

Command of Rigden Tyepo by Nicholas Roerich

NICHOLAS ROERICH The Prophet of Beauty and Peace

By PROF. O. C. GANGOLY

THE death of Nicholas Roerich removes a towering figure, a veritable giant, a *mahi-ruha* of Himalayan magnitude from the landscape of the world's culture. As a leader of culture and spiritual thoughts, he can be easily compared with Tolstoy, Romain Rolland, and Mahatma Gandhi. Nominally, an artist, incessantly employing his brush with an untiring energy, and producing and bequeathing for posterity thousands of canvases which fill many museums and galleries, he was much more than an artist, a great thinker, a practical idealist, a philosopher, a humanist, a man with a message, a mystic, a prophet and a high priest of culture, a veritable *Rishi*, a missionary in the best and the most extensive connotation of the term. He has made valuable contributions in the field of letters as well as of Art. And the incessant flow of his literary products parallel the incessant flow of his brush. Living in seclusion, as a recluse in the solitude of his Himalayan *Ashrama* at Naggar in the Kulu District of the Punjab, during the last twenty years of his life, he had been an indefatigable traveller and an intrepid explorer, a veritable pilgrim across impenetrable mountains and deserts. His intimate relations with Nature and natural phenomena are best revealed in the records of his exploratory travels in the brilliant pages of his travel-diaries, illustrating the truth of the picturesque adage that 'great things happen when men and mountains meet, things do not happen by jostling in the street.' Roerich was a 'Man of the Mountain,' a devotee of the mystery, the solemnity and the desolation of the rocky faces, the geological ebullitions of the earth, their silence, grandeur, and majestic beauty which he explored and set down in his innumerable canvases in wonderful colours. As a modern worshipper of the Himalayas he challenges the activities of the Swedish and the Swiss mountaineers and other European leaders of Himalayan expeditions on the one hand, and the Rishis and hermits

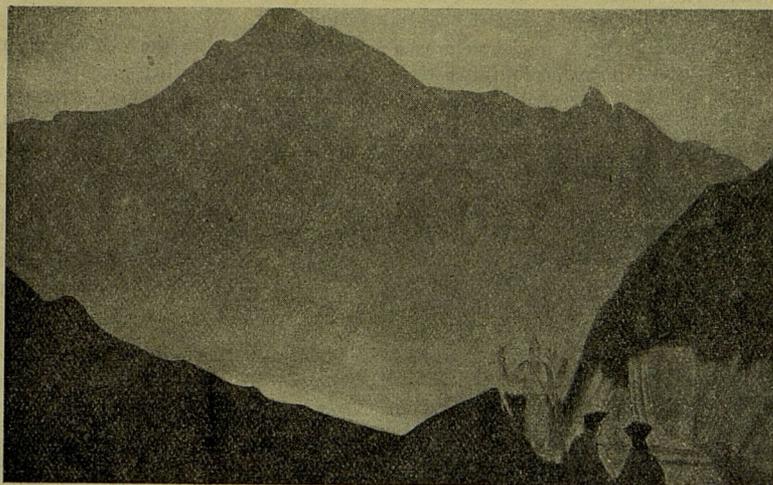
of ancient India, on the other. This is best demonstrated in his magnum opus, *Altai-Himalayas*, and his *Diary Leaves*, and nowhere more graphically than in the astounding beauty of his gigantic landscapes, in which he has incessantly portrayed the Himalayas, in all their mystic moods, and in the infinite variety of their forms and colours.

His love of the Himalayas and the secret of his worship of this king of the mountains is pithily expressed in his own words :

"Nowhere is there such glimmer, such spiritual satiety as amidst the precious snows of the Himalayas . . . I am happy to have the privilege of disseminating throughout the world the glory of the Himalayas—the Sacred Jewel of India."

