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Paths of Blessing

By NICOLAS ROERICH

(*The world-famous Russian Artist.*)

III.

HOW are we to bring art into life? Where are these blessed paths? Perhaps they are inaccessibly difficult? Or they may require countless wealth? Or only spiritual giants may venture along these paths?

All assurances will be unconvincing. These doubts can be answered only by a page out of real life.

I shall take the portraits of four of my friends. They have all left us now. Only one of them was rich in money, the other three were rich only in the brightness of their spirits.

The rich collector was the Moscow merchant Tretiakoff. There was nothing in his family to dispose him towards art. Rather did that old merchant family look with suspicion on the art it did not understand. But unexpectedly young Tretiakoff was drawn into a new path. And gropingly, guided by personal feeling, he began to collect pictures of the Russian school. He went his way alone, only now and again listening to the advice of some artist friend. And it was not by chance that the now famous Tretiakoff Gallery in Moscow began to come into being. With the true intuition of the picture-lover, Tretiakoff understood that the Government generally filled its museums mostly with official productions, passing over the best work of the artists. And this official physiognomy of the museums could not reflect the evolution of the national school. So has it ever been. So far, I fear, it will be in the future.

Art has always blossomed with an ardent personal urge, which will comprehend and find and preserve and give to the whole nation. And so the merchant Tretiakoff grasped the national task of art. And he found out fresh artist powers and lightened their path. And he preserved their work, surrounding them with pure delight. But he made his joy a national joy, and while still alive gave the whole of his remarkable collection to the city of Moscow. And the task which he had set himself was no small one. He had not simply gathered together a mass of valuable pictures, but made his collection reflect the whole of the Russian school. Everything that was new, brilliant, important came under the eye of Tretiakoff. This taciturn, grey-headed man, in his large fur coat, indefatigably visited all exhibitions, and nothing could hold him when he considered a picture important. He would mount the steep stair leading to the studio of the young beginner in art. He was first to see a picture finished. He was first at the opening of an exhibition. But he was also first in the possession of the best and most characteristic work.

It came to pass that the prizes given by the highest art institutions were considered as naught compared with the purchase of a picture by Tretiakoff. And the destiny of the beginner in art was decided not by the Academy, but by this sincere and taciturn man. When there was no more room on the walls in his house, Tretiakoff built another beside

it. If this was needed it had to be done. And art was not to suffer any loss.

Of course, it may be said that with Tretiakoff's great wealth it was possible to collect on this vast scale. He was able to choose the best and could gather enough to represent the whole of the Russian school in his collection. It was true that his wealth made this scale possible, but the quality of the collection, his love of the work, and his living creative work in the choice itself of pictures and of men—all this proceeded not from the amount of his means, but from the countless riches of his spirit. Thus did one man, strong in spirit, do an infinitely important national work. And now, should the Government seek to have a new Tretiakoff Gallery, it would find itself powerless, for it was the urge of the spirit that created that inimitable combination of beauty.

This is an instance of ideal creativeness within national limits.

Now for another spiritual portrait. Here we have the same power of spiritual urge along with a mighty struggle with means. It was Count Golenishtcheff-Koutousoff, a well-known poet and worker in the sphere of culture and Chamberlain at the Imperial Court. In his case family traditions conduced to the development in him of the love of art. His historical knowledge was great, special deep poetic gifts were his.

His collection consisted of pictures of the old Dutch, Flemish and Italian schools. Its fundamental characteristic was not the search for conventional names but the truth shown in wonderful creations. The collector understood that the names of Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Dyke are purely collective names, that only the lowest type of collector seeks in the dark for that which to him is but an empty sound. But a better knowledge of art shows us a countless number of artists engulfed in so-called great names. And the task of the cultured collector is to distinguish among these forgotten names for truth's sake. If on an excellent picture attributed to Rembrandt we find the signature of Karel Fabricius, his pupil—is a fine

picture any the worse for that? Or, again, could Van Dyke paint two thousand portraits in one year? Of course not, but he had up to two hundred pupils.

I know how grieved the Count would be to learn that one of his favourite pictures, by an unknown Flemish painter Haselaer, now hangs in the Metropolitan Museum in New York under the name of Joachim Patinir.

In the name of truth, Count Golenishtcheff-Koutousoff sought to discover the real names of painters and remedied, as far as he could, the sins of mercenary human history. And what loving intimacy breathed from his choice collection. Every picture, too, had been obtained with difficulty, with privation. Every new member of the collection was greeted with the disapproval of numerous relations who grudged the money spent on it. And money was so scarce. His small Court salary was not enough to live on. And this collector departed this world surrounded by his real friends, his pictures. And he willed that his collection be dispersed to give new joy to new seeking souls.

Golenishtcheff-Koutousoff was the type of the refined collector, who, working and rejoicing in new beauty and truth, sends it forth again to serve for the ennobling of the human spirit.

Now for the type of a young collector—an instinctive collector from his school-days. Instead of the joys natural to his age, the boy develops a love for works of art. From childhood, without possessing any personal artistic capacities, he is distinguished by education and developed taste. He is attracted by all that is beautiful. His spirit seeks to rise.

What pleasure it was to pass the time with young Sleptsoff. While yet a pupil of the Imperial Lyceum, he began to collect pictures. His purchases were not chaotic, not accidental. He knew what he was doing. And all the money given the boy by his mother for pleasures was spent on his noble pursuit. And if sometimes he was short of money, his enthusiasm for his general task never suffered from this.

