

ROERICH'S CONCEPTION OF WOMEN

Roerich made Woman the Heroine of his noblest conceptions, Queen of Heaven, Mother of the World, Great Mother of the Banner of Peace. Words of Roerich sent from the Himalayas to the three million legions of the Federation of Women's Clubs in America, on their acceptance of the Banner of Culture and Peace, are imbued with the same spirit.

"When there are difficulties in the home we turn to the woman. When accounts and calculations are no longer of aid; when enmity and mutual destruction reach their limits, we turn to the woman. When evil forces overcome one, the woman is invoked. When the statistical mind becomes helpless, then one remembers the woman. Verily, when wrath pauperizes the judgment of the mind, only the heart finds saving solutions. And where is the heart which can replace the woman's? And where is the courage of a heart-fire, which can be compared with the courage of woman at the brink of the insoluble? What hand can replace the calming touch of the conviction of a woman's heart? And what eye, having endured the pain of suffering, will respond as self-sacrificingly in the name of Bliss? We do not praise woman; that which fills the life of man from the cradle to the end cannot be praised . . . And it will not be praise but reality to identify woman with heroism. The medieval humiliation and belittling of women have passed. People have again realized the future Era of the Mother of the World. And again the sword of heroism is in the hand of Jeanned'Arc. And again the glow is not the fire of the stake but the flame of the heart. How much darkness, how many ugly outgrowths of wrath and ignorance would consume the flaming heart! How much vulgarity, how many mad debasements of human dignity will be despatched by the ray of the woman's heart."⁷¹

71. N. Roerich, To the Woman's Heart.

Many are the types of women Roerich painted, the golden Venus being born in a strangely Eastern landscape; the archaic Daughters of Men awaiting the Sons of Heaven in the morning of Time; Nordic princesses with golden hair, surrounded with a magic-like ancient music; Hindu women so delicate and so completely feminine with their flowers, colored birds and tame animals; austere Kwan Yin's moving in the water or appearing upon the highest mountain, but one of the most tender and lovable is the Madonna Laboris.

"The apostle Peter, Sacristan of Paradise, was disturbed. And he said to the Lord God: 'All day long I watch the gates of Paradise; I do not let anyone in, yet in the morning there are newcomers in Paradise.' And the Lord said: 'Let us make the rounds at night, Peter.'

"So they went in the night and they saw the Holy Virgin lowering along the wall her snow-white scarf, up which souls were climbing. Peter took this to heart and wanted to interfere, but the Lord whispered: 'Sh . . . let be. . . .' "72

Roerich owes much to the friendship and cooperation of women everywhere, whose intuitive souls recognized him as a leader. He, in turn, gives them stirring ideals, and the responsibility for the future of the world, and brings out the noblest in them by his recognition of their inherent qualities.

First and foremost is Elena Ivanovna Roerich, his courageous wife and co-worker, who is said to be the first woman to endure the terrific hazards and privations of traveling through the Himalayas. When in the hills of Tibet with her husband, she was looked upon as a Tara, a goddess. Her photograph reveals an

72. N. Roerich, Realm of Light, p.45.

aureole of beautiful light about her head, the rays of her inspiring and creative personality. There is a story that once when she was in Tibet, she admired a certain Buddha. Later it was brought to her by a Llama, who reported that he was commanded by the white Tara in a vision to bring it to her. Very little is known about her, as it was her wish to shine only through the works of her husband, not as an individual sharing his acclaim.

One of the most creatively beautiful friends of Nicholas Roerich was the late Princess Maria Klaudievna Tenisheff who realized the value of the little known ancient Russian art and the art of the peasants. She understood not only the ageless power of the beauty of ancient ornament, but also the awesome message of church paintings and icons. On her estate, Talashkino, she organized a center to which peasants and typical great Russian artists were invited to work together for a renaissance of Russian art. In this movement were also Vroubel, Roerich, Benois, Bakst, Nesterov, Repine, Diaghileff, Somov and Malutin. She enjoyed studying the history and sources of ornaments, and some of her theories of the analogy between European Gothic and Tibetan ornaments were later verified by Roerich on his Tibetan travels. She set an example to her fellow artists by creating enamels, ornaments and beautiful glazes. She promoted education in Smolensk, which today has a street named Tenishevskaya in her memory. She gave Smolensk a fine museum and to the Russian museum she offered a collection of water colors by Russian and foreign masters, but the museum refused to accept the work of foreign artists. Many other museums received donations from her, and she helped to organize Diaghileff's "World of Art" magazine.

Maurice Maeterlinck, in an Essay on Women, wrote:

"They are still nearer to God and yield themselves with

less reserve to the pure workings of the Mystery. And therefore it is, doubtless, that all the incidents in our life in which they take part seem to bring us nearer to what might be the very fountain-head of destiny Indeed will any true sentiment of the future ever come to the man who has not had his resting place in a woman's heart? For they know the things that we do not know, and have a lamp that we have lost. Their abiding-place is at the foot itself of the Inevitable, whose well worn paths are visible to them more clearly than to us. And thence it is that their strange intuitions have come to them, their gravity at which we wonder; and we feel that even in their most trifling actions, they are conscious of being upheld by the strong, unerring hands of the gods. I said before that they drew us nearer to the gates of our being She will never cross the threshold; and awaits us within, where are the fountainheads. Some of nature's strangest secrets are often revealed, at sacred moments, to those maidens who love, and ingeniously and unconsciously they will declare them. The sage follows in their footsteps to gather up the jewels, that in their innocence and joy they scattered along the path."

Words of ancient wisdom state:

"To enumerate the achievements of Womanhood, is to write the history of the world. To enumerate the ecstasies of illumination, is to enumerate the visions of Womanhood. To study cooperation is to perceive the hand of Womanhood." 73

73. N. Roerich,, Realm of Light, p.258.

Roerich said:

"Better than others, the woman knows the element of fire, that element with which is bound the nearest future. From ancient times, the woman was called to the most sacred tests. And so now she is called to the most broad knowledge, because with her heart she will understand how variedly and cautiously one should kindle the fire of understanding and response."74.

Man, consciously or unconsciously associates woman with the earth, the material manifestation of God and the uncreated. The Cosmic fire, the fire of genius, the fire of creation is inherent in them; they instinctively desire to produce children and to be of service, because of this. The sense of love, with which they have been endowed by nature, seems never to be quelled by difficulty or discouragement, nor does it fall. An old proverb says, "When the children are small, they are a burden for a Mother's knees; when they grow up, for her heart." Such service is woman's greatest joy. She lives to serve and to inspire. The fact that she cannot help it shows her kinship with God. In recognition of this, men have, during inspired moments, created the Madonna image, pure beyond their comprehension, endowed with the mystery of creation, and to distinguish her from her Father-Spouse, the artist gives her a femininity all her own, with which she beguiles Him into being lenient with the erring children of the world.

This representation of the Motherhood of God has existed for all people. "To both East and West, the image of the Great Mother--- Womanhood --- is the bridge of ultimate unification." She is the Quick to Aid, She-of-the-Hundred- Hands and Of-the-Thousand-Eyes, She, the Mother of the World, whether in the image of the Kwan-Yin or in the bright colored mantle of the Madonna.

74. Ibid., p.53.