



## THE ROERICH PACT

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Letter from Prof. Nicholas Roerich to  
"Les Nouvelles Litteraires", Paris.

The Editor,  
Les NOUVELLES LITTERAIRES,  
Paris, France.  
Sir,

March 5th, 1938.

I have been particularly happy to hear that your esteemed paper has decided to ask various well-known people to express an opinion with respect to the problem put forward in the excellent article of our eminent friend, Professor A. de Geouffre de la Pradelle, relating to the protection of historical monuments and works of art in time of war. For 34 years I have worked in this sphere and as an old friend of France, where I finished my artistic studies, I think it is my duty not only to congratulate "Les Nouvelles Litteraires" for having undertaken these investigations but also to express to you my deep conviction that the international discussion which has been thus opened is of great and urgent importance. In the article herewith "The Gates of Peace" I mention some declarations on the problem in question emanating from M. de la Pradelle himself, from the late Marshal Lyautey, and from the representatives of America, China, India, Czechoslovakia and many other countries who have taken part in the International



Conferences authorized to investigate our Pact for the protection of artistic and scientific treasures.

World-wide events recall to mind how necessary it is to safeguard these treasures without delay, for they constitute the heritage of the whole of humanity and they are now threatened by war and the spirit of destruction.

Unfortunately there exists an opinion according to which the suggested protection seems Utopian, as so many violent and cruel attacks would prove. One may add that even the Red Cross has suffered many an inhuman attack. In many cases also the Red Cross flag has been outrageously insulted, but these crimes do not in any way detract from the wonderful work done by the Red Cross. In the same way the salvage of valuable artistic and scientific treasures can come into contact with vandalism. Nevertheless humanity must untiringly strengthen the protection of her most precious patrimony. The younger generation must be taught to respect the emblem and any attack against it must be considered an outrage. Respect for monuments of the past and for treasures of art should be instilled in them while at school, so that every young citizen would consider himself the responsible guardian of the heritage of a nation. It should be part of every curriculum. May those who predict the inevitable destruction of all culture keep quiet! Optimists have always been the greatest realists, and we know that although it takes time to create certain movements we should all the same persevere.

To defend his country is every man's sacred duty. To defend treasures of Beauty and Knowledge is the noble duty of every citizen and he should not fail to do so. The humane ideal of the Red Cross demanded years of effort to put into force, and this ideal raised many a jeer from the ignoramuses. When we are told that it is a difficult undertaking to protect art and science we must answer: "therefore we must increase our efforts."

With all my heart I wish your great paper entire success in the enquiry it has undertaken.

Yours very sincerely,  
Nicholas de ROERICH



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THE ROERICH BANNER OF PEACE

BY

Colonel A. E. Mahon, D. S. O.

(for "*Les Nouvelles Litteraires*")

A Banner of Peace may sound out of place in a world that is anything but peaceful, but if we examine the real objects of such a banner we will find that not only is it not out of place but it is eminently desirable.

Professor Roerich's idea is to create a flag which would be respected as international in the same way as the Red Cross is today, and the places over which it is flown would be treated as neutral territory. It would be raised above cathedrals, museums, libraries, mosques, temples, universities and other centres of culture in every country with the object of preserving them in times of war.

Professor Nicholas Roerich will need no introduction to the majority of people, his reputation in the spheres of art and letters is famous throughout the world, and his work in the cause of universal peace and understanding is known in every country. It is indeed fortunate that an acknowledged leader of culture whose name is universally familiar should pioneer this scheme for the preservation of international treasures.

We have heard so much of pacts in recent years that we are inclined not to give them the consideration that they deserve. If, in experience, agreements have often been broken, that bare fact does not nullify their value. The more deeply one probes into historical records the more one comes to appreciate the restraining influence which agreements exercise. They operate both psychologically and technically. We are justified in deducing that assurances of help, prohibition of certain forms of action, and limitation of weapons may be an effective check, if not a complete one. Their effect may even persist after they have been broken. Moreover, although each tie separately may seem a fragile strand, when interwoven they may form a powerful check.

If the Great War did no other good, it at least brought home to us the irreparable loss that modern warfare must



inflict not only to human life but also on those treasures of art and science that form the milestones of civilisation.

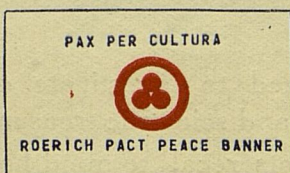
We know that Red Cross has been fairly well respected, so far as the conditions of modern warfare will permit. Would it not be possible to have a flag for the protection of institutions of culture and also of monuments of artistic and scientific value ?

Although the idea has been welcomed in the highest quarters, and its practicability endorsed by competent military authorities — including the late Marshal Lyautey — there are still sceptics who express their doubts as to the possibility of respecting such a flag in modern warfare. Similar doubts were expressed in the past with regard to the Red Cross, and yet we must admit that, in spite of regrettable accidents, the Red Cross has been respected, and that it has proved to be an inestimable blessing to all nations. The spirit of the Geneva Convention has been observed in all wars between civilised powers that have occurred since the signing of the Convention in 1864.

If it is possible to respect the Red Cross which, generally speaking, is for the protection of the sick and wounded and their attendants, would it not be equally possible to protect those places which, on the cessation of hostilities, are for the benefit of both belligerents ?

Personally I believe that the protection of the places which the Roerich Pact is designed to protect, would not be so difficult as the protection of a hospital, although I am well aware of the difficulties that would have to be overcome. As a soldier I know that in war one becomes imbued with the desire to kill as many of the enemy as possible, and one is even loath to spare the sick and wounded in hospitals, for will they not return to the fight as soon as they are well again ? Even though one may feel no personal animosity towards the enemy one feels that in order to win the war one must kill as many of the enemy as possible. When a spirit of hatred for the enemy has been fostered among the fighting forces, as is sometimes done, it is possible to understand the killing of even women and children in a mad desire to exterminate the race of





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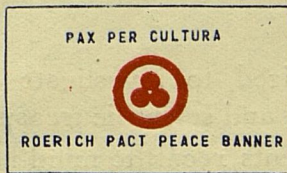
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