

THE ART OF ROERICH

A SYNTHESIS OF EAST AND WEST

By DR. J. H. COUSINS

ROERICH: Text by Barnett D. Conlan; Art Editor, A. Pranade. (Published by the Roerich Museum, Riga; representative in India, the Secretary, Urusavati Institute, Naggar, Kulu, Punjab; 192 pages, 13 by 9½ inches; 126 illustrations, 47 in colour: Rs. 30.).

The author of this fascinating volume is a man of letters of high distinction in thought and expression, a poet of sensitive idealism, a student of art reared in the creative centres of London and Paris, a traveller in the Orient, and synthetically minded. It also happens that to some extent this description of the author applies also to his subject, and forms the basis of what may be termed a spiritual affinity that makes understanding of the inner nature of his subject and interpretation of his outer expression uncannily intimate and true. To this intimate interpretation the author further brings an unusual knowledge of art and experience of humanity: we are given here a knacky series of studies of other artists (Turner, Cezanne, the Chinese masters, Dante, Scriabine, etc.) that constitute a book of literary and art criticism within the ostensible book.

The reviewer read one of the first copies of this monograph, received from Riga, in the Himalayan home of the artist, and made the discovery that the subject thereof survived both the process of literary analysis and of day-to-day familiarity, and remains in the memory as a personification of gentle strength, knowledge distilled into applied wisdom, tolerance that is only intolerant of intolerance, dignity that enjoys a joke without losing its dignity, and the unremitting industry of creative genius that, to his calculated five thousand masterpieces of painting, is adding others that, in the opinion of the reviewer, who saw them, are still more masterly.

For sixteen years the world-renowned artist, with his highly endowed wife and their two remarkable sons, has lived, save for intervals of exploration in Asia, in sight of the eternal snows, for five years near Darjeeling and the remainder at Naggar, the old capital of Kulu in the upper Punjab. Europe asks for Roerich, America wants him—but he remains in Himalayan India. This is surely, at least to Indians, a challenging biographical phenomenon. The monograph before us will help us to some understanding of it.

"If Pheidias," says the author, "was the creator of divine form, and Giotto the painter of the soul, then Roerich may be said to reveal the spirit of the cosmos. For this reason he is the chief interpreter of our epoch, and his art is the counterpart of science itself, since it supplies that religious vision of life and the universe which science had seemingly taken away. . . . If Pheidias had a close affinity with Aeschylus, and Giotto with Dante, then Roerich, by his immense faith in the power of culture, may be said to continue the work of Goethe . . . his universal culture, his vast outlook which stretches throughout Europe, Asia and America, comes of a race (the Russian) which is half Asiatic, and which contains in itself a sort of synthesis of East and West."

Here we have a hint from heredity as to a racial bent towards the Orient; and the general tendency of race had a family reinforcement in the fact, quoted by Mr. Conlan from a Siberian writer, that "on his mother's side Roerich is descended from an ancient Russian family . . . of Mongolian origin."

Artistically also, in the author's estimate, Roerich belongs, not to the "western developments of art, but to the Byzantine tradition", *apropos* of which, "it is now known that the landscape element in Byzantine art was derived from China, so that his return to mountain landscape is a sign that he belongs as much to the Orient as to the West." In fact, "the soul of this great painter is Asiatic, and no one since the great masters of China disappeared has done so much to evoke the hidden beauties of Asia." The reference here is not only to India, but to the wanderings of the painter and his family in eastern China, Mongolia, Tibet and Turkestan, of which he has given the world priceless pictorial interpretations.

It is, however, on the side of the intellectual expression of the reality of life and the universe that Roerich found his affinity with India. After much thought and experience (in collaboration, be it said, with Madame Helena Roerich), Nicholas Roerich "arrived at the belief held many thousand years before by those higher beings of ancient India, the arhats, the rishis and Buddhism that the whole material universe is but an appearance, and that the only thing ultimately real and lasting is spirit."

By these influences, racial, aesthetical, intellectual, Nicholas Roerich was drawn to India in 1923. A year later he came to the south. Thereafter, on scientific search for alleviations of human discomfort and disease (folk medicines and transplantable desert grasses), he founded at Naggar the Urusavati Institute of Himalayan Research as the guide and receptacle for the first results of arduous and dangerous continental explorations, in one of which Madame Roerich participated.

