ERDENI MORI
(Mongolian Epics)

By Nicholas Roerich

[The great Russian artist and philosopher and the recognised authority on Asia, Prof. Nicholas de Roerich has just returned from an extensive expedition in Mongolia. The Twentieth Century is privileged to publish these Diary Leaves, (chronicled in Timur Khada), which have such an exclusive significance today.]

I

In folk-lore and sagas we meet with the white steeds of heroes. We know of the white steed of St. George. We know of the white horses of St. Flora and St. Laurus. We have also met with the white fiery Pegasus.

We have seen the white horses of the Lithuanian ancient god Svetovit. And the Germanic Valkyries also were riding on white steeds.

We have heard of the white horse of Isphagan in ancient Iran. We have seen the huge steeds of Arjuna, the guardians of the Temple.

We have heard of the steed of Ghessar-Khan, the great hero of ancient Asia and we have seen the trails of its hooves on the rocks in Tibet. We knew of the steeds from Himavat with the blessed treasure Chintamani.

Erdeni Mori—the white steed—is the Mongolian carrier of the same treasure of happiness.

On Chinese paintings the white deer carries the same fiery sacred sign on its horns, as if like the deer of St. Hubertus. And the trail of the white horse marks the
boundary of the Wall of China. All heroes are on white steeds. And also in Mongolia Tzagan Mori—Erdeni Mori is the white steed, venerated in all legends. The Ruler of Shambala, Rigden Japo, also is seen riding on it and the steed appears in a wondrous flame. And when the people await the future, then the great Ruler directs the waiting ones towards the predestined.

Verily the white steeds in all folk-lore belong to the hero. But sometimes the wise white horse brings alone the great message.

On Scythian bronzes the predominant place is given to the horse. They of course carry the traditions. And in fairy tales most prophetic qualities are attributed to the white steed. The hero enters into one ear of the horse and comes out wise from the other ear. In sagas the horse warns the warrior of danger. The steed never survives its master. And in burial mounds the bones of the horse are always inseparably with those of the hero.

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To-day Mongolia is on everyone's tongue. Let us listen to some Mongolian prophecies.

Listen to the prophecies of the wise Mongolian seer Molon Baksha, as written down by his grandson Sangey Zibikoff and translated by the Mongol Shagdoroff and Shagdor Dabayev.

In the year of the cycle of the pig, there will be an earthquake. In the year of the dog there will be confusion amongst those who have power. A great hero will be born in a little hut. And a great Khan will pass by, attracting no one's attention. Near the house troops will pass. People who have no claim to nobility will become rulers and will govern the people. Honest people will withdraw and will take a place near the threshold; whereas liars will take possession of homes.

There shall come a time when truth will be overpowered by
hypocrisy. The spotted serpent will eat its own head, and the red-spotted serpent will devour the flesh of his own body. The horse eating its body shall also consume its head. Hence a chief who embezzled the people's property, shall pay with his head.

And there will come a time when a wooden cart will cost as much as a horse. For the bad horse the road is long and for a miser a friend is far. As the dead one has no title, so the poor one has no property.

You will fell timber with an axe which has no handle.

An iron serpent will obscure the earthly light—and the whole world is a fiery serpent.

In 1904 there will be a great event.

In the year of the ox there will again be a great occurrence. In the year of the tiger there will be destruction. The year of the hare will be the year of patience and endurance.

On the eastern boundary there will be robbery, because the chiefs will let the wolf upon a herd of sheep enclosed in a yard.

There will come a time that will be called: "neither mine nor yours", a travelling brass kettle and a leather yagtan will be needed.

The fiery serpent will dominate everywhere during the time of migrations.

From the side where the sun rises will appear a miraculous white stone with an inscription. If you try to obliterate the inscription with an axe, it will appear again.

Beyond this stone will be the desert, which you will reach. Those who can reach this region will again become human, and the animals will again turn into animals. It will be hard for the senile ones and for children. Loads will be carried even on oxen, cows and horses. Images and books you will have to carry yourselves. For the old ones you will have dry meat and fry barley. To drink black tea is nourishing.

