in the life of man.—JOHN JACOB ABEL.

*Or so it seems. Yet who would dare
Deny that nature planned it other,
When every freckled thrush can wear
A dapple various from his brother,
When each pale snowflake in the storm
Is false to some imagined norm?*

This example of "light" verse alone might suffice for evaluating some of the issues raised in the communications. For instance, does it have scientific content in that a conception fundamental in present-day science is presented? If so, is this conception one that should be held by all people to the extent that it profoundly affects their thought and action? Does the verse enrich the conception and then express it in language that may serve to move many people in a way that the referential language of science might never move them? Does it matter whether or not Miss McGinley was deliberately or consciously writing "good science"? Good poets and good scientists have so many characteristics in common that the paths of their creative thought surely must often meet.—D.R.

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