A Friend of Mankind

By NICHOLAS ROERICH

A great friend of mankind has passed away. I speak of Charles Crane. Manifold and fruitful was his life and in all parts of the world he will be warmly remembered. Crane belonged to one of the old American families and his life was one of ceaseless activity. In childhood, being drawn to the East he joined a schooner as a ship-boy and this first cruise of his showed all his longing for far-off lands.

Charles's father was one of the largest industrialists of America and wished his son to stay in the factory. From his fifteenth year Charles was acquainted with the workshop and this gave him a practical knowledge of the industry. Later we see him in close partnership with Westinghouse, but such an activity never filled his soul. Gradually he turned away from direct participation in the factories and dedicated himself to the wider activities of the diplomat and humanist.

We remember Charles Crane as ambassador in Peking, where he is highly esteemed and afterwards as honorary advisor to the Chinese Government. We know of Crane's friendship and meetings with Ibn Saud of Arabia, with Feisal of Iraq and with the leaders of Egypt. After this he goes to India and then to Russia. If his activity was great the significance of his humanitarian work was greater, as a multitude of facts can witness.

Who sent a shipload of provisions to Mt. Athos to save the monastery from starvation and poverty?—Crane. Who helped Czechoslovakia and Masaryk?—Crane. Who gave funds for educating students in other countries?—Crane. In Syria, in Switzerland, in China, students and scholars will always remember the generous hand which helped them on their difficult way. In his hospitable home one could always meet with scholars, writers, artists, diplomats and social workers, in other words outstanding people from various countries. For some he arranged lecture tours, for others recitals, stage work, exhibitions. He helped universities, museums and hospitals. Vast anonymous support was given everywhere where there was need for it. Verily one can say that no one ever left Crane without some encouragement and heartfelt assistance. A special trait of Crane's character was his extreme sensitteness and responsiveness. No one could stop him when he felt that he could help. Many cultural and philanthropic organizations had his name on their
lists of honour. He was also Honorary Advisor of our Institutions.

More than once during his travels Crane was subject to great dangers but nothing could keep him back. In Iraq he escaped death from a shot fired by bandits thanks to a happy coincidence. His best humanitarian deeds were sometimes misinterpreted. Crane's attachment to the East was remarkable, and not only did he like to travel in the East, but he had a deep understanding of its people and its majestic beauty. He did not cross Asia or Egypt as a casual tourist but as an old friend.

To us Russians the name of Crane is especially dear. He was often in Russia, knew and appreciated the Russian people and admired Russia's ancient art. The last time he was in Moscow about two years ago we received a remarkable letter, in which he gave favorable impressions of his trip. The opinion of such a connoisseur is most valuable. If only the Russian people could have more such friends!

Crane's art collection comprised Russian and Oriental art. He had many Russian paintings, tapestry and other art objects. On the walls of his houses and villas one could see Samarkand, Mt. Athos, Rostov-the-Great, Benares, Tibet, the Himalayas—in other words, everything to which his great soul was attracted. Towards the end of his life, after a severe illness, he expressed his desire to see the Near East. And last September he visited Egypt and for the last time admired the grandeur of the pyramids.

Before his passing Crane wrote to us for my painting "And We Open The Gates". His spirit was already aspiring to the open gates where dwells eternal beauty and where thought creates the future happy life. On Feb. 14th Charles Crane left this earthly world but his memory will live on in all countries. His many friends will cherish in their hearts the memory of this great friend of mankind.