To the author of this monograph, however, the real importance of such expeditions was other than scientific. He quotes a remark by Roerich on Tibetan buildings ("Before such a vista, such decorations, Italian cities pale. . . . Let us be just, and bow before such true beauty"), and says: "There is something historic in this last sentence. It makes a turning-point in our history, for it is the recognition of a superior beauty in Asia. And here Roerich would seem to be the advance-guard of a new age, of another Renaissance. No one before him has done so much to bring before our eyes the beauty of Asia, and it is always Beauty that claims his attention, for he is well aware that it is the one thing that is immortal."

We are in sight of a finger-post on the highway of life that forks on the left towards the dominion of matter, and on the right towards the commonwealth of spirit. Mr. Conlan almost prophesies that humanity will proceed towards the right, and that "the sphere of spirit" and a state of exalted activity which he calls the "higher dynamism" will be realized to be one and the same. It is in this sphere of higher dynamism that Roerich dwells, operating "from some immense ring of time only perceptible to himself"—but apparently glimpsed by the author. He declares further that at the moment when spirit and the higher dynamism are realized

as being the same, there will arise "a world-wide interest in Roerich's work, for it will be generally felt that he alone among the great painters of our day has been consistent in painting the landscape of this higher sphere."

We shall get at the heart of this cryptic utterance if we translate it into terms of Hindu religious art, and say of the artists who fashioned the images of Nataraja and Krishna, Durga and Sarada (externally dynamic and at the same time the expressers of hidden spiritual qualities and powers), that they have been consistent in painting the personality of the higher sphere where dwell the archetypes of the Hindu pantheon. No one takes it as a literal fact that Shiva has sometimes two arms, sometimes four, sometimes many more, and that Ravana has nine heads. These extensions of the paraphernalia of the higher dynamism are accepted as utterances of deeper vision than that of the ordinary eye into the extra-human and super-human characteristics of the cosmic life.

Similarly, in his representation of form and particularly of colour, Roerich, while keeping as true to nature as the canonical artists of India, is as faithful to his own *silpa-sastras* as they to theirs, in his simplification of forms and intensification of colours with intent to convey some impression of the landscape of that higher sphere that supports and vivifies the landscape of nature—and this because he is one with them in experience and vision, and in the sense of responsibility that places on the outer instruments of the inner creator the discipline of purification and aspiration through which alone can sight become insight. Such a view and mode of the artistic life (so rare as yet in human history outside the spiritual art of the Orient) cannot but show itself in every phase of the consecrated artist's activity, from the zenith of his vision to the tip of his brush. On this matter the author tersely says that Roerich's "technique is not European, but something akin to that of the Brahmanical artists of ancient India, whose art was a form of yoga". A detail of this technical affinity with the immortal though unknown craftsmen of ancient India is the fact that Roerich found himself compelled by aesthetical necessity to adopt the tempera method of the murals.

The special psychological equipment of Roerich here spoken of showed itself, of course, before the painter gravitated to India: it was, indeed, the cause of such gravitation. In his early works Mr. Conlan notes a "primitive spirit" that owed its origin, he believes, "to an innate sense of those cosmic Powers of life which underlie all appearances." Between 1902 and 1912 Roerich painted a series of ancient cities of Russia, "paintings which show the inner and poetic nature of these places as no other artist has done. . . . Some of these canvases have an unearthly beauty of colouring which would suggest that the painter has had visions of that world of archetypes of which Plato spoke."

Roerich is not the first western-born painter to proclaim this inwardness of art. Blake, as the author reminds us, asked the question, "Shall painting be confined to the sordid drudgery of facsimile representations of merely mortal and perishing substances, and not be, as poetry and music are, elevated into its own proper sphere of visionary conceptions?" Mr. Conlan sees the latter half of the question as a reference to the future, and says: "There is no doubt that Roerich's work belongs to this order of painting". Such work, he explains, "does not illustrate, it does not express itself in symbols, nor does it treat the subject as a matter of dramatic interest, but rather radiates a complex impression of fine form and colour which conveys the subject to us in a way we did not anticipate. In other words its technique is Chinese."

It would be hyper-criticism, and therefore untrue, to point out baldly that the author has already classified Roerich's technique as Indian, and has also noted the visible fact that "in all Roerich's work there is a sense of the theatre. . . ." The reproductions of the paintings "Agni Yoga" and "Fiery Thoughts" (the latter royally housed in the Ranga Vilasom Palace Museum in Trivandrum), in juxtaposition to the foregoing apparent inconsistencies, help us to resolve the seeming paradox. The central figures in the paintings are impressively real, yet are endowed beyond human capacity. They are not symbols in the geometric sense. They are related to Yeats' "red hound following a hornless deer." In other words, they are symbolical realities. So also, while they do not depict specific drama, they are dramatic in their expression of significant action. In this respect they are related to the classical art of China. In their spiritual vision, which goes deeper than that of China, and their marked austerity, they are Indian. Their first appeal, in their dignified and majestic forms and colouring that makes other paintings look drab and moribund, is to the eye; the ultimate appeal is to the inner eye to which they present not depiction only, but revelation.