There is not an important city in India, Europe, and America which has not received gifts of one or other of his colourful studies of the Himalayan landscapes. The best and largest collection of his paintings is in the gigantic Roerich Museum in New York. Most Indian cities possess representative specimens of his studies of the Himalayas, in the dreamy harmonies of the blue, the silver, and the grey. In a gallery at Benares there are about thirty specimens and in the Municipal Museum at Allahabad there is a large collection exhibited in a special gallery called the Roerich Hall. Roerich's sense of the bony structure of the earth, and the architecture of its mountain masses is almost unique in the history of painting. Besides presenting Himalayan scenes in infinite moods and phases, he has left many masterpieces with other subjects, all imbued with a mystic flavour and a profound vision. His other pictures cover many Christian themes, Buddhist legends and Indian subject-matters. To name only a few, his *Saint Sergius*, *Sancta Protectrix*, *Conflagration*, *Saintly Ghosts*, *Buddha the Giver*, *Command of Rigden Tyepo*, *Sri*

Krishna and Kalki Avatara are important landmarks in his career of the painter's craft, interpreting the most profound and abstruse thoughts through the symbols of colours. All the art-critics of the world have lavished on him their unstinted tributes. The present writer was led to characterize him, twenty-five years before, as "the wizard of Eastern landscapes, who sublimates realistic scenes to the



Tibetan Landscape by Nicholas Roerich

dizzy heights of divine dream-lands."

As an eminent critic has put it:

"His Art knows no limitation of time and space, for he envisages the universe in its past, present and future as a unit, as a continuous song, binding the stone age to the age of electricity."

The tribute of Rabindranath Tagore is worth quoting:

"Your pictures profoundly move me. They made me realize that Truth is Infinite. When I tried to find words to describe to myself what were the ideas which your pictures suggested, I failed. It was because the language of words can only express a particular aspect of Truth. . . . When one Art can fully be expressed by another then it is a failure. Your pictures are distinct and yet are not definable by words—your Art is jealous of its independence, because it is great."

His doctrine and philosophy of Art is intimately connected with his philosophy of life and they may be best studied in his own statements, very significant and indicative of his theory of Art and his notions about the functions of beauty:

"The pledge of happiness for humanity lies in beauty. Hence, we assert Art to be the highest stimulus for the regeneration of the Spirit. We consider Art to be immortal and boundless."

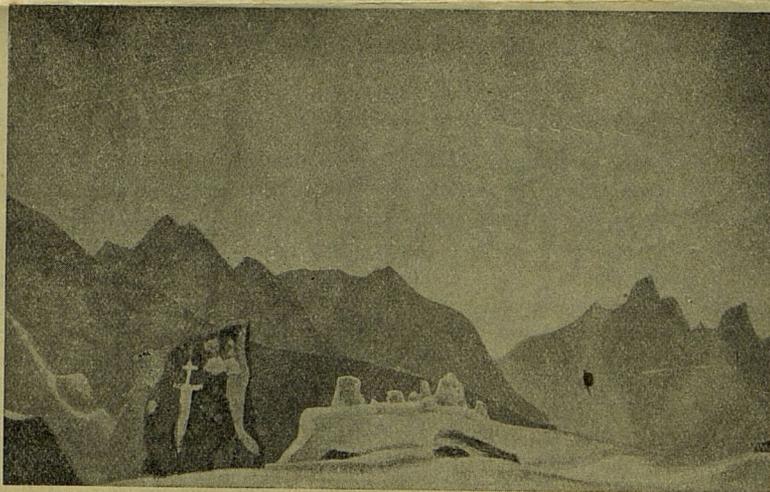
"Art is to create Beauty ; through Beauty we gain victory ; through Beauty we unite and through Beauty we pray to God."

"Art is the heart of the people and knowledge the brain of the people, and that only through the heart and through wisdom can mankind arrive at union and mutual understanding."

"Art will unify all humanity. Art is one—indivisible. Art has its many branches, yet is for all. Everyone will enjoy true art. The gates of the 'sacred source' must be wide open for everybody, and the light of Art will influence numerous hearts with a new love."

In his spirited, profound and moving essay, "Joy of Art," Roerich interprets the cult of beauty and exhorts humanity "to labour in the name of Beauty," "to collect and safeguard all flowers of Beauty," and "to regard Beauty as a real motive force."

His contributions to literature have been prolific and profound and reveal him as a great thinker and a prophet. His book of poems, *Flame in Chalice*, is full of



Himalayan Landscape by Nicholas Roerich

profound teachings sometimes echoing the thoughts of the Upanisads:

"Before Thine image the sun does not shine nor the stars nor the flame. In the darkness are shining particles of Thy glory, and in my closed eyes dawns Thy wondrous light."

