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N I C H O L A S      R O E R I C H

October 10, 1874 was a great day in the history of civilisation; for it saw the birth of a new hope for humanity. When the baby, Nicholas Konstantinovich Roerich, was born into an enlightened aristocratic family at St. Petersburg, unlike other babies, afraid of an unknown world, he did not cry at all ! He was not frightened when he saw around him bitterness and ugliness masquerading as civilisation. On the contrary, without fleeing from it in shame or fear, he set about removing it in his own humble way. He dreamt of a new civilisation - a real civilisation based on love, knowledge and beauty, and worked for it by unlearning the law he had studied at the University of St. Petersburg and by dedicating his life to the service of humanity through Art and Culture. In whatever he did, and undid - whether as Professor in the Archaeological Institute, (St. Petersburg, 1898-1906) or as head of the Central Asiatic Roerich Expedition, (1923-1929), whether as sponsor of the Banner of Peace (which was signed in the White House on April 15, 1935 by representatives of 21 Governments of North, Central and South America) or as Founder of the Master Institute of United Arts and the Roerich Museum (New York) - was reflected his "scientifically inquisitive, intellectually illuminated and interpretative, and aesthetically expressive" mind. He turned to Art because he believed in it. With him it was a mission, not profession. Through it, he worked for a cosmic synthesis uniting 'East and West, Truth and Beauty, Past, Present, and Future'.

"To see a painting by Roerich", according to Maxim Gorky who had considered him as "one of the greatest intuitive minds of the age" means "to perceive a new world". 'But what was his technique? One may wonder at the stark simplicity of his paintings. Was he a modernist? Was he a Classicist? Neither - and both; that is the answer. But essentially he was a humanist .



The curves and colours on his canvasses are not just freaks of imagination of an idle artist: they speak to us in their own language: they have feelings too. But, as we cannot understand what they say, we continue to make a mess of the world we live in.

Roerich had great love for all things in creation; but he had greater love for India and her hills. Twentyfour years ago, he came to the Himalayas, heard strange voices in them, bowed in deep reverence and finally settled down, as, to him, they had symbolised, 'Ascent'. The paintings reproduced in this volume - most of them with an animistic background - reveal the spiritual ecstasy, mystic splendour and divine inspiration, usually associated with 'MAHARISHIS'. In the mighty Himalayas as he, a foreigner, believed, lay the 'abode of Rishis', 'resounded the sacred flute of Krishna', 'thundered the Blessed Gautama Buddha, and 'originated all Vedas'.

Physically, Nicholas Roerich is no longer in our midst today. His distinguished sons, Svetoslav and George, may be trusted with the rich legacy left by their father.

The message of love, knowledge and beauty - for which Roerich lived and died - is so simple, but we have no sympathies for the simplicities of life !!

A.S. RAMAN.

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TAKEN FROM NICHOLAS ROERICH PAINTINGS

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