Finally, of Roerich the artist the author says: "Roerich's work may be said to supply what the world most lacks—a sense of the poetry of the wild, of lofty mountain regions, of mystery, beauty, and rare colour, and, withal, signs of some approaching aristocracy of the spirit." And of Roerich the man: "It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of an artist such as Roerich for the world of to-day. In almost everyone of his activities—through his paintings, poetry, prose writings, messages, educational institutions, culture associations and peace pacts, he is always doing what is most urgent and necessary at the moment, urged on by a fiery desire to make things better for the world at large."

Mr. Conlan rightly emphasises the inability of reproductions to do justice to the original paintings of Roerich, particularly monotonous which can give no indications of their marvellous colours. Happily the colour plates in the monograph have been so admirably made that it only requires an exercise of imagination to enlarge them to five feet length or breadth and thus to get an impressive idea of the originals. Some of the reproductions are gems, especially those that bring out the artist's extraordinary power of suggesting light.

DICKENS MS. GOES TO U. S.

"Life of Our Lord"

Mr. Philip Rosenbach sailed for New York during mail week, carrying with him the treasured manuscript of "The Life of Our Lord," which Charles Dickens wrote for his children in 1846.

At Sotheby's yesterday he won it for £1,400 against all-comers, the most prominent of these being Miss Gladys Storey, the authoress of "Dickens and Daughter," recently issued.

In the presence of members of the Dickens family she began the contest at £250. Very pluckily she continued to "cut and come again," and although she showed signs of flagging, she entered the lists again when Mr. Ernest Maggs shook his head at the signalled bid of £1,200 from Mr. Philip Rosenbach, standing at the auction room door.

Then she made a dual of it, but after the auctioneer Mr. C. Des Graz, had called £1,400 she could stay the course no longer. When the name Rosenbach was given as that of the winner, she sighed "Oh!" very audibly.

It is understood that Miss Storey hoped to win the manuscript and then to offer it to the British Museum. But if it be any consolation to her, I know that Mr. Philip Rosenbach came prepared to bid up to a much higher figure if he had been further challenged. He had been in cabled communication with his brother, Dr. Abraham Rosenbach, and their decision was to buy the precious manuscript.

I may add that they thought that Dr. Gabriel Wells might be their chief opponent yesterday, but he did not attend the sale, although he is staying for a while in London.

GENESIS OF "LIFE"

As I stated on July 10, Dickens devoted a summer holiday at Lausanne, in 1846, when he was 34 to compose this simple "Life" for the instruction of his children. The late Sir Henry Fielding Dickens, who inherited the manuscript from his aunt, Miss Georgina Hogarth, was born three years after his father wrote this "Life." After his death in 1933 his widow, Lady Dickens, consented to the serial publication of the manuscript in many newspapers, at home and abroad. It was offered yesterday for the benefit of herself and family.

The Rosenbachs have often given very high sums for Dickens's manuscripts. In 1922 they paid £3,700 for the manuscript of "The Haunted Man," which Dickens had given to the Baroness Burdett-Coutts in 1850. In 1928 they gave as much as £7,500 for only five pages of "The Pickwick Papers" which Dickens had presented to his Halifax friend, John Marvell Whiteley.

That was the year in which Dr. Rosenbach astonished the collecting world by bidding more than £15,000 for the manuscript of "Alice in Wonderland." When he arrived in New York, he had some hours of anguish. The bag in which the precious relic had been placed was missing. It was found, after an agonising search, among the baggage of another passenger with similar initials.

More than £10,000 was totalled by the two days' sale at Cam House, conducted by Sotheby's. A Rodin bronze group, "Le Baiser" fetched £110, and the four-post bedstead, which the late Mrs. Evelyn St. George commissioned Sir William Orpen to paint in the style of Angelica Kauffman, realised £160.