His facile pen, sometimes rivalling his brush, has poured forth incessantly, gems of essays, articles and spiritual appeals, published in all the journals of the world. In many obscure and little known journals of India

(e.g., the *Scholar*) he published numerous articles of great significance and prophetic values.

His greatest contribution in the field of international politics was his design for the Roerich Banner of Peace and the signing of the Pact of Peace (*Pax Per Cultura*) for the purpose of safeguarding works of Art, and cultural monuments from the destructive horrors of wars. He designed a special banner to protect them. The banner comprises a scarlet circle with three spheres of the same colour inscribed in the centre, on a white background. By an international convention it has been resolved that buildings flying this banner cannot be bombed.



The Sacred Flame
By Nicholas Roerich

"Twenty-four years ago Nicholas Roerich thought of the Banner of Peace. To-day (23rd September, 1938) thirty-six nations have already agreed to respect that Banner."

Another very important phase of his activity was the founding of cultural associations bearing his name in all the important cities of Europe. The most important of these foundations are, (1) the Master Institute of the United Arts, the first institution in America to teach all Arts under one roof; (2) Corona Mundi (International Art Centre) 1922; (3) the Roerich Academy of Art in New York; (4) the Urusvati Institution of Research at Kulu and (5) Flamma, an Association for advancement of culture, founded at Indiana (U.S.A.) in 1937.

The fundamental doctrine underlying all the above educational institutions founded by him is best summarized in his own words :

"To educate does not mean to give a record of technical information. Education, the forming of world consciousness, is attained by synthesis, not by the synthesis of misfortunes, but by the synthesis of perfection and creativeness. The true knowledge is attained by inner accumulations, by daring; for the approaches to the One Knowledge are manifold. . . . The evolution of the New Era rests on the corner-stone of knowledge and beauty."

There was a great significance in the choice that he made (after travelling all over the world) for his permanent residence in a far corner of India, where he built his

Ashrama in a quite recess of the Himalayas in the Kulu Valley where he passed the last 19 years of his life in meditation, in his *sadhana*, in his pictorial practices, in his Work and Worship in sight of the eternal snows, uttering the following inspired words of prayer:

"Himavat, the beautiful! Thou hast given us our greatest treasures and for ever thou shalt remain the guardian of the greatest mystery, the holy marriage of heaven and earth!"

His love for India and all that she stands for was expressed in numerous tributes of praise expressed with great ecstasy:

"O Bharata, all beautiful, let me send thee my heart-felt admiration for all the greatness and inspira-

tion which fill thy ancient cities and temples, thy meadows, thy *deobans*, thy sacred rivers, and the Himalayas."

As Dr. Kalidas Nag has pointed out that "Professor Roerich was the first Russian ambassador of beauty who brought to modern India the deathless message of Art and we are for ever grateful to him for his inspiring thoughts and his loyal co-operation in bringing the soul of Russia and of India closer." Though Europe called for Roerich, and America demanded him, he chose to remain in Himalayan India like the Rishis of ancient India as an Indian, as a *yogi*, in the same spiritual atmosphere, absorbing the spirit of India and assimilating the secrets of its spiritual culture and interpreting it in his ecstatic raptures and in his pulsating pictures, as a *Bhakta*, as a *Rishi*, as a spiritual dreamer of the greatest visions of the heavens realized on the face of the earth.



exist in Europe, America and the Middle Eastern countries but also in Philippine Island whose delegate I had the good fortune to meet, at Prague congress.

