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THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE
ADYAR, INDIA
From his studio in the Himalayas, in the beautiful Kulu Valley, Nicholas Roerich is broadcasting messages of beauty, culture and goodwill. Inspired by the snow-white heights above him, he sends his benedictions over the world below: "When the household is vast it is best seen from the mountain top." Heart of the Roerich Museum, New York, founder of the Roerich Banner of Peace, painter of three thousand canvases in the world’s galleries, dedicated to the cause of universal welfare, this master artist re-enters the Theosophical arena, affirming that Beauty is the Way to the peaks of the spiritual life and the universal and true solvent whereby racial and national animosities may be dissolved.

"The artist is the priest of the beautiful. It is he who rescues the truth from its ugly defilement and gives us to drink of the perennial font of joy amidst the fret and stress of life.

"The beautiful is scattered through the universe like the auriferous sands."

So speaks the eminent artist, Bhabes Chandra Chaudhuri, in his article "The Artist and the Beauty in Art" in a recent issue of the Twentieth Century.

It is a joy to read such an appreciative article in which the artist himself affirms the significance of Beauty. There was a time when it was considered for some reason that an artist should not be a writer. Sometimes such artificial preconceptions went so far that a talented composer, according to the judgment of his impresario, should not be permitted to appear in public as a conductor, as it was stated that public opinion would thereby be confused. One can imagine how Leonardo da Vinci, Vasari or Cellini would laugh at such an absurd way of obstructing creative thought.

It would seem that in the history of art there are many convincing examples of how people who devoted themselves to Beauty expressed it in a multitude of ways, choosing that which at the moment appeared to them the best. How beautifully they combined painting with architecture, or with sculpture, not to speak of mosaic and the various graphic arts.

As priests they served Beauty, finding the most persuasive expressions for their beneficent influence on the broad masses and in refining the consciousness of the people.

Renaissance in India

In India today we notice a renaissance of art. There appear
glorious hosts of artists, State Galleries are being opened, and frescoes again adorn public buildings. The best artists are heading Art Schools and the artificial barriers between so-called "great art" and "applied crafts" are broken down. Verily Beauty is great in all its multifacedness. It is a pleasure to find in many monthly journals and magazines a page on art and many reproductions of art both modern and ancient.

Someone may smile and think: "This sounds very encouraging, but what of the difficult life artists lead?" Of course their lives are not easy, nor is any heroic achievement. No one will think that the lives of Rembrandt or Rubens were easy. It is only in recent times that their names have become great collective concepts above any doubts. But we know that beautiful masterpieces of Rembrandt, which he was commissioned to paint, were rejected by the local authorities and municipalities. We also know that Leonardo in Florence and Michel Angelo in Rome experienced great hardships. Time adorns all sufferings with epic beatitude and calm. Yet how many tragedies remain hidden behind the gorgeous brocaded curtains of Time!

We all know of the martyrdom of scientists like Copernicus, Galileo, Paracelsus, Lavoisier and innumerable other sufferers for Truth. There exist entire books dedicated to these martyrs of Science. And next to them there should also exist volumes entitled "Martyrs of Art and Culture." However, once we know that artists are priests of the Beautiful, we also know that the attainment of all other attributes is inevitable.

Vandalism and Beauty

Much has been written of vandalism. We introduced the Banner of Peace as a Red Cross of Culture to protect real treasures of humanity. And now let me mention another hidden but cruel vandalism, which quietly exists in the life of many nations.

When studying old Masters, we often come across the fact that many very good paintings were for some reason overpainted by inferior artists with entirely different subjects. It is obvious that the old painting has become old-fashioned, and the artist simply used the wood as material for his modern and more fashionable expression. One should not think that only paintings of secondary importance were subjected to such barbaric manipulations. On the contrary, amongst the recorded cases we find some very important ones which today occupy a place of honour in the history of art.

I remember how once in Italy whilst studying a beautiful painting, "Virgo Inter Virgines," we were surprised at its exceptionally good condition. When expressing our amazement at this, we received the following unusual but characteristic explanation: "Apparently in the beginning of the XVIIIth Century this beautiful painting was already considered old-fashioned and therefore despite the religious subject it was covered by another religious subject, 'Ecce Homo,' and had remained all the time in a certain monastery. This second painting was by far
inferior to the original masterpiece. It was noticed comparatively recently that through the second painting there became vaguely discernible the outlines of a different composition and the person who had purchased this inexpensive painting from the monastery decided to remove the upper layer, thus revealing a beautiful masterpiece.” Now this painting adorns the Art Institute in Chicago.

