



GIFTS OF THE EAST

(Diary Leaves)

By His Excellency Prof. Nicholas Roerich

There is before us an ancient Mongol coin. On it are reproduced the sun, the moon and the seven stars of the Great Bear or the Seven Elders. This is a broad dream of the heavens. A dream of miracles and wonders of the Great Blue Sky of Chingiz-Khan.

Verily a broad concept.

Is it not striking that the Mongols bathed their horses in the Adriatic? The Mongols were in Paris, Lyons and Valencia. The Mongols supplied helmets to the army of Philip the Beautiful. Alanconcomes from the Alans. The Alans are esteemed in the Mongolian camps.

All this is boundless, as is also the whole advance of the East to the West, under the sign of Crusades and following the trails of great travellers. The West often forgets how many heritages of the East it has accepted during many ages in the time of Marco Polo, Plana Carpini, Rubruquist, Lonjumo, d'Anselico and other daring spirits.

"The Mongols invasions have left such a hatred behind them that their artistic elements are always neglected. It is forgotten that the mysterious cradle of Asia has produced these quaint people and has enwrapped them in the gorge-

ous veils of China, Tibet and Hindustan. Russia has not only suffered from the Tartars swords, but has also heard through their jingling the wondrous tales known to the clever Greeks and to the intelligent Arabians, who wandered along the Great Road from the Normans to the East.

The mongol manuscripts and the annals of the foreign envoys of those days tell us of an unaccountable mixture of cruelty and refinement with the great nomads. The best artists and masters were to be found at the head-quarters of the Tartar Khans".

Thus I emphasized in my lecture "Joy of Art".

In 1202 the Italian, Leonardo da Pisa, writes the mathematical treatise "Liber abaci" already with Arabic figures. He also uses for the first time the Arabic cipher-zero, voidness, vacuum. Arabic figures! But the Arabs themselves, in full justice, call them Indian figures. Often we come across the Indian cradle. The gifts of the East are unlimited. And even now the khazars, this old tribe, live in Afganistan. Algebra, alidad, zenith, nadir, azimuth and finally Aldebaran, Algol, Altair—they all come from the Arabs, from the East.

From the same source there come many conceptions in

medicine and the natural sciences—alcohol, alambic, alkali, amalgam and many others are from the East. In Spain we see an Arabian university at Cordoba and the same in the South of Italy at Salerno. The physician of the Sultan of Egypt cures Louis IX. The words syrup, julep, elixir, camphor and many others were already recorded in the medicine of the East.

Even in agriculture the East gave useful advices to the West. Maize is from Asia. The sugar cane, rice, indigo, saffron, tea and whole series of fruit trees and vegetables have their home in the East. Many pilgrims carried in their travelling bags various seeds and saturated with them their home countries. The apricot was called the pear of Damask. The eschalot (shallot) is from Ascalon. Artichokes, spinach, estragon—are all from the Arabs. The wines of Cyprus, Ghaza, Ascalon, the raisins of Greece and Palestine are all the gifts of the East. Arabian horses, karabaghs, karashakhs, donkeys, mules, and finally the hunting guepard, so beautifully depicted on the canvasses of Gozzoli—all this is from the vastnesses of Asia. It is stated that even the windmills are from Asia.

The industry of the East has since long tempted Europe. The sugar of Antiochia and Tripoli. The cotton from Beyrut, Aleppo, Akra. The silk from Tyre, Tortosa, Teveriada.

The muslin cloth from Mossul. Moire, taft, chiffon from the Arabs. The carpets from Iran. The Eastern compositions of colour. Leather from Cordova. The celebrated Spanish-Moorish fayence.

In the terminology of seafaring—bussol, admiral, arsenal, mosoon, felucca, corvette, challanda, tartana—all come from the East.

On the battle fields the Eastern armies were mighty enemies. More than once the West during encounters with the East learned new military strategies, discipline, watchfulness and alertness. Powerful orders of knights were inaugurated after coming in contact with the East. Western warriors imitated excellent Eastern armour. Swords of Damask up to now have the reputation of being of highest quality.