THE CONNEMARA PUBLIC LIBRARY

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Beveridge: Prices and Wages in England from the 12th to 19th Century. Vol. I—Price Tables—Mercantile Era.
Caudwell: Studies in a Dying Culture.
Coomaraswami: The Philosophy of Mediaeval and Oriental Art.
Desai: History of British Residency in Burma 1826-1840.
Durant: The Problem of Leisure.
Emeleus and Anderson: Modern Aspects of Inorganic Chemistry.
Morton: Two Lectures on Practical Aspects of Absorption Spectrophotometry.
Rowan-Robinson: Imperial Defence.
Sitwell: Trio: Dissertations on Some Aspects of National Genius.
Wingfield-Stratford: The Making of a Gentleman.
Wrench: The Wheel of Health.

MADRAS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Latest Additions

Oriental Public Library Bankpore: Cat. of the Arabic and Persian mss., V. 23.
Subbaramaiah: Investigations on the Liesegang Phenomenon and Scattering of Light by Colloidal Systems.
Kanna Muruganar: Ramana Sannadhi Murai.
Bhagavan Das: Science of Peace.
Campbell: Great English Writers 2 V.
Trial: Trial and Flagellation with other studies in the Chester Cycle.
Humorous John's mirth.
Greene: John of Bordeaux.
Tannenbaum: Christopher Marlowe: a bibliography.
Tannenbaum: Ben Jonson: a bibliography.
Duraiswami Iyengar: Chithirangi.
Olcott: Old Diary Leaves V. 4.
South Indian Inscriptions V. 9, Pt. 1.
Macmillan: Local Government Law and Administration in England and Wales V. 11.
Buckley and Calder: Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiquo, V. 6.

BOOKS RECEIVED

THE SILAPPADIKARAM OR THE LAY OF THE ANKLET: Translated by V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar. (Oxford University Press. Price Rs. 15).
THE SOCIOLOGY OF RACES, CULTURES AND HUMAN PROGRESS: (Studies in the relations between Asia and Eur-America) By Dr. Benoy Kumar Sarkar. (Chatterjee & Co., Ltd., 15, College Sq., Calcutta. Price Rs. 7).
ESSENTIAL FACTS ABOUT THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS: (10th edition) (League of Nations, Geneva. Price 1sh. or 25 cents.).
PREVENTION OF INTERNATIONAL DOUBLE TAXATION AND FISCAL EVASION: (Two decades of progress under the League of Nations) By Mitchell B. Carroll, (League of Nations, Geneva).
GERMANY'S WAR CHANCES: By Dr. Ivan Lajos. (Victor Gollancz Ltd. Price 3sh. 6d.).
INDIA'S TEEMING MILLIONS: By Gyan Chand. (George Allen & Unwin Ltd. Price 12sh. 6d.).
THE MOTOR INDUSTRY OF GREAT BRITAIN, 1939: (The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders Ltd., Hobart House, Wilton Street London S. W. 1. Price 5sh.).
WHY THE VILLAGE MOVEMENT? (3rd edition) By J. C. Kumarappa (Hindustan Publishing Co., Rajahmundry. Price Re. 1-8).
EARLY BUDDHIST JURISPRUDENCE: By Miss Durga N. Bhagvat (Oriental Book Agency, 15, Shukrawar Peth, Poona. Price Rs. 3 or 5sh.).
GOPAL KRISHNA DEVADHAR: Edited by the Hon. Dr. H. N. Kunzru. (Servants of India Society, Poona. Price Paper Rs. 2. Cloth Rs. 2-8).
SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE GRIHYA-SUTRAS: By V. M. Apte. (D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Bombay. Price Rs. 4).
SELECTED SPEECHES ON THE CONSTITUTION, VOLS. I & II: (World's Classics Nos. 479 and 480). Edited by Cecil S. Emden. (Oxford University Press. Price 2sh. each).
NADI JYOTISHA OR THE STELLAR SYSTEM OF ASTROLOGY: By "Meena". (copies can be had of C. R. Srinivasa Rao (P. O.), S. V. Nagavaram, Arni, S.I.Ry.) Rs. 2 or 5 sh.

TAMIL

THE LIFE OF JESUS: By Rev. Francis Kingsbury. (Author, Colpetty, Colombo, Ceylon).
GNANA PRAKASAM OR MANOHARINI: By N. Subrahmaniam Iyer. (Author, President, Sri Brahma Vidya Vimarsini Sabha, 178, Lloyds Road, Royapettah, Madras. Price As. 10).
DEVI CHOUDHURANI: By Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya. Translated by K. P. Rajagopalan. (Alliance Co., Brodies Road, Mylapore, Madras. Price Re 1-4).
CHOLAR KOYIRPANIGAL: By J. M. Somasundaram Pillai. (Author, Manager, Palace Devasthanams, Tanjore. Price As. 4).
THE TAMIL SHORT-HAND SELF-INSTRUCTOR: By P. G. Subramaniam Iyer. (Author. 386C/1 Pycrofts Road, Royapettah, Madras. Price Rs 3-8).