And this general task was a fine one. The boy developed a love for certain very subtly selected painters, and decided to have specimens of each of them in all the periods of their work—to preserve and to hand on to posterity a complete picture of the creative human life of each. The youth dreamt of the future: each painter was to have a separate room and the whole furnishing of the room was to correspond with the character of the art represented in it—the furniture, the embellishment of the walls and ceiling, the character of the lighting and the floor covering. From this we may gather what subtlety of perception lay in that young soul and what deep love and care surrounded each of the artists represented. In these special rooms choice singing and music were to be heard at times. Or suitable passages were to be read aloud. In a word the dream of harmony of the unity of art was to be realised.

It was a joy to hear how a new work of art was selected for the collection. What subtle and truthful considerations were expressed for discovering and bringing out a new and worthy feature in the creative work of an artist. And you could see in this treatment of art no mere fancy, but a real cultural need. And this subtlety of culture infected those surrounding him. Both thought and speech were purified by this bright ascension of the spirit.

Sleptsoff dreamt of handing over his collection to the nation, without any care for his name. But he left us too early to do so. And he left us in an unusual way. He went out for a ride and did not return. He passed over unexpectedly, in the midst of Nature, listening to the harmony of the Cosmos. An enviable passage—a passage to new beautiful labours.

This was the type of a sensitive soul with ingrained feelings of a future harmony and unity.

Now for one more touching type of a collector.

A very poor officer in a line regiment, stationed in a distant provincial town, reaches out to art with all his soul. Depriving himself of many things, Colonel

Kratchkovsky, always pleasant in manner, always active, burning with enthusiasm, seeks to gather a collection of specimens of Russian painting. Of course he is unable to collect large pictures. So he collects small pictures—sketches, studies, drawings. But in its essential value his collection becomes a very considerable one. He seeks for the best painters; he understands that often the sketch is more valuable than the picture itself. He seeks to bring out the character of the artist in its most typical features. This is not a buyer of cheap pictures. This is a true collector. And therewithal he himself is often in want of ten roubles (five dollars), and for him it is a matter of the greatest consequence whether he has to pay ten roubles more or less for a picture. And he asks the painter to let him have the picture and persistently persuades him to a lower price. And his words produced their effect and the sketches were given him. And he would rejoice with the bright joy of a child, and would write enthusiastic letters about his new treasure. How he loved art, and with what lofty meaning he surrounded the conception of true creative work!

In his will he bequeathed the whole of his collection for public use. More than that, he commanded that all his modest property, all that he had in daily use, be sold, and the proceeds applied to the purchase of more works of art which were to be added to his collection.

This is the type of an outwardly unnoticed but deeply important worker for the culture of the future. His example drew the attention of many. And if you could see his letters written from the battlefield! His was a pure soul. Colonel Kratchkovsky left us during the late war.

I might show you many more characters, full of noble seeking in different spheres of art. But even these four types show the level of those cultural aspirations which are so necessary for humanity.

So do things happen; not in dreams, but in real life—sincerely and actively. And such pure labours are accompanied by a smile of joy. How near are the

seekings of art to the attainments of the spirit.

It is time to understand, to note and to apply to life these wondrous channels.

And when art has entered actively, irresistibly and simply into all spiritual

developments of public life, then it will be brought also into the whole of modern life.

And it is through these channels that the true paths of blessing will draw near to every human heart.

Books of the Month

Nature as Healer—A Blavatsky Book—The Outspoken Dean—Prohibition in America

By S. L. BENSUSAN

A YEAR ago Mr. Clement Jeffery delivered a series of lectures on Nature Cure at Mortimer Hall, London, and a selection from these has now been published under the title of "The Philosophy of Nature Cure" (London, C. W. Daniel, Ltd.). I have read the seven papers of which the book is composed, not only with considerable interest, but with a certain limited conviction. It is possible to set out very briefly and in general terms, the author's theories. He has a profound disbelief in drugs; he holds that proper diet, massage and osteopathy are the great contributory forces to good health, and he is a believer in Iridology, that is to say, he holds that Nature writes on the iris of the eye her own indications of the state of the body. This belief has a large following, and several popular exponents on the far side of the Atlantic. There are lengths to which the mere layman cannot go in company with Mr. Jeffery, and his theory that all acute disease is a healing effort of Nature, is one that will make some, at least of the judicious, grieve; but whatever the points of detail in which we may join issue with the author, the fact remains

that he is pointing the way to a realm in which long-forgotten truths may enrich this century with a very valuable harvest. Gradually we are becoming aware of the part that the mind can be trained to play in controlling the organs of the body. We all know that suggestion has a very definite value, that faith can effect cures, that many of the followers of Christian Science are justified by personal experience of the belief that is in them. The doctors themselves admit that the Victorian age over-dosed and over-drugged, and that we are on the eve of great changes must be apparent to all who study the slow progress of the new thought. Yet it is well to remember that there are very grave dangers associated with unlimited belief in the unqualified practitioner. What is wanted above all things, is a properly mapped out course with a degree from some body that stands above suspicion to be won by all who wish to practise a new art of healing or to put their novel theories into practice. If this is not done, we shall find quackery rampant, confusion everywhere, and nothing but discredit for all new ideas. This way reaction lies. So far as I am able to see, the progress of Occult Science and even the proper