I have also personally seen an old replica of the well known painting by Correggio which is in the National Gallery in London, and on this replica I could clearly see the outlines of an ancient portrait, and indeed the panel on which it was painted proved to be far older than the replica. Once we had occasion to witness how from beneath paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there appeared in good condition beautiful originals by Lambert Lombard, Rogier van der Veiden, Adrien Bloemart and similar renowned artists. And now in the last April issue of the Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston we find a most instructive story about the portrait of Sir William Butts, by Hans Holbein the Younger. Let us quote a few lines from this article:

Restoring a Holbein

“On November 17, 1935, the Museum purchased the striking portrait by Hans Holbein the Younger . . . Connoisseurs, seeing the portrait, refused to believe that Holbein could have done it, and with good reason. As it appeared for about three and a half centuries it was certainly not Holbein. In very recent times, however, a young friend of the Butts family, which had retained possession of the painting from the time it was done until it passed to the Museum, a painter by the name of H. M. Jonas, remarked that the hands seemed to be painted in a manner somewhat different from the rest of the portrait and suggested an earlier style. He was permitted to have an X-ray made and the result was the discovery of a portrait underneath. The X-ray showed a different outline to the cap, a full beard, a different chain and a suit puffed with white silk. It also revealed the existence of an inscription on the background. Next came the difficulty of restoration. The first restoration was undertaken by Mr. Nico Jungman. It was an extremely difficult task, since the overpainting was of very nearly the same period as the painting underneath. It is obvious that the sitter caused his portrait to be repainted later in life. When this was done we cannot be sure, though probably in 1563 when Queen Elizabeth came to Thornage and was elaborately feted. It is likely that then Sir William, an older man, holding high offices, demanded that he be shown with different garments and ornaments added, and therefore had himself repainted, presented in regalia and brought up-to-date, but unfortunately by a very inferior artist.”

This interesting story has two corollaries. First, we must pay tribute to the administration of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and to the restorer, who have completed this most difficult restoration
so successfully, and thus have revealed to the world the original masterpiece of a great artist without any later inferior additions and overpainting. Secondly, this instructive historical episode shows to us once more that vandalism is committed not only by the hands of an infuriated mob but also tacitly in highly distinguished dwellings for the sake of vanity and prejudice.

A Beautiful Necessity

Beauty cannot be guarded by orders and laws alone. Only when human consciousness realizes the inestimable value of beauty, creating, ennobling and refining, only then will the real treasures of humanity be safe. And one should not think that vandalisms, obvious or tacit, belong but to the past ages, to some fabulous invaders and conquerors. We see vandalism of many kinds taking place even today. Therefore the endeavour to protect and save beauty is not an abstract nebulous move, but is imperative, real and undeferrable.

Verily education in art and beauty is a necessity. And although it is a beautiful necessity, yet it is a necessity with all its duties and obligations. We always rejoice when we see that thoughts are being transmuted into action. It is for this reason that the opening of new schools, the inauguration of an International Academy of the Arts, is always to be greatly welcomed.

The Value of Active Beauty

Sixteen years ago we wrote upon the shields of the Master Institute of United Arts and of the International Art Centre in New York the following mottoes:

Art will unify all humanity.
Art is one—indivisible. Art has its many branches, yet all are one.
Art is the manifestation of the coming synthesis. Art is for all.
Everyone will enjoy true art. The gates of the "sacred source" must be wide open for everybody, and the light of art will influence numerous hearts with a new love. At first this feeling will be unconscious, but after the purification of vanity and prejudice it will will purify human consciousness. How many young hearts are searching for something real and beautiful! So, give it to them. Bring art to the people—where it belongs. We should have not only museums, theatres, universities, public libraries, railway stations and hospitals, but even prisons decorated and beautified. Then we shall have no more prisons.

Humanity is facing the coming events of cosmic greatness. Humanity already realizes that no occurrences are accidental. The time for the construction of future culture is at hand. Before our eyes the revaluation of values is being witnessed. Amidst ruins of valueless banknotes, mankind has found the real value of the world's significance. The values of great art are victoriously traversing all storms of earthly commotions. Even the "earthly" people already understand the vital importance of active beauty. And when we proclaim: love, beauty and action, we know verily that we pronounce the formula of the international language. And this formula, which now belongs to the museum and stage must enter everyday life. The sign of beauty will open...
all sacred gates. Beneath the sign of beauty we walk joyfully. With beauty we conquer. Through beauty we pray. In beauty we are united. And now we affirm these words—not on the snowy heights, but amidst the turmoil of the city. And realizing the path of true reality, we greet with a happy smile the future.

Sixteen years have elapsed and we see that all the requirements of Beauty have become still more urgent. Everything that has been done in this direction still remains as though on isolated islands. Beauty does not tolerate conventional limitations and boundaries. The treasures of Beauty belong to the world. Hence the care for art and knowledge is also a universal duty on a planetarian scale.