And further Molon Baksha foretold that later there will come two—four men who will subdue unrest and will construct a religious righteous state.

Molon Baksha died at the age of eighty in the year of the ox. His song was:
Why does the reed wave
On the right side of the Selenga?
Why does the reed wave
On yonder side of the Kudara?
And foreseeing sufferings in life
Why do I already feel sorrow?

When singing this song he used to cry.

* * *

And there is another prophecy:

The great people of Kidan will not perish. They will meet the people of Shambala. They will carry most reverently the sacred images and will honour the country's laws.

On the white stone they will read and will call for the great Teacher to reveal the word of truth.

From great bonfires the inscription on the stone will shine. What is coming? Why does the steppe grass move? Who is coming?

Erdeni Mori itself comes. Erdeni Mori itself approaches. And the people will not remain in their previous state.

What shines above the steppe grass? Why do the holy obo (cairns) radiate? Why is the great Suburgan already alight?

There, where Erdeni Mori has passed, the steppe grass glimmers. There the wolves become silent.

And the falcons hasten their flight.

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From ancient times Erdeni Mori appears and its treasure radiates. At sunrise and at sunset everything is submerged into silence, this means that somewhere the great white steed, carrying the treasure, is passing. As long as the people know of the ordained treasure, they will remain on the righteous path. Their path, although long and unusual, is inevitable. As inevitable as is the service to perfection. For someone it may be a fairy tale, and for another it is a reality. And someone will become afraid. And others will unfold the pages of the given book.
The book of doves also came from heaven. And the treasure came from above. And not soon was a wise man found to read the book. And many peoples remember these given great gifts. And to all evil ones the light is unbearable. Why are they so horrified? They are afraid of themselves, they have not read the great book and they have turned away from Light. And having turned away from a small light, how can their eyes stand the brilliant radiance of the Great Light!

Menhe Tengri!...........
...........the great blue sky, which Chingiz Khan worshipped! Endless are the plains of Mongolia. Boundless are the steppes! Numberless are the mountains, hills, ranges and ravines, where the glory is hidden!

It seems that the desert is lifeless, but suddenly there appears a camp on the slope. Behold, many yurtas rise and unexpectedly there shines a white monastery or suburgan. And a small blue lake glimmers in the distance.

And again the desert becomes lifeless. And again riders in bright kaftans and in yellow kurmas and red-topped hats approach with the speed of the wind. The saddles are silver-laid, just as they were in the times of Chingiz Khan. But where are the arrows and bows? Long are their rifles on the back.

And again there is silence. But the dark outline of the caravan proceeds. The steppes are spotted with herds of black yaks. Droves of fine horses are scattered over the desert. Like snow the herds of white sheep glitter in the sun. Antelopes rush along the hillside. A marmot disappears in a hole. Camels, wolves, foxes, hares......

Where are the birds? Only an eagle circles in the heights. Black ravens appear here and there. A lark sings its beautiful song. A partridge and a quail fly up. And
from the lake comes the noise of geese and ducks. A bustard runs along swiftly. Cranes and herons are flying in formation. Many birds!

From where comes thy great silence, beautiful desert? Does it come from thy boundlessness? Does it come from the high blue heavenly dome, from the great Tengri, which was always benevolent towards Chingiz?

At night all starry signs shine. The beautiful stellar runes are awakening. The Book of Glory is open. Beyond the hills a ray of light flashed.

Who is there? Who passed there? Erdeni Mori!

On the rocks of Shara Muren are the signs of the treasure. Naran Obo guards the miraculous stone. Everywhere Erdeni Mori has passed.

II

The banner of Chengiz Khan was white. In different campaigns he used various symbols—the lion, the steed of happiness, the falcon, or the panther. Fundamentally the colour of the Mongols is blue.

The laws of the Great Khan are extant even to this day, and we may recall many which are applicable to our present life. His severe penalties for theft, murder, adultery and other offences, could be placed upon the pages of our law even in the present times. Similarly with his other official acts, his orders to his officers and his steps for the progress of his country were broadly introduced by the Great Khan.