Torches (small shields) came from the East. The Saracinian mail armour bakhteretz, the Eastern helmet misurka and a quantity of manifold armour and saddlery has its origin in the East. Let us not forget that the word "ulan" which is applied in many armies, is a purely Mongolian word. In the Russian, Polish and Lithuanian vocabulary there are many Mongolian and other Eastern words, which have become deeply inrooted: essaul (an officer's rank), kuyack (a helmet), meren (a horse), tamga (a seal); yam (a postal station); yarlyck (a label); yar (a steep

river bank), karaul (a watchman); dokha (a furcoat); chumbur (a bridle), argamack (a steed) and many other similar widely applied words.

In the East the crusaders, in order to be distinguished during battle, began to depict on their shields the first symbolic signs, which remained afterwards as coats of arms. Many heraldic animals have their origin in the East: the unicorn, the elephant, the lion, the griffon, the dragon. On our shield the stars are Eastern. The very colouring of the shields even in terminology reminds Iran and other countries of the East.

Innumerable scents, perfumes, pomades and all sorts of cosmetics came from the East. Many terms in the household and of furniture came from these same sources—divan, baldachin, alcove, sunduck, carafe, jar—all is from there, as also the name of many precious stones. Even the word galet reminds us of Galata.

Often the Eastern nations were pictured by prejudiced chroniclers as intolerant, cruel, even treacherous and immoral. Yet at the same time we have irrefutable historical datae about their tolerance, humaneness, honour and charity. We admire the valour and daringness of Chingiz Khan and of many warriors of the East. The Saracens were called by some historians ignorant barbarians, yet at the same time in their

universities and from their cultures in science and art, one could see how they sometimes even excelled the West. Contact with Eastern nations was one of the main impulses of the middle ages. It called forth in several domains of life a kind of awakening—this was a precursor of the renaissance.

In the book "The Duke of Mongolia" there are narrated many testimonials about Mongolia:

The first impression of a foreigner crossing Mongolia, will be unfavourable as regards the military strength of this country, but in reality the military force of Mongolia is not so small, as a casual observer may think. Every mongol is an excellent rider and marksman. The whole population loves hunting as a sport. The Mongols shoot from their saddle, and from childhood are accustomed to archery and lassoing from galloping horses.

The bow and arrow, even quite recently, were the main weapons of the Mongols. Archery competitions are up to now the main entertainment during the annual festival..... A sure eye and a steady hand are required to mark the target when turning back from a horse at full gallop. In this way the Mongols also have become masters of the rifle, with which they acquaint themselves with surprizing ease. Almost no shot in a battle misses its aim.

The mongols love their

country more than many other people. They have many advantages in the defense of their country. They quickly judge distances, are used to the air of the heights: they are clever in manoeuvring across their hilly country. The Mongols can endure great hardships without food and water and can stand the local terrific hurricanes. Besides an active resistance, the Mongols are also very patient and persistent. The Mongol population living in yurtas can leave their whole settlement overnight. The cattle will be driven away, the well will be destroyed and the intruder will find himself in an empty desert without food and water, left to the mercy of the rough nature.

The Mongols can stand a great deal and the heroism described in annals since the time of Chingiz Khan are not fairy tales.

The same may be stated of many peoples in the East. And the West in the past has acquired many gifts from the East. Most religions, philosophies and other most precious treasures of spirit and culture originated in the East, in Asia. Why this is so, is not for us, to judge. The historian can but base himself on reality. And no one can diminish the great value of the gifts of the East.

I was glad to receive the book of Dr. Hara Davan about Chingiz Khan. The author belongs to the East and therefore his enlightened judgement is the more convincing. He knows of what he speaks. He understands the deep culture at the foundation of many great movements, which may be incomprehensible to outsiders. Also the recently deceased Vladmirtzeff correctly evaluated the treasures of Asia.

Gratitude is the quality of Arhats. Following this great ordainment let us be grateful for all great gifts, in all their multifacetness and significance.

Let us remember all the gifts of India. Let us remember how unexpectedly was often expressed appreciation there, where in mediaeval distances one might have expected insufficient knowledge. Dante in his "Paradise" inspiringly mentions the Orient, the Ganges and the Blessed One:

"Die questa costa, la dov'ella
frange
Piu sua ratezza, nacque
al mondo un sole,
Come fa questo talvolta
di Gange.
Pero chi d'esso loco fa parole
Non dica Ascesi, che
direble corto,
Ma Oriente, se proprio
dir vuole."
(Dante, Paradiso).