Culture’s Cornerstones

Culture—the veneration of Light—rests on the cornerstones of Beauty and Knowledge. And if there was a beautiful necessity to inaugurate the Red Cross of Culture and a universal Banner reminding men of the treasures of Culture—it means that this beautiful necessity also was undeferrable. Culture, Beauty and Science are violated not only in times of war, but also in time of so-called peace. This truth again refers to the whole world.

If anyone should possess a receptacle containing a wonderful panacea, how carefully would he guard such a treasure. But Beauty is that same miracle-working panacea and as such requires a vigilant devotion.

Now cures are effected in hospitals by sound and colour—thus Beauty, the perfect panacea, enters in a new garment. People worry greatly about their health. May this consideration at least teach them to venerate and guard the panacea of Beauty. Half a century ago our great Dostoyevsky proclaimed: “Beauty will save the world.”

Amidst the touching definitions of art I recollect two legends, one from Chinese Turkestan, the other from Tibet:

An artist wanted some money for his painting, and when he came to the moneylender, the man was absent and only a boy was there. This boy gave the artist a very large sum for the painting. When the moneylender came back, he said: “For these fruits and vegetables you gave such a great sum!” and he discharged the boy. Time passed and the artist returned and asked for the painting. When he saw it he was horrified, saying: “That is not my painting. Where are the butterflies? Go find the boy that he may help us find my painting. This painting you show me has only cabbages.” The boy came and said: “Now it is winter, and the butterflies come only in the summertime. Put the painting near the fire, and we shall see the butterflies return.” And so it was; the paint was put on the canvas so skilfully that during the cold weather the colours receded, but in the warmth they returned. Thus beautifully do the people of Kuchar speak about the perfection of art.

And the other from Tibet: Why do the giant trumpets in the Buddhist temples have so resonant a tone? The ruler of Tibet decided
to summon from India, from the place where dwelt the Blessed One, a great Teacher, in order to purify the fundamentals of the teaching. How to meet the high guest? Gold and precious gems would not be adequate to meet a spiritual Teacher. Then the High Lama of Tibet, having had a vision, gave the design for a new giant trumpet so that the guest should be received with unprecedented majestic sound; and the meeting was a wonderful one—not by the wealth of gold but by the grandeur of the beautiful sound.

The Master could be greeted only with something beautiful. The sense of the Beautiful must be that life-giving seed—that real panacea, which makes the deserts, both physical and spiritual, flourish.

And wherefrom else can come a sense of Goodwill and Unity if not through the blessed realization of the Beautiful!

(Next Month: Professor Roerich on "Unknown Artists.")

THE ROERICH FAMILY AT WORK

In 1928 Prof. and Mme. de Roerich founded the Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute, at Naggar, a haven of beauty in the Kulu Valley of the Punjab, and here with their two gifted sons, they live and work, amidst luxuriant vegetation and sylvan surroundings, investigating problems of anthropology, biochemistry, pharmacology, and Himalayan botany. The Institute was the immediate outcome of the Roerich Central Asia Expedition. Dr. Georges de Roerich, director of the Institute, is an outstanding authority on Tibetan languages, and Svetoslav de Roerich is a talented artist.

The Urusvati centre of culture has several active departments. A biochemical laboratory is under construction, with equipment to investigate into the pharmacognostical properties of high altitude plants in their living state. Mr. Svetoslav Roerich has made an extensive collection of rare indigenous Himalayan drugs with a view to their possible application in western pharmacopeias. A number of experimental plantations have been started, and rare medicinal plants are being cultivated in special conditions with a view to making them more accessible.

The Philological Department has published an authoritative work by Dr. Georges de Roerich on the Tibetan dialect of Lahul, and he is preparing for publication a Tibetan-English dictionary—a monumental work. The Institute publishes a voluminous journal, which is a treasure-house of modern knowledge and ancient wisdom. There is also a Cancer Research Department.

Nicholas Roerich insists that the great tree of culture is nourished by "unlimited knowledge, enlightened labour, incessant creativeness and noble attainment." His ashram is a laboratory for the practice of those ideals, a continuous "festival of labour and constructiveness." Here he holds aloft the torch of culture—painter, writer, philosopher, educationist, explorer, archaeologist, pacifist—living his multi-coloured life against an imperishable background. In a period of history which can boast a galaxy of great men Roerich is surely one of the most colourful and attractive.

Roerich passionately loves the mountains, their beauty and grandeur. He says: "Majestic is Karakorum and the icy kingdom of Sasser. Beautiful is Kwen-Lun. Fantastic are the celestial peaks of Tian-Shan. Broad in sweep is Altai. Decorative is Nan Shang. Austere is Angar Dakchin. But all these are only the preface to the unutterable grandeur of the Himalayas. "In the Himalayas was crystallized the great Vedanta. In the Himalayas Buddha became exalted in spirit. The very air of the Himalayas is penetrated with spiritual tension—the true Maitreya Sanga."

J. L. D.