In order to prevent pride and vanity among the khans, Chengiz Khan forbade the adoption of pompous titles. Freedom of religion and speech were observed and the love of God
acknowledged. Clergy and physicians were freed from public taxes. Capital punishment was prescribed for spies, perjurers, sorcerers and those who accepted bribes. The marriage laws forbade marriage between the next of kin. And to raise the sense of honour, it was forbidden to employ one's next-of-kin as servants. To abolish intoxication Chengiz Khan constantly discountenanced the use of strong beverages and urged his people to eliminate the use of these entirely.

A regulation is also known to have aimed at the abolishing of excessive superstitions. The ordinances of Chengiz Khan encouraged hospitality among his nomad population and insured the safety of travellers throughout the vast extent of his empire. Rules were given in regard to camp sites and divisions of yurtas were made into tens, hundreds and thousands.

Along the caravan routes military stations with guards were established and at intervals of a day's journey posts for horses were set. The army was divided into divisions of tens, hundreds, thousands and ten thousands. Capital punishment was meted out to all officers who deserted their posts.

Judging by everything which has come down to us, Chengiz Khan was a great leader and organizer.

"The Lord preserve us from the Mongols!" Such were the inscriptions found in destroyed cities of Asia. Danish fishermen did not venture into the open sea for fear of a Mongolian invasion.

This is one of the earliest descriptions of the Mongols, presented to Europe in the thirteenth century, which was created by fear and terror:

Lest human joys be especially prolonged, and the world's benevolence endure too long without tears, [wrote Matthew Peris in the year 1240], reviling creatures of Satan himself, the count-
less Tartar hordes broke loose and swept out of the boundaries of
their encampments surrounded by mountains. Swarming like
locust over the earth, they brought terrible devastation to Western
Europe and by fire and sword reduced it to a wasteland. They
are inhuman, bestial, more monsters than men. They thirst for
blood and gorge themselves with it. They rend and devour dogs
and human flesh and dress in skins with their chests and backs
naked except for armour. They are small in stature, stocky, hairy
invincible. With zest they drink the pure blood of their herds.
Their horses are stout, strong and eat branches and even trees.
Due to their short thighs they have to mount these horses with
the aid of three-stepped ladders. . . . . They know no laws; they
are completely lacking in any idea of comfort and are more
ferocious than lions or bears. . . . . they have pity neither for age
nor sex nor position. . . . . they know no language to converse in
besides their own, which no one understands, because up to recent
times there was no contact with them and they themselves never
came beyond the boundaries of their country. Thus there is no
information available about their customs and personalities, such
as is gained through the mutual intercourse of people. They
travel with their herds and wives and the latter are accustomed to
fight as well as the men. To the destruction of Christendom,
they suddenly appear and with the speed of lightning ravage and
annihilate everything on their way, terrorizing everyone and
arousing terrific hatred everywhere.

This was the reputation of the Mongols when their name
first reached Europe, accompanied by the sensational terror
which usually preceded their attacks. The very word
Tartar aroused terror; they were considered the scourge of
God. The old writers called them the "plague of God",—
demons sent against men in punishment.

Europe did not regard the Mongols as human beings.
It denied them the honour of being enemies or customary
adversaries and considered them some sort of superhuman
creatures. In those times Europeans sincerely believed that
Mongols had dogs' heads and devoured human flesh. This
was the sort of wild terror that gripped Europe before the appearance of the Tartars. The danger which threatened humanity was regarded as so extreme that even Danish fishermen did not venture into the open sea for fear of Mongols.

The same picture is apparent at that time within the boundary of the Far East as well as in the Far West—on the shores of the Pacific as well as on shores of the Black Sea. One of the Chinese historians of that period exclaims with dismay that “since the creation of the world, no nation has been as powerful as the present Mongols. They devastate entire countries more easily than we pluck grass. Why do the heavens permit it!”

Another writer, describing the consequences of Mongolian supremacy, significantly remarks that “in Asia and Western Europe a dog can hardly bark without the permission of the Mongols.”

