

Alexander Bogdanov
Red Star: The First Bolshevik Utopia

1908

nature and proudly repudiated the cowardly judgment morality had passed on his actions. When I paused in involuntary reflection before this panoramic monument, Enno quietly recited some verses which expressed the essence of the spiritual tragedy of the hero.

"Who wrote that?" I asked.

"I did," replied Enno. "I wrote it for Menni."

I could not fully appreciate the inherent beauty of poetry in a language that was still foreign to me, but the idea in Enno's verses was lucid, the rhythm was flowing, and the rhyme rich and sonorous. This suggested a new train of thought.

"Ah," I said, "so your poetry still uses strict meter and rhyme?"

"Of course," said Enno, slightly surprised. "Do you mean that you find it ugly?"

"Not at all," I explained. "It's just that it is commonly thought among us that such form was generated by the tastes of the ruling classes of our society, and that it reflects their fastidiousness and predilection for conventions which restrict the freedom of artistic expression. Whence the conclusion that the poetry of the future, the poetry of the socialist epoch, should abandon and forget such inhibiting rules."

"Nothing could be further from the truth," Enno retorted vigorously. "Regular rhythmicality seems beautiful to us not at all because of any liking for conventions, but because it is in profound harmony with the rhythmical regularity of our processes of life and thought. As for rhyme, which resolves a series of dissimilarities in uniform final chords, it is intimately related to that vital bond between people which crowns their inherent diversity with the unity of the delights of love, the unity that comes from a rational goal in work, and the unity of feeling in a work of art. Without rhythm there is no artistic form at all. If there is no rhythm of sounds it is all the more essential that there be a rhythm of images or ideas. And if rhyme really is of feudal provenance, then the same may be said of many other good and beautiful things."

"But does not rhyme in fact restrict and obstruct the expression of the poetic idea?"

"Well, what if it does? Such constraints, after all, arise from the goal which the artist has freely chosen to set himself. They not only obstruct but also perfect the expression of the poetic idea, and that is their only *raison d'être*. The more complicated the goal, the more difficult the path leading to it and, consequently, the more obstacles there are on the path. If you want to build a beautiful building, just think how many rules of technology and harmony are going to determine, that is, 'restrict' your work! You are free to choose your goal, and that is the one and only human freedom. Once you have chosen it, however, you have also selected the means to attain it."

We went out into the garden to rest for a moment after all the new impressions of the day. It was evening already, a clear and mild spring