SANSKRIT-TAMIL

SRIMAD VALMIKI RAMAYANAM-SUNDARA KANDAM-PART 8: By Late P. S. Krishnamami Iyer R. S. Vachyar & Sons, Kalpathi, Palghat. Price As. 12).

MALAYALAM

SRIMAD VALMIKI RAMAYANAM-SUNDARA KANDAM-PART 3: By G. S. Srinivasa Iyer. (R. S. Vachyar & Sons, Kalpathy, Palghat. Price As. 12).

PUBLIC NOTICES

THE MADRAS STATE AID TO INDUSTRIES ACT, 1922 (ACT V OF 1923).

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT the undernoted applicants have applied for aid under Section 6 of the State Aid to Industries Act. Any person who may have objection to the grant of the aid is requested to send to the Director of Industries and Commerce a notice of his intention to appear and object, with his name, address and calling and with a short statement of the grounds of his objection. The notice should be separate and distinct in respect of each application and should reach the Director of Industries and Commerce, within 30 days of the publication of this notice. Objections, if any, will be heard by the Director of Industries and Commerce at his office, Old Engineering College Buildings, Chepauk, Madras, on a date to be notified hereafter.

(1) The Dwaraka Mills, Ltd., Coimbatore have submitted through their Managing Agents, Messrs. Varadan and Co., an application for the subscription by Government of shares in the Company of the value of one lakh of rupees, for the grant of a subsidy of 25 per cent of the cost of special machinery and for the grant of electric energy at a concession rate, in connexion with the setting up of cotton mills at Coimbatore and Bellary.

(2) The Mettur Chemical and Industrial Corporation, Ltd., Mettur have submitted through their Managing Agents, Messrs. Dayaram and Sons, Mettur Dam, an application for a loan of Rs. 4 lakhs to enable them to complete the construction of the factory and for purposes of working capital.

(3) The Proddatur Spinning and Weaving Mills, Ltd., Proddatur, have submitted, through their Managing Agents, The Proddatur Trading Corporation, an application for the subscription by Government of shares to the value of Rs. 50,000 in the Company.

L. B. GREEN,
Director of Industries and Commerce.
Madras, 23-8-1939. 3837

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BOOKS

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point" of her friendship with Benjamin Haydon. The figure of the young Elizabeth has been so surrounded with romance, sentimentality, even worship, that a definitive interpretation has become almost impossible. But towards the accomplishment of the impossible Miss Shackford has added an important short book.

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ities. So also, while they do not depict specific drama, they are dramatic in their expression of significant action. In this respect they are related to the classical art of China, and their marked austerity, they are Indian. Their first appeal in their dignified and majestic forms and colouring that makes other paintings look drab and moribund, is to the eye: the ultimate appeal is to the inner eye to which they present not depiction only, but revelation.

Finally, of Roerich the artist the author says: "Roerich's work may be said to supply what the world most lacks--a sense of the poetry of the wild, of lofty mountain regions, of mystery, beauty and rare colour, and withal, signs of some approaching aristocracy of the spirit." And of Roerich the man: "It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of an artist such as Roerich for the world of to-day. In almost everyone of his activities--through his paintings, poetry, prose writings, messages, educational institutions, culture associations and peace pacts, he is always doing what is most urgent and necessary at the moment, urged on by a fiery desire to make things better for the world at large."

Mr Conlan rightly emphasises the inability of reproductions to do justice to the original paintings of Roerich, particularly monochromes which can give no indications of their marvellous colours. Happily the colour plates in the monograph have been so admirably made that it only requires an exercise of imagination to enlarge them to five feet length or breadth and thus to get an impressive idea of the originals. Some of the reproductions are gems, especially those that bring out the artist's extraordinary power of suggesting light.

Ten copies of issue containing
this review to be sent by
v. p. post to--
Mr V. A. Shibayev,
Secretary, Urusvati Institute,
NAGGAR, Kulu, Punjab.

For THE HINDU
From Dr J. H. Cousins,
"Ghat View," KOTAGIRI,
Nilgiris.

THE ART OF ROERICH
A SYNTHESIS OF EAST AND WEST
BY J. H. COUSINS

ROERICH: Text by Barnett D. Conlan; Art Editor. A.
Prande; published by the Roerich Museum, Riga; represen-
tative in India, The Secretary, Urusvati Institute, NAGGAR,
Kulu, Punjab: 192 pages, 13 by 9½ inches; 126 illustrations,
47 in colour: Rs 30.

