

ARMOUR OF LIGHT

BY NICHOLAS ROERICH

I remember how Puvis de Chavannes found always a sincere, benevolent word for the most different creations. But I cannot forget how another famous artist used to go round all exhibitions but with the foam of bitter criticism on his lips. Once I noticed that he took much longer time in looking at exhibits which he defamed. I noticed that he spent about three quarters of an hour on abuse and only a quarter of an hour on rejoicing. Taking leave of the artist, I said, 'I know how to make you stay longer—by things which are detestable to you!' And the abuse of this artist was most refined, but his praise very poor and dry. Of course in his creativeness Puvis de Chavannes was far higher. Did not the benevolent criticism of Puvis originate because of his greater creative ability?

Why disparage and act maliciously where a general enthusiasm and a general joy of creativeness have been ordained?

Since time immemorial innumerable are the commandments about the beautiful. Whole kingdoms, whole civilizations were built by this great ordainment. To beautify, to ennoble, to uplift life means to reside in the good. All-understanding and all-forgiveness and love and self-denial are generated in the attainment of creativeness.

And should not all young hearts strive for creativeness? And so they do; and plenty of ashes of vulgarity are required to choke this sacred flame! How often can one open new gates to the beautiful by the single call, 'Create, create'! How much decrepitude is expressed in the fossilized programme: first I shall learn to draw, then I shall go over to colours, and after this I shall try to start composition? Innumerable

are the cases when the flame of the heart was extinguished before the pupil reached the forbidden gates of creativeness! But how much joy, daring, and vigilance is developed in the consciousness of those who from their childhood dared to create! How enticingly attractive can children's composition be, before their eyes and hearts become hardened by the all-deadening conditions of standard!

Where are the conditions of creativeness? In the genius, in the imperative tremor of the heart, which calls forth constructiveness. The earthly conditions are of no importance for the creator who has been called. Neither time, nor place nor material can limit this impulse of creativeness. 'Even if imprisoned, an artist will become an artist,' was one of the sayings of my teacher Kuindji. But he also used to say, 'If you have to be kept under a glass-cover, then the sooner you disappear, the better! Life has no need for such touch-me-nots.' He understood well the significance of the battle of life, the battle of light and darkness. A small clerk came to the teacher; the latter praised his work, but the clerk complained: 'Family and office stand in the way of my work.'

'How many hours do you spend in the office?' asked the artist.

'From ten to five.'

'And what are you doing from four to ten?'

'What do you mean, from four to ten?'

'Yes, from four in the morning?'

'But I sleep.'

'Well, then you will spend your whole life sleeping. When I worked as a retoucher with a photographer, our work was from ten to six; but the whole morning from four to nine I had

at my own disposal. And to become an artist even four hours per day are sufficient.'

Thus said the venerable master Kuindji, who, beginning as a shepherd boy, through labour and unfolding of his talent, reached an honourable place in the art of Russia. Not harshness, but knowledge of the laws of life suggested to him his replies, full of realization of his responsibility, full of consciousness of labour and creativeness.

The main thing is to avoid everything abstract. It does not exist in the actuality just as emptiness does not exist. Every recollection of Kuindji, of his teachership, both in the art of painting and in the art of life, always brings to memory unforgettable details. How necessary are these milestones of experience, when they bear witness of tested valour and of actual constructiveness!

I remember, how after my graduation at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, the Imperial Society for the encouragement of fine arts invited me as assistant editor of their periodical. My colleagues were indignant at such combination of activities and prophesied the end of my art. But Kuindji firmly advised me to accept the appointment, saying, 'A busy person succeeds in everything, an open eye perceives everything; but for a blind man to paint is anyhow impossible.' I remember how Kuindji once criticized my painting 'The March'. But half an hour later he returned, short of breath, having run up to the studio, and said smilingly, 'You must not be grieved. The ways of art are innumerable. The main thing is that the song comes right from the heart.'

Another teacher of mine, Puvis de Chavannes, who was full of well-wishing and inexhaustible creativeness, always called with profound wisdom for the labour of self-expansion and the joy of the heart. Love for humanity and joy of creativeness were not dead in him; but one will remember that his first steps were not encouraged. Eleven

years his paintings were not accepted by the Salon. This was a hard testing-stone for the greatness of the heart!

My third teacher, Cormon, always encouraged me to individual independent work, saying, 'We become artists when we remain alone by ourselves.'

Blessed are the teachers, when they lead with a benevolent, experienced hand towards wide horizons. It is a great happiness when one can remember one's teachers with the full tremor of a loving heart.

The teachership of old India, the deep conception of Guru—teacher—is especially touching and inspiring. Yes, it is inspiring to see how a free, conscious veneration for the teacher exists until to-day. Verily, it forms one of the basic beauties of India. No doubt the same conception existed also amongst the old masters of Italy and the Netherlands and among Russian icon-painters. But in these countries it is already a beauty of the past, whereas in India it is living and will not die out, I hope.

