

NICHOLAS ROERICH .

Half a century's work for Peace and Culture.

By P.P. Siriwardhana, B.A.

The late Editor of The Maha Bodhi and The Buddhist.

History of nations offers charming characters whose personality and special mission of life have an appeal to the intellectual in all ages. Prince Mahinda urged by higher sense of service made Ceylon his sphere of activity. Many Indian sages founded monasteries in snowy Tibet in order to disseminate the Law of the Buddha. Our own Sinhalese Buddhist monks of the 5th century crossed the uncharted seas and established Bhikkhuni Order in China. A heroic French man sailed the Atlantic to fight for American Independence. The much maligned English poet Byron hurried down to South of Europe to participate in the Greek struggle for freedom. Equally interesting and romantic is the fact that a sage, Russian by birth, has made his home in a Himalayan valley, from where his art and literature radiate over the whole world of culture. I refer to Professor Nicholas Roerich, who lives at Naggar, in the beautiful Kulu, north of the Punjab. Artist, scientist, explorer and author, Professor Roerich's mission is to establish peace through culture - Pax per Cultura; and the most significant fact is that he discovers culture in every race and age.

The fortieth anniversary of his Academic activities falls on October 10, on which day in 1874 Nicholas was born. In celebrating this event one is tempted to trace back and to find how few were the real friends of humanity, who have devoted their whole lives for the great task of ennobling life on earth. From 1896 onward, when he was appointed professor of Imperial Academy of Archaeology in Russia the career of Roerich has been one of unceasing activity directed to liberalisation of human mind. In 1917 America saw him and loved him. His paintings were exhibited in New York and he made such an impression on the American people that they dedicated a twenty nine storied

sky scraper for housing his paintings and as a permanent home where various cultural activities of the master-artist are carried on. It is now one of the most famous world centres for the promotion of the highest ideals of man. This signal honour done to him by the U.S.A. was followed by organization of a hundred of Roerich Societies on all continents and the establishment of the Master Institute of United Arts and Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute.

Paintings of Roerich have bestowed on art a new orientation and a new meaning. The artist characterises his action with the attitude of a true philanthropist. Commercial aspect of art has never entered into the mind of Nicholas Roerich as an eminent artist. Nor does he paint mere heads. As Ruskin remarked he is not a painter of "that particular order of humanity which we call gentlemen and ladies". His art at once indicates true understanding and unfailing sympathy. Synthesis of various aspects of life, of different schools of culture and of modes of architecture is the key-note of his paintings, which are a message to the world - a message which is better understood and appreciated than one couched in words. Great mountains, sacred rivers, ancient sages - all those which have become the common objects of love and veneration - are treated with that vivaciousness and charm which could only be performed by a genius. These brush work messages have found their way to hundreds of art galleries, cultural institutions and museums throughout the world. The majesty ~~and~~ of Himalayan snows finds its best expression in the hand of Roerich and is admired in the Vatican Museum of Rome. Similarly over 3000 paintings from his facile brush have become the common property of many nations. One of the most remarkable acts of this master-painter was the inauguration of lending his paintings to various centres and individuals thus affording opportunity to lovers of art to enjoy his pictures. No other artist, I think, can claim the happiness of being so loved and admired as this modern Messiah of Peace and Culture.

In the recent past Roerich has done more for the promotion of peace than

any of his contemporaries. His grand conception of the idea of a Banner as a symbol of protection of cultural and scientific institutions and national treasures during war was hailed as a unique one. The League of Nations supported the new movement, and at a convention held in Washington in 1933 thirty six nations gave their consent to adopt the Banner of Peace. Roerich found destructions in all lands. What the genius of man created for the benefit of humanity was wantonly destroyed by man's own greed and hatred. The Banner was invented to serve as a warning to the belligerent nations that the buildings over which the Banner was flying ought not to be aimed at by war weapons. Roerich wishes that the Banner should serve as a safeguard to cultural institutions in the same manner as the Red Cross serves the wounded and the sick. Dr. James H. Cousins sings thus of the Peace Banner:

Banner of Peace! March on!

Halt not your pilgrimage

Till to the world's glad warless dawn

You lead the coming age.

In Roerich's own words it is "imperative to take immediate measures to preserve the noble heritage of our past for a glorious posterity".

Inseparably connected with Roerich the artist is Roerich the Philosopher. The principle underlying his philosophy runs parallel to that of his art. Peace and Goodwill can be established if only man respects man. Destructive activities beget destruction and corrupt mankind. Creative works are starved in order to maintain costly navies and armies. Distrust of each other precipitates inhuman brutalities which no one can stop till all the works of Beauty and Culture of generations are mutilated and thrown into fire. Sympathy and understanding alone is able to wipe out this misery. Professor Roerich is never tired of saying, repeating and warning that co-operation is capable of doing greater good than brandishing of sword. In all his writings - and they are legion - he preaches the sermon of peace. "Altai-Himalaya", "Adamant", "Shambala", "Realm of Light", "Flame in Chalice", "Heart of Asia", "Fiery Stronghold" and other hundreds of essays and messa-

ges poured forth from his pen while thousands of paintings are finished by his brush. Nor this is all. Exploration of little known regions, educational work, bio-chemical experiments and cancer researches engage his earnest attention. One can hardly believe that a single person is able to cope with this vast amount of work. But the artist-philosopher has faith in unceasing activity. Every day is a blessed one with him.

His great expedition to Central Asia lasting from 1923 to 1929 is a world event. With immense suffering and loss, he collected data which he placed before the public. This expedition inspired and strengthened him. While in his "Altai Himalaya" he recorded the daily happenings he did not forget to condemn the corrupted and pillaging officials in Tibet. But even the darkest superstition in that mysterious land received investigation at his hands and he drew a lesson from it. Our knowledge of the world especially of the Himalayan countries is made richer by his writings. His mode of approach to various religions and philosophies is by way of synthesis, thus leading ultimately to unite and befriend warring creeds and beliefs. Never Asia knew a man from the West, who understood her peoples so well as Nicholas Roerich.

In any sketch however brief dealing with the last two decades of the eventful life of Professor Roerich no writer can forget the inestimable assistance given him by Madame Roerich and his two sons Georges and Svetoslav, the former an eminent Tibetologist and the latter a promising artist and a scientist. Dr. Georges Roerich is compiling the first comprehensive Tibetan Dictionary. Mr. Svetoslav Roerich has done wonderful work in collecting and experimenting on Himalayan plants with a view to their being applied in Western pharmacopoeia. Madame Helena Roerich lives in silent dignity, always striving in her own charming way to make human life happier and brighter and to further the aims and objects of her famous husband and sons. A word must also be said on this anniversary day about Mr. V. Shibayev, Secretary of Prof. Roerich, who has done his part so well as to merit every praise not only from so many

institutions and Roserich Societies but also from a host of friends and well-wishers of the great Russian savant.

Naggar, the Himalayan home of Roserich is one of the most beautiful spots in that enchanting mountain range. To that already pretty place our Guru has given an altruistic outlook which has transformed it into a temple of pilgrimage to lovers of art and culture.

"In the twilight of Dukhang the gigantic image of Maitreya majestically rises into the height". Shambala.

MADE IN CANADA
GILXOV BOND