If this fascinating volume, so impressive and attractive
in its sumptuous simplicity, were a production of post-mortem
objective research, the reviewing of it would be an easy
enough operation. It happens, however, that the subject ^{of the} is
very much alive and perhaps only approaching his zenith, and
that the author ^{of it} is a man of letters of high distinction in
thought and expression, a poet of sensitive idealism, a
student of art reared in the creative centres of London and
Paris, a traveller in the Orient, and synthetically minded.

It also happens that to some extent this description of
the author applies also to his subject, and forms the basis
of what may be termed a spiritual affinity that makes under-
standing of the inner nature of his subject and interpreta-
tion of his outer expression uncannily intimate and true-- a
reviewer knowing nothing of the subject might also add the
word exaggerated, but this reviewer, knowing the subject
inwardly and putwardly, cannot enjoy that critical luxury.

To this intimate interpretation the author further brings
an unusual knowledge of art and experience of humanity both in
war and peace, in Asia as well as Europe; and in his reflections
on the relationship of Roerich to the universe of Conlan we
are given a knacky series of studies of other artists (Turner,
Cezanne, the Chinese masters, Dante, Scriabine, etc) that
constitute a book of literary and art criticism within the
ostensible book. His main study of Nicholas Roerich, being
congenial, original and creative, is expressed with a quality
that presents to at least one reviewer a serious temptation
to wander down by-paths of literary criticism.

To these obstacles to plain reviewing add the further, that
the reviewer read one of the first copies of this monograph,
received from Riga, in the Himalayan home of the artist, and
made the discovery that the subject thereof survived both the
process of literary analysis and of day-to-day familiarity,
and remains in the memory as a personification of gentle
strength, knowledge distilled into applied wisdom, tolerance
that is only intolerant of intolerance, dignity that enjoys a
joke without losing its dignity, and the unremitting industry
of creative genius that, to his calculated five thousand
masterpieces of painting is adding others that, in the opinion
of the reviewer, who saw them, are still more masterly.

These circumstances contain the elements of a Roerich cult.
But there is something in the temperament and character of the
central object of the cult that moves the would-be devotee
away from one aspect of the word that leads to worship, to the
other aspect that leads to the reverent and affectionate recog-
nition of cultural eminence allied to personal aspiration and

humanitarian activity. But there is fairly obviously a Roerich enthusiasm. The reviewer himself caught it when he lived for a year in New York in the Roerich Museum apartments over the entrancingly arranged galleries containing a thousand works of the master. Associations, clubs, museums in many lands show out some items of the Roerich beauty and express some aspects of the Roerich idea. The library of ~~items~~ ^{writings} by Roerich on art and its ramifications and significances has been outnumbered by the library of writings on Roerich.

And for sixteen years the world-renowned artist, with his highly endowed wife and their two remarkable sons, has lived, save for intervals of exploration in Asia, in sight of the eternal snows, for five years near Darjeeling and ~~near~~ the remainder at Naggar, the old capital of Kulu in the upper Punjab. Europe asks for Roerich. America wants him-- but he, an acclaimed "immortal," with an ancestral background, both directly and by marriage, that is of the epic order, and a personal achievement that would richly spread over a score of eminent careers, remains in Himalayan India.

This is surely, at least to Indians, a challenging biographical phenomenon.. The monograph before us will help us to some understanding of it.

The author begins his dissertation at its end, so to speak, a privilege of contrariness granted to writers of Irish ancestry. He throws scholarship and interpretation into a number of striking statements that are the fruit of his own thinking, and the seeds and roots of his exposition. "If Pheidias," he says, "was the creator of divine form, and Giotto the painter of the soul, then Roerich may be said to reveal the spirit of the cosmos. For this reason he is the chief interpreter of our epoch, and his art is the counterpart of science itself, since it supplies that religious vision of life and the universe which science had seemingly taken away... If Pheidias had a close affinity with Aeschylus, and Giotto with Dante, then Roerich, by his immense faith in the power of culture, may be said to continue the work of Goethe... his universal culture, his vast outlook which stretches throughout Europe, Asia and America, comes of a race (the Russian) which is half Asiatic, and which contains in itself a sort of synthesis of East and West."

Here we have a hint from heredity as to a racial bent towards the Orient; and the general tendency of race had a family reinforcement in the fact, quoted by Mr Conlan from a Siberian writer, that "on his mother's side Roerich is descended from an ancient Russian family..... of Mongolian origin."