Journalist organisations—however tiny and ineffective—do exist in our country as I have already mentioned. Now, then, what prevents them from becoming united in a national union and finding out ways and means of bettering their lot? The Chief Information Officer of the Government of India wrote me that the number of people engaged on the staff of the Indian papers is unavailable while I find figures regarding the number of domestic servants and beggars in the statistical abstracts of British India. The journalists in our country know almost every-

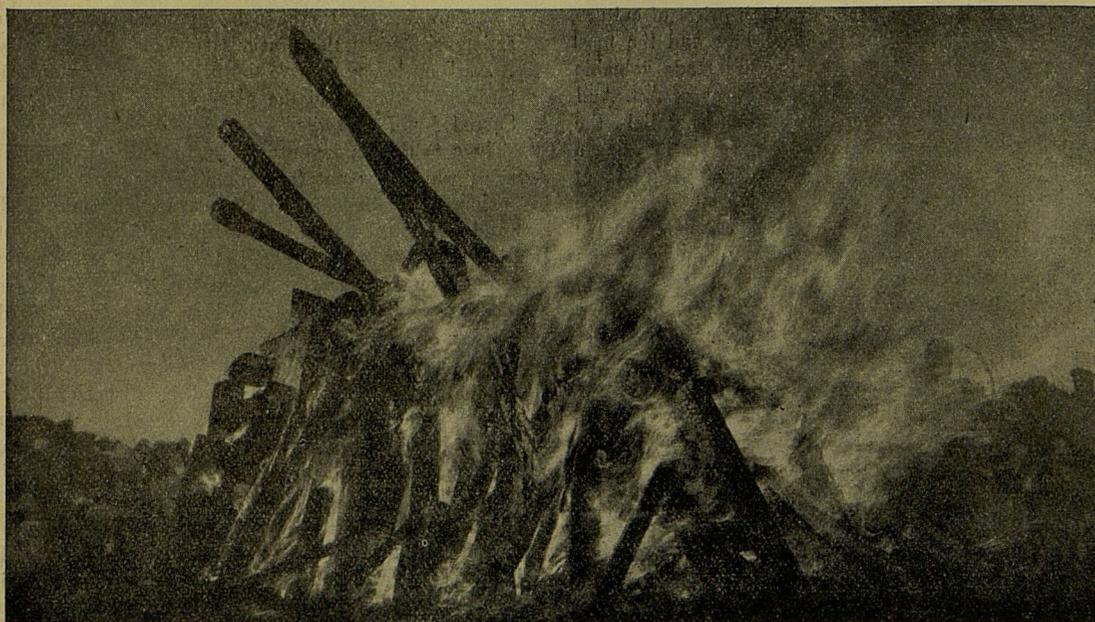
thing about everything except their own strength. It is, therefore, up to them to find out the relevant data and prepare ground for a national conference.

I firmly believe that my fellow pilgrims in India and Pakistan will not fail to realise the need of the time and rise to the occasion for which the humble author pledges full support. Any information as regards the constitution or conditions of working journalists of leading countries may be always available from him without delay or obligation.

Newspaper Society wage increase—week commencing 4th November, 1946 :

PROVINCIAL OFFICES	Adults			Juniors					
	24 & over	18	19	20	21	22	23		
	£ s d	£ s d	£ s d	£ s d	£ s d	£ s d	£ s d		
Weekly Papers	6 9 6	1 19 —	2 12 —	3 5 —	3 17 6	4 17 —	5 10 —		
Weekly papers in places where daily papers are published	6 16 —	2 1 —	2 14 6	3 8 —	4 1 6	5 2 —	5 15 6		
Weekly papers within 12 miles of Charing Cross	7 2 6	2 3 —	2 17 —	3 11 6	4 5 6	5 7 —	6 1 —		
Daily papers published in towns of under 100,000 inhabitants	7 6 —	2 4 —	2 18 6	3 13 —	4 7 6	5 9 6	6 4 —		
Daily papers published in towns of between 100,000 and 250,000 inhabitants	7 14 6	2 6 6	3 2 —	3 17 6	4 12 6	5 16 —	6 11 6		
Daily papers published in towns of over 250,000 inhabitants	8 1 —	2 8 6	3 4 6	4 — 6	4 16 6	6 1 —	6 17 —		
LONDON OFFICES OF PROVINCIAL DAILY PAPERS				Juniors					
	Adults			£ s d					
First year's service in London	9 13 —			First year's service in London					
Second year's service in London	10 3 6			Second year's service in London					
Third year's service in London	10 14 —			Third year's service in London					

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On January 31, a fire fed by sandal-wood logs consumed the mortal remains of Mahatma Gandhi