Every spiritual impoverishment is shameful. From the subtler worlds the great masters are watching sorrowfully, grieving over the folly of impeded possibilities. In the articles *Spiritual Values*, *Revaluation*, and *Flame—the Transmuter*, we spoke sufficiently about everything that should not be lost at the cross-roads. I cannot forget the deep saying of my deceased friend, the poet Alexander Blok, about the ineffable. Blok ceased to frequent the Religious Philosophical Society because, as he expressed himself, 'They speak there of the unspeakable.' Precisely; there is a limit to words; but there is no limit to feelings, to the capacity of the heart. Everywhere is the beautiful. All pilgrims of the good, all sincere searchers landed at this coast. People may quarrel ever so much and may even become like beasts; but still they will unitedly be silenced at the sound of a mighty symphony and will desist from all quarrels in a museum or under the dome of the Notre Dame in Paris.

The same love of the heart is evoked

when we read in all ordainments the lightnings of beauty.

The Persian apocrypha about Christ is most touching: 'When Christ was walking along with his disciples they came across the carcass of a dead dog, lying near the road-side. The disciples turned away in disgust from the decaying corpse. But the teacher found beauty also in this instance and pointed out the beautifully white teeth of the dog.'

At the hour of passing, Buddha the Lord remembered:

How beautiful is Rajagriha and the cliff of the vulture! Beautiful are the valleys and the mountains. Vaishali! What a beauty!

Every Bodhisattva, besides all his other abilities, has to be perfect in art also.

The Rabbi Gamaliel says, 'The study of the law is a noble work if connected with some art. This occupation, which is accompanied by art, leads away from sin. But every occupation which is not accompanied by art, leads nowhere.' And the Rabbi Lehuda adds, 'He who does not teach his son art, makes of him a highway robber.' Spinoza, who reached considerable perfection in art, answered indeed to this ordainment of harmonization and ennoblement of the spirit.

Of course the high ordainments of India also affirm the same basic significance of the creative art. 'In ancient India art, religion, science were synonymous with Vidyâ, viz, culture.' 'Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram, are the eternally triune manifestation of godhood in man, immutable, blissful, and beautiful.'

Let us remember the Museion—the home of the Muses—of Pythagoras, Plato, and all those great ones, who understood the corner-stones of the foundations of life, and Plotinus—speaking on the beautiful!

From the depths of hard experiences of life, Dostoevski exclaims, 'Beauty will save the world!' Ruskin who glorifies the stones of the past, reiterates the same. A well-known head of the

church looking at paintings, exclaimed, 'A prayer of earth to Heaven!'

The old friend of all creative searchers, Leonardo da Vinci, says,

He who despises the art of painting, despises the philosophical and refined contemplation of the world, for painting is the legitimate daughter, or better to say, grand-daughter of Nature. Everything that exists has been borne by the Nature, and has borne in its turn the science of painting. That is why I say that the art of painting is the grand-daughter of Nature and akin to God Himself. He who defames the art of painting, defames Nature.

The painter must be all-embracing. O artist, may thy multiformity be as infinite as the manifestations of Nature. Continuing what God has commenced, strive to multiply not the deeds of human hands, but the eternal creations of God. Never imitate anyone. And every creation of thine be a new manifestation of Nature!

The 'stubborn sternness' of Leonardo da Vinci,—was it not strengthened by the clear joy for the far off worlds, by the firm prayer of the heart for Infinity?

How many of the best personalities affirmed the prayer of the heart, the prayer for beauty, for the beauty of creativeness, for victories of Light! From all lands, in all ages, everybody affirms the significance of creativeness as the leading principle of life. Ancient monuments retain glorious images of Egypt, India, Assyria, Maya, and China; and are not the treasures of Greece, Italy, France, Belgium, and Germany living witnesses of the significance of highest creativeness?

How wonderful that even now, amidst all spiritual and material crises, we can affirm the kingdom of the beautiful! And we can do this not as abstract idealists, but being armed with the experience of life and strengthened by all historical examples and by the spiritual ordainments.

Remembering the significance of creativeness, humanity must also remember the language of the heart. Are not the parables of Solomon, the Psalms and the Bhagavadgita and all fiery commandments of the hermits of Sinai written in this language? How precious it is to realize that all ordainments lead not to division, limitation,

not to savagery, but to the ascent, the strengthening and purification of the spirit!

Dr. Brinton reminded me, that when leaving America in 1980, I told him, 'Beware of the barbarians.' Since then many barbarians have broken into the domain of culture. Under the sign of financial depression many irremediable crimes have been committed within the walls of the spirit. The list of dark oppressors, like tablets of shame, has indelibly been recorded on charts of education and enlightenment. Uncultured retrogrades hastened to destroy and uproot much in the field of education, science, and art! Shame, shame! Chicago has no funds to pay the municipal teachers. A church in New York has been sold in auction. In Kansas city the capitol has been sold in the same way. And how many museums and schools have been closed! And how many hard-working men of science and art have been thrown overboard! Yet the horse-races were visited by fifty thousand people! Shame, shame! The stones of ancient monuments can cry out against all the apostates of culture, the source of everything blissful and precious. Do not the scorners of culture trample their own well-being? Even the blind ones see more than these gloomy servants of darkness.