Artistically also, in the author's estimate, Roerich belongs, not to the "western developments of art, but to the ~~Byz~~ Byzantine tradition," apropos of which, "it is now known that the landscape element in Byzantine art was derived from China, so that his return to mountain landscape is a sign that he belongs as much to the Orient as to the West." In fact, "the soul of this great painter is Asiatic, and no one since the great masters of China disappeared has done so much to evoke the hidden beauties of Asia." The reference here is not only to India, but to the wanderings of the painter and his family in eastern China, Mongolia, Tibet and Turkestan, of which he has given the world priceless pictorial ~~records~~ ^{interpretations}.

It is, however, on the side of the intellectual expression of the reality of life and the universe that Roerich found his affinity with India. After much thought and experience (in

collaboration, be it said, with Madame Helena Roerich who, at the age of twentytwo, beautiful, artistically accomplished, of princely lineage, entered with the then famous young painter on a life of unbroken mutual search for truth), Nicholas Roerich arrived at the belief held many thousand years before by those higher beings of ancient India, the arhats, the rishis and Buddhas, that the whole material universe is but an appearance, and that the only thing ultimately real and lasting is spirit."

By these influences, racial, aesthetical, intellectual, Nicholas Roerich was drawn to India in 1923. A year later he came to the south to present in person one of his paintings to the Headquarters of The Theosophical Society at Adyar as a nucleus of a museum of art in memory of his fellow-countrywoman, Madame H. P. Blavatsky-- a superb gift that was gratefully and joyously accepted, on behalf of the absent President of the Society, Dr Annie Besant, by the reviewer. Thereafter, on scientific search for alleviations of human discomfort and disease (folk medicines and transplantable desert grasses), he founded at Naggar the Urusvati Institute of Himalayan Research as the guide and receptacle for the first results of arduous and dangerous continental ~~expeditions~~ explorations, in one of which the entire family participated.

To the author of this monograph, however, the real importance of such expeditions was other than scientific. He quotes a remark by Roerich on Tibetan buildings ("Before such a vista, such decorations, Italian cities pale.... Let us be just, and bow Before such true beauty"), and says: "There is something historic in this last sentence. It makes a turning-point in our history, for it is the recognition of a superior beauty in Asia. And here Roerich would seem to be the advance-guard of a new age, of another Renaissance. No one before him has done so much to bring before our eyes the beauty of Asia, and it is always Beauty that claims his attention, for he is well aware that it is the one thing that is immortal." Mr Conlan adds: "In exploring these unknown parts, and in discovering the beauty of such traditions, Roerich has done something of lasting value, something far more important for us today than the exploits of Marco Polo."

A saying such as the latter implies a philosophy of life very different from that held by the majority of those who trouble at all to have such a thing as a philosophy of life. It also implies a measurement of the individual referred to that can stretch higher than the six-feet maximum, and a gauge that is not intimidated by barricades on the verge of the tangible, but can evaluate also the intangible. We have a hint in this direction (not mentioned in the monograph) in the fact that a sum of money capable of supporting materially ten thousand people in South India for a year would be willingly paid by an art lover who had the money to spare for a square yard or less of canvas covered with pigment by the hand of a dead painter.

We are here in sight of a finger-post on the highway of life that forks on the left towards the dominion of matter, and on the right towards the commonwealth of spirit. Mr Conlan almost prophesies that humanity will proceed towards the right, and that "the sphere of spirit" and a state of exalted activity which he calls the "higher dynamism" will be realized to be one and the same. It is in this sphere of higher dynamism that Roerich dwells, operating "from some immense ring of time only perceptible to himself"-- but apparently glimpsed by the author. He declares further that at the moment when spirit and the higher dynamism are realized as being the same, there will arise "a world-wide interest in Roerich's work, for it will be generally

felt that he alone among the great painters of our day has been consistent in painting the landscape of this higher sphere."

We shall get at the heart of this cryptic utterance if we translate it into terms of Hindu religious art, and say of the artists who fashioned the images of Nataraja and Krishna, Durga and Sarada (externally dynamic and at the same time the expressers of hidden spiritual qualities and powers), that they have been consistent in painting the personality of the higher sphere where dwell the archetypes of the Hindu pantheon. No one takes it as a literal fact that Shiva has sometimes two arms, sometimes four, sometimes many more, and that Ravana has nine heads. These extensions of the paraphernalia of the higher dynamism are accepted as utterances of deeper vision than that of the ordinary eye into the extra-human and super-human characteristics of the cosmic Life.