After overwhelming all Asia and reaching the threshold of Europe, the Mongolian invasion seemed such an ominous threat that the rulers of Europe began frantically to take council with each other as to ways of meeting the threatening danger. It was decided to undertake united resistance against this human deluge, as no single country could cope with it alone. No proof is more evident of the fear which these Mongol hordes inspired, even within the limits of the greatest European countries of that period, than the call of Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor, to the entire Christian world to repel the invasion of the dreaded Mongols. Just imagine an appeal addressed to “Germany, ardent in battles, France, nursing at her bosom a fearless army, militant Spain, England, powerful in men and ships, Crete, Sicily, wild Hibernia, and cold Norway”, asking them to organize international crusades against the nomad conquerors who came
to Europe from far-off Mongolia.

Once during the conquest of Persia by the Mongols, a few Mongols met some Persians and not having any arms with them, told the Persians to keep sitting by the roadside until they go to fetch their swords to behead them. And the Persians calmly obeyed. Thus history tells us.

Excerpts from the manifesto of Frederick II eloquently describe the "Mongol terror" which surrounded Europe in 1240.

These people, [wrote the Emperor], have emerged from the far ends of the world, where they have long been concealed in an atmosphere of terrific climatic extremities and have suddenly and brutally swept upon the Northern countries, swarming like locusts. No one knows whence this fierce race has gained its title of Tartar, but one thing is certain, it is apparently God's will that this race has been preserved from prehistoric days as a weapon to scourge people for their transgressions and mayhap even for the fall of Christendom. This brutal savage people has not the least conception of humane principles. They have a leader whom they revere and whose command they blindly obey, calling him the earthly god. They are small in stature, stocky, strong with great resistance, and have unbreakable faith. At the least sign from their leader they throw themselves with reckless valour against the most incredible perils. They have broad faces, slanting eyes and emit the most terrifying shrieks and outcries, which indicate vividly the savagery of their hearts. They know no other raiment except the skins of oxen, asses and horses and up to now their armour is only crudely and badly-soldered iron plates. But now—and we cannot mention this without shudder—they begin to improve their armour by looting that of the Christians. Soon the Lord's wrath will descend on all of us and these barbarians will begin to kill us, to our shame, with our own weapons. The Tartars already are learning to dress richly and elaborately and at present they eat the most savoury food. They ride beautiful horses and are inimitable archers. It is said that their horses, when they have no other fodder, eat foliage, bark and roots of trees and yet preserve their courage, strength and agility.
Thus Europe estimated the Mongol conquerors. In later times these estimates become more exact and more detailed. For instance, Timur, instead of the former evaluation of a destroyer, received from the French savant, Grousset, a completely different estimate. Grousset says that Timur “who combines the subtle strivings of Iran-Hindu culture with the austere mould of an ascetic, appears as one of the most colourful figures of the Indo-Iranic world”. Thus the great son of Chengiz Khan in the clan of Barlass is presented in a new light by the reflective scientist Grousset. Similarly, many rulers of the world, who were hastily condemned, as quickly revealed themselves in a completely different light. Is this not the case in Russian history with Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great?

In recalling the description of Grousset and the notes of Plano Karpini about the interest in arts and sciences of Mongolia, we may consider that the Mongolian apotheosis reached the zenith in Akbar the Great. Of course there have been prejudiced judgments of him as a bloodthirsty tyrant, but there has finally emerged a brilliant picture of the resplendent unifier and cultured ruler of a great country. And to this luminous image of Akbar, already apparent, new studies can only add new valuable signs. And the wisdom of the people, which is just at its base, will add the aureole of a saint to the image of the Great Emperor. Thus through the centuries the people can revere a consistently great service. In regard to the characteristics of Mongols, I also recall other notes by contemporaneous travellers. There are many valuable and benevolent tokens. One should likewise remember the sacred Mongolian books, with their covenants about the Bodhisattvas and their admonitions to compassion, self-sacrifice and help to one’s neighbour. Let us also recall the Nestorian times. In short, let us not in any way dispar-
age that which was so real a factor in the life of this strong and courageous people.