'Beware of the barbarians!'

Still we cannot be reconciled with an unstable value. We can unite only on the steps of culture, in the name of everything inspiring, creative, beautiful. Still it will always be considered a good and noble deed to support everything creative and educational. Ascending these steps, we become ourselves enlightened.

Assembling around the sign of culture, let us remember how we addressed womanhood: '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's heart.'

And thus now, times are difficult for the universal abode of culture. And again we hope that the heart of the woman will understand the grief for hampered creativeness, for culture. She will understand the grief for spiritual treasures and will come to aid in realms of the beautiful.

The youth should not be educated upon the wails of despair. When we wrote about the pre-ordained beautiful gardens, we did not lure into illusory domains. On the contrary, we called to the strongholds, affirmed by life. Especially in the days of distress we must affirm the prayer of the heart to the beautiful. We must remember that the beautiful is within the reach of everyone.

To rise from a shepherd boy to venerated masterhood like Kuindji, or for a remote peasant to become a beacon of science, like Lomonosov, is certainly not easy. Seemingly nothing helped them. Everything was as if against them, and yet—'Light conquers darkness!'

As children we liked the book *Martyrs of Science*. It is really necessary that there should also be published books on *Martyrs of the Spirit*, *Martyrs of Art*, *Martyrs of Creativeness*. The life-dramas of Van Gogh, Gauguin, Rider, Vrabel, Mares, and many martyrs for the beautiful make one more unforgettable ordainment which leads the youth. 'Gratitude is the virtue of great hearts'. Let us not only remember the glorious names with gratitude, but let us arm ourselves with the whole of their experience in order to confront all destructive forces of darkness. The experience of creativeness forges all those invincible 'Armours of Light' of which the apostle speaks. Now is an urgent hour, when one must be armed with all the experience of the past, in order not to surrender the stronghold of culture. Now is the time to be aware of the whole spiritual treasure of creativeness in order to repel with this

'Armour of Light' the dark forces of ignorance and to move onwards fearlessly! *Per aspera ad astra!*

Is it not joyful, that we can, notwithstanding varied parties, address every sincere artistic group with the hearty greetings: 'Despite all kinds of disunity, the human spirit turns again to positive constructiveness, when every sincere co-operation is appreciated. Do not many kinds of different flowers grow upon the spring meadows and are they not magnificent in their diversity? Does not this creative multiformity manifest in its fragrance the festival of the spring, which is celebrated by all people since time immemorial?'

Nothing can replace the divine multiformity. So also in the earthly reflection of Divinity, in art, multiformity means bountifulness of the people's spirit. Amidst the disasters of humanity, we feel more the value of creativeness.

May constructiveness and the beautiful desire for the good, in other words, that which is to be laid at the foundation of all activities of a cultural man, resound. Everywhere man feels oppressed under conventional divisions, terrible in their insignificance; he is suffocated by the stench of ignorance, by the poison of non-culturedness, which poisons all existence.

All to whom human dignity is dear, all who strive towards truly pre-ordained perfection, must naturally work together casting off, as shameful rags, the dictionary of malice and lies, remembering that in the dictionary of good there are many non-abstract, really vitally applicable conceptions. And now undeferrably these conceptions must be applied in life, in order that the word ceases being an empty sound, but becomes the actually strengthening factor of creative thought.

Everyone, striving towards the good, knows how valuable are all so-called obstacles, which for a virile spirit are

only measures of strength, and which in their tension work out but a new and transmuted energy.

It is not yesterday that is being affirmed. One can affirm but the tangibility of the future. As long as we shall not be convinced in our hearts of the radiant constructiveness of the future, we shall remain in hazy abstraction. For the future trees are being planted along the road-side, and for the future the milestones are being erected. The builder would not put up milestones, if in his heart he could not know whither this path leads.

We affirm—this path leads to knowledge, to the beautiful; but this knowledge will be freed from all prejudices, and will follow the aims of the good. We affirm—this road leads to beauty, and not luxury or caprice; but everyday's necessity will impel the striving and realization of the beautiful on all paths. We shall not be afraid of the conception of reality. Those who strive in valour, know all conditions of the path.

As the wise ones say, 'Before leaving one does not pronounce unkind words.' The weak ones will say, 'The heart became weary, but what lives in infinite love leading towards realization in discipline of the spirit and in beauty, will not become weary and overfilled. By tension and burdening of the heart we increase our experience. Let us be guided by the beautiful words of the wisdom of the East :

Tire Me now, load Me better, laying upon Me the burden of the world,

But I will multiply the strength.

Dost thou hear? The load will blossom with roses and the grass will be garbed in the rainbow of the morning.

Therefore Tire Me.

When I am nearing the garden of beauty, I do not fear burdens.

In wisdom everything is real, and the morning is real and the beautiful garden is real; and the burden and the weariness of the world and transfigured attainment are also real.