

Defence of Values

BY NICHOLAS ROERICH



PEAKING of the Pact for the preservation of artistic and scientific treasures I agree with you that all conventional Leagues and 'uncultured non-co-operations' as Masaryk called them lead to nothing. From this standpoint Pacts are nothing more than scraps of paper. My idea, however, is very different. For a long time I have been a member of the French Red Cross, having been elected life member, so that I am well aware of the history of this admirable institution, from the day of its foundation by Dunant.

I remember the irony and derision that hailed his idea, and this great Swiss was labelled utopian and mocked at for his impracticable ideas.

Seventeen years of steady labour were required before he was able to realise his humanitarian scheme, and what seemed impossible was eventually realized.

Even to-day, you will find people who take an evil pleasure in stating that Italian bombs recently destroyed the Red Cross hospitals. Barbarous incidents, however, do not affect the lofty ideals of the Red Cross. One can spit at and insult divine images, but this is not likely to change their character. When Millet's Angelus was disfigured by vandals, it did not lose its significance.

My idea concerning the preservation of artistic and scientific treasures aims at creating an international impulse to protect all that is precious and valuable to life.

If the Red Cross sign recalls humanitarianism, then a similar sign ought to remind mankind of its cultural treasures.

From his early school years and throughout all his social manifestations man should have a clear conception of the significance and the importance of art and science.

Pictorial impressions are the most lasting and decisive. If children, then, are taught from their early years to respect the Red Cross of Culture, then their consciousness is much more likely to rise to a higher plane. In our correspondence on such matters, we have received many interesting suggestions. In Paris, the well-known literary paper—*Les Nouvelles Littéraires*—has invited correspondence on the subject and is to publish letters from General Gamelin, Paul Jameau, Ugo Oggetti, Philadelphus and other prominent people. The subject was brought to the fore, in an article, by our friend De la Pradelle concerning the preservation of works of art in times of war. A professor once wrote to me: 'You rouse me and make me ashamed of myself and leave no room for pessimism and dejection.' If a man feels ashamed, then it means that he has begun to ponder over the value of art and science, which we should all do, morning, noon, and night. My effort, then, has been to stimulate thought towards a higher level rather than argue over scraps of paper.

If, as in the case of Dunant, we must put up with all sorts of abuse, this will not discourage us. The archives of literature and the opinions of all sorts of individuals point to endless strife and effort in this direction. Humanity is a long way from peace; nevertheless, on all hands, people to-day aspire towards the 'peace of all the world'.

This would seem to be a sublime utopia, and yet the human heart will never pray for war, even though this remains the infamous condition of our time.

Space is filled with prayers for the peace of the whole world, and, in this saturation of space there is light and optimism. And if it is not to be for us of to-day, then, let us hope that it will be for the humanity which is to come, and which we have been told to love. There may be very different opinions as to the present state of mankind and one can look upon scientific progress with pessimism or optimism. Just now, however, malice and hatred are pouring up from the pit of darkness and it is very difficult for people to see clearly. The weak in spirit do not understand how those who are predisposed to right conduct are often kept apart by trifling prejudices, which we ought to overcome by setting an example to the younger generation. Not so much time now remains for us to labour in this world and to set all forth

we have learnt from our contact with the most varied types of people.

Suspicion, belittlement, indifference there cannot be, where the heart is concerned, and so, let us continue to express the desires of the heart.

In all of us there is a fund of precious recollection which can be of use in all circumstances. You know that I and all of us have to undergo slander. Not long ago a friend wrote from Paris to say that certain people had invented all sorts of fiction about me, going as far as to allege that I did not paint my pictures. All this, however, has no effect because truth is a thing that will out. Long ago it was said—grief to-day, tomorrow joy.