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How many beautiful hours we recall from our own travels in Mongolia. I remember the hearty greeting of welcome of the Mongol Rin-chin. How much we valued also the fiery exclamation of the grey-headed Buriat, "Light conquers darkness!" I remember how valiantly the Mongols acted in our encounter with bandits. I remember the building of the Suburgan and the gracious offering of their treasures. If we go by the marks of benevolence we will find many of them. No matter how often a nation finds rebirth, its foundations still prevail. The same may be observed with many other peoples. Circumstances may change, bringing happiness or ill-fortune, but the soul of the people remains. And one may trace this folk soul by its ancient songs, its sayings and its parables. In these indestructible folk mementoes, one can find the worthiest characteristics.

In the laws of the Mongolian Khans, in the heroic epic of these people, is reflected a nature that is firm, courageous, often ascetic, patiently enduring the vicissitudes of their time.

And perceiving these covenants of the past, which have not been lost in the currents of the present day, should we not help this people, which desires peaceful progress?

There was a time when the circumstances of life and the yearnings of their heart enticed the Mongols into far-off places, because man often thinks that the beyond is more alluring—"splendid are the drums beyond the mountains". But contemporary thought has directed the Mongols towards the treasures of their own lands. To appreciate our own possessions, to learn to evaluate that which is defined by destiny, is a great accomplishment. It so happens that the
Mongols as such, having concerned themselves with remote places, did not as yet exhaust their own inner treasures. Not to use, means not to waste. Therefore it is but just to direct attention to Mongolia with benevolence and friendship.

No one will make the error of exclaiming again "Lord preserve us from the Mongols." On the contrary, thoughtful persons will send hearty wishes for the peaceful regeneration of their people.

Rigden Djapo himself, in resplendent armour, is galloping on. The Mongols do not forget the visions of the Great Lama in 1927. So it is also said in the prophecies:

On the slope towards the sunrise a white stone will be revealed with an inscription . . . . and though you hew out this inscription it will never disappear, but will for ever emerge again".

Greetings to our Mongolian friends. Greetings to Mongolia!

Tzong-Kha-Pa in his Teaching "Lam-Rim-Chen-Po" ordains:

As the shadows of birds flying in the sky, move together, so also good and evil deeds follow the living beings.

Do not neglect even the smallest sin, thinking that it may be harmless. The accumulation of drops of water by and by fills even a large vessel.

Habits for good and evil deeds constantly dominate over man. Deeds, even over a hundred world-periods will not disappear, but will accumulate, and when the time is ripe, their consequences will arise for the reincarnated.

How happy are the travellers who have taken care to carry along sufficient food, so also living beings who have done good deeds, ascend to a blissful life.

The Lama proclaims:

Let life be firm as adamant; victorious as the banner of the Teacher; mighty as eagle and may it last for eternity.

Callingly resounds the conch-shell over the vastnesses of Mongolia!
Monologues identify private concerns. Communication with remote places did not yet capture their command. Resonance from the past to us, meant not to write. Instead, it is pure ideal to garner.

Extension to monology with perception and knowledge. To imagine solutions to the future, the condition begins. To engage with the monologue, to observe the eponymous page. The promise of achievement within the present, the secular intervention we find ourselves in need of. I remember.

I remember how the people had no light. I remember how the people had no power. I remember how the people had no freedom.

The principle is simple: to engage the world with the present, to engage the world with the present, to engage the world with the present.

In these instances, the politics of the imagination.

In the imaginary world, where people speak for a cause, where people speak for a place, where people speak for a time.

These are the moments when the imagination can be a tool for change. It is through these moments that we can begin to imagine a world where people can speak freely, where people can act with purpose, where people can be heard.

Through the power of imagination, we can create a world where people are not bound by the limitations of the present. We can create a future where people are free to express themselves, where people are free to be who they want to be.

This is the moment. This is the opportunity. This is the time to imagine a world where people can be free. This is the moment to imagine a world where people can be heard. This is the time to imagine a world where people can be seen.