Similarly, in his representation of form and particularly of colour, Roerich, while keeping as true to nature as the canonical artists of India, is as faithful to his own silpa-sastras as they to theirs. in his simplification of forms and intensification of colours with intent to convey some impression of the landscape of that higher sphere that supports and vivifies the landscape of nature—and this because he is one with them in experience and vision, and in the sense of responsibility that places on the outer instruments of the inner creator the discipline of purification and aspiration through which alone can sight become insight. Such a view and mode of the artistic life (so rare as yet in human history outside the spiritual art of the Orient) cannot but show itself in every phase of the consecrated artist's activity, from the zenith of his vision to the tip of his brush. On this matter the author tersely says that Roerich's "technique is not European, but something akin to that of the Brahmanical artists of ancient India, whose art was a form of yoga." A detail of this technical affinity with the immortal though unknown craftsmen of ancient India is the fact that Roerich found himself compelled by aesthetical necessity to adopt the tempera method of the murals.

The special psychological equipment of Roerich here spoken of showed itself, of course, before the painter gravitated to India: it was, indeed, the cause of such gravitation. In his early works Mr Conlan notes a "primitive spirit" that owed its origin, he believes, "to an innate sense of those cosmic Powers of life which underlie all appearances." Between 1902 and 1912 Roerich painted a series of ancient cities of Russia, "paintings which show the inner and poetic nature of these places as no other artist has done.... Some of these canvases have an unearthly beauty of colouring which would suggest that the painter has had visions of that world of archetypes of which Plato spoke."

Roerich is not the first western-born painter to proclaim this inwardness of art. Blake, as the author reminds us, asked the question, "Shall painting be confined to the sordid drudgery of facsimile representations of merely mortal and perishing substances, and not be, as poetry and music are, elevated into its own proper sphere of visionary conception?" Mr Conlan sees the latter half of the question as a reference to the future, and says: "There is no doubt that Roerich's work belongs to this order of painting." Such work, he explains, "does not illustrate, it does not express itself in symbols, nor does it treat the subject as a matter of dramatic interest, but rather radiates a complex impression of fine form and colour which conveys the subject to us in a way we did not anticipate. In other words its technique is Chinese."

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Finally, of Roerich the artist the author says: "Roerich's work may be said to supply what the world most lacks -- a sense of the poetry of the wild, of lofty mountain regions, of mystery, beauty, and rare colour, and, withal, signs of some approaching aristocracy of the spirit." And of Roerich the man: "It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of an artist such as Roerich for the world of today. In almost every one of his activities-- through his paintings, poetry, prose writings, messages, educational institutions, culture associations and peace pacts, he is always doing what is most urgent and necessary at the moment, urged on by a fiery desire to make things better for the world at large."

It will be good news to many in South India that exhibitions of masterpieces by Nicholas Roerich, and some of the brilliant works of his son Svetoslav, are in contemplation for Mysore during the Dasara festivities from October 13 to 22, and in Trivandrum during the birthday celebrations of the Maharaja from November 8 to 15. Many others will entertain a hope that the extraordinary collection of pictorial beauty will also be shown in Madras. Nothing could be better as a stimulus to the creative impulse of Indian artists in the making than the study of such works of genius, with their revelation of supreme personal endowment and stupendous *aspiration* and *labour* towards perfection.

"Ghat View,"

KOTAGIRI, Nilgiris,

August 23, 1939.

To the Editor,

"The Hindu," Madras.

*Copy to
V.A.S.*

Dear Sir,

Kindly make the following modifications in my review of "Roerich" which I posted to you yesterday:--

MSS page 3, para 2, line 22 from top of page: delete

"the entire family" and substitute "Madame Roerich".

MSS page 3, line 13 from bottom: delete "dead painter"

and substitute "Leonardo or a Watteau" (read as modified "hand of a Leonardo or a Watteau").

MSS page 5, after para ending "better for the world at large," insert the following as ~~a new~~ an additional paragraph:

"Mr Conlan rightly emphasises the inability of reproductions to do justice to the original paintings of Roerich, particularly monotones which can give no indications of their marvellous colours. Happily the colour plates in the monograph have been so admirably made that it only requires an exercise of imagination to enlarge them to five feet length or breadth and thus to get a n impressive idea of the originals. Some of the reproductions are gems, especially those that bring out the artist's extraordinary power of suggesting light."

Yours faithfully,

J. W. Jones

The para beginning "It will be good news" stands as the final para.