

THE LITERARY DIGEST

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"FREE" POETRY IN RUSSIA

ARTISTS IN ANY LINE who fancy that the "freedom" offered by the Bolsheviki of Russia would make that land a paradise for them should give heed to some of the fruits of freedom furnished us by the *Journal de Genève*. Defenders of the Lenine régime, points out this journal, insist that "the rule of the proletariat in Russia so protects arts and letters that the poets, liberated from 'capitalistic' tyranny, can, under the ideal régime of Communism, produce immortal works." All the evidence brought by the "rare visitors to the Bolshevik paradise" leads this cautious observer to maintain "reserve." It considers the paramount facts that no liberty of the press exists in Russia, and so none but a poet recognized by the Government can get his verses published, a fact that becomes more manifest by the examination of the few specimens exhibited here. The translation from the Geneva paper is made by the New York *Tribune*, where we read:

"In justice to Russian letters it must, however, be said that all talented Russian authors have abstained from writing, or, at any rate, from publishing their works during the rule of the proletariat, so that only the official poets, the literati hired by the Government, have their say.

"With the exception of a few second-rate writers, present-day Russia counts five poets recognized as such by the Government. They are the citizens Block, Byelyi (Weiss), Ivanoff, Romizoff, and Mayakovsky. All five are futurists, and their verses are freed from all prosaic and even grammatical constraint.

"Rightly or wrongly, Mayakovsky is considered the most gifted poet of this new 'Red' pleiad. The *Czas* of Prague has recently published a few samples of his work, which may be interesting to quote.

"The official Bolshevik propaganda has always given formal public assurance of its respect for the past works of art. This claim is false. Let us see what Mayakovsky writes on this subject in his 'Revolutionary Odes':

The world's conflagration has softened our nerves.
Howl.
"Firemen!"
Murillo is burning.
With petroleum we water
Corneille as well as a certain Racine,
And we throw them into the street
To illuminate our rubbish.

"Again:

If you meet a White Guard,
Shoot him.
And don't forget Raffael.
And don't forget Rastrelli.
Why not attack Pouchkine
And the other classics?

"If the poet shows himself little indulgent toward the artists of the past, he has no more clemency for the philosophers. The following advice he gives the Germans in his collection of 'War and Peace Poems':

Germany!
Into the mouths of the deluge,
Into its open jaws
Throw the thoughts,
The museums,
The books.
Show your teeth with insolence,
Young men!
Jump on Kant,
The knife between your teeth.
Unsheathe your swords!
Russia!!
Has the rapacious fervor grown cold?
The desires are violent like the savage hordes.
Drag by their meager legs
The Tolstoys hidden under their gospels
And pull them by the beard
On to the stones."