Himalaya
(Diary Leaves)
By NICHOLAS ROERICH

ANY expeditions are striving to conquer the gorgeous peaks of the Himalayas. Severely the unconquered giants meet the daring intruders. Again Everest refused to welcome the new-comers. And Nanga Perbat does not facilitate matters in the attempted conquest. And the Kinchenjunga peak is not even contested. And yet from all sides various nations aspire to reach the resplendent Himalayan summits. Such a procession turns into homage of pilgrims to the highest of the world.

The local lamas smile mysteriously when they hear that yet another attempt was defeated. If they have confidence in you they will tell you in whisper some ancient prophecies which assert that certain sacred summits will never be defiled. Not long ago a well-known lama, who is now dead, told us: "Curious people are the pelings, why do they undertake such dangers in the physical body, when we can visit these summits and do so in our subtle body?"

Indeed in every striving to the summits, in every ascent is contained an untold joy. An inner impulse irresistibly calls people towards the heights.
If someone would begin to trace historically these aspirations, having the Himalayas as their goal, an unusually significant study would result. Truly if one could trace back the force of attraction of these heights for a thousand years one could readily see why the Himalayas have been called "Incomparable". Since times immemorial innumerable tokens of Divinity have been connected with this country of mountains. Even in the dark middle ages remote countries dreamt of beautiful India, which was epitomised in the imagination of people by the mysterious sacred snowy giants.

Let us try mentally to compare all these beautiful legends, which could only be conceived in the Himalayas. First of all, we will be astonished at the amazing diversity of this heritage. It is true that this wealth of legends has originated in the accumulations of many tribes, becoming more bounteous through the grateful contributions of many milleniums, and are crowned by the achievements of great seekers after truth. All this is so. But for such supreme achievements, a magnificent environ is necessary, and what could be more majestic than the unconquered mountains with all their inexpressible radiance and all their exquisite variation of forms.

It would be a rather unfortunate and feeble effort to compare the Himalayas with any of the other splendid mountain ranges of the world. The Andes, the Caucasus, the Alps, the Altai—all the most beautiful heights will appear to be but single peaks when compared with the supreme mountain ranges of the Himalayas.

What does it not encompass, this multiform Beauty? Tropical approaches, alpine slopes and, finally, all the incalculable glaciers, powdered with metoric dust. No one describes the Himalayas as overwhelming; no one would dare to call them gloomy portals, nor mention the word monotony, in thinking of the Himalayas. Truly a great part of the human vocabulary must be forgotten when you enter the realm of the Himalayan Snow—the part of one's vocabulary comprising its sinister and effete expressions.

The human spirit, seeking to overcome all obstacles, is filled with a yearning which irresistibly impels one onward towards the conquest of these summits. And the very difficulties which at times loom so dangerous, become only the most necessary and the most desired steps of ascent, overcoming earthly conventionality. All the dangerous bamboo bridges over the thundering mountain torrents; all the slippery steps on the age-old glaciers over perilous precipices, all the unavoidable inclines before each successive ascent; and the storms, thunder and cold and heat are surmounted, when the chalice of achievement is full.

Not the feelings of ambition nor boastfulness alone could inspire so many travellers and searchers to go to the Himalayas. Other difficult peaks could be found for competition and contests. But above all thoughts of competition and contests is a yearning towards these world magnets, an ineffable holy aspiration, of which heroes are born.

The true magnets are not competitive laurels of contests nor the fleeting front pages of books and newspapers, but the attraction to this surpassing grandeur which sustains the spirit; and in such striving there can be no harm.

"Is this another tribute to the Himalayas?" one may ask.

But does the solemn grandeur of the Himalayas need any tributes?

Of course, in this case tributes are out of place; and any of them, even the most excellent, can be but feeble echoes. But then, why does one think of the Himalayas, why are we seemingly compelled to think of them, remember them and strive towards them?

Because even mental communion with their solemn grandeur provides one of the best of tonics. Everything is impelled towards the beautiful in its own way. Everyone thinks about beauty and he will feel an impulse to say something or other about it. The thought of Beauty is so powerful and moving, that man cannot contain it silently within himself, but always tries to clothe it in words. Perhaps in song or in some other expression of his being, man must manifest and record his thought of the Beautiful.
From the tiniest flower, from the wing of the butterfly, from the glow of a crystal and on, farther and higher, through beautiful human forms, through the mysterious sublime touch, man wants to fortify himself by the immutably Beautiful. Wherever on earth there have been beautiful creations of human hands, the pilgrim will come to them. He will find calm under their created vaults, and in the radiance of their frescoes and stained glass. And if the pilgrim is captivated by mirages of nature’s far-off horizons, he will set out towards them. And if, at last, he becomes aware of these loftiest peaks shining far off, he will be drawn to them and in this very striving he will become stronger, purer and will be inspired to achievements for the good, for beauty and for ascent.

The pilgrim is always listened to with special attention near the campfire or at a gathering of men. And not only in ancient chronicles does one read of the respect accorded to those who came from afar. Even now, despite all the speedy ways of communication, when the world has already become small, when people strive into higher strata or down towards the center of the planet, even now, the narrative of the pilgrim still remains the highlight of every gathering.

"Are the Himalayas truly so beautiful?"
"Are they really incomparable?"
"Tell us something about the Himalayas and whether anything unusual is to be found there!"

People expect something unusual in every narrative of a pilgrim. Customs, habits, immovability due to attachments, depresses even the coarsest heart. Even a depressed spirit strives towards movement. After all, no one thinks of movement as directed downward only.

I recall the story that a traveller once related having begun the descent of the Grand Canyon in Arizona; surrounded by most beautiful colors, he was oppressed by the very thought of such endless descent: "We descended lower and lower and this thought of descending even prevented our admiring the country".

Of course exaltation and transport is primarily connected with ascent. During ascent there is the urgent desire to look beyond the snow peaks that soar before you. But when you descend, each parting summit pronounces a sad "goodby". Therefore it is so joyous not only to ascend a summit, but at least to follow the ways of ascent in thought. When we hear of new travellers to the Himalayas, we are thankful even for that, for they remind us of the summits of the call ever-beautiful and ever necessary.

Himalayas, let me send you once more my heartfelt admiration!

Likewise, India all-beautiful, let me send thee another greeting for all the greatness and inspiration, which fill thy meadows, thy forests, thy ancient cities and sacred rivers!