Sacred Ashrams

By NICHOLAS ROERICH

AILASA, Manasarowar, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Triloknath, Ravalsar—these glorious gems of the Highest always fill the heart with special blissful tremor. When we were within a day's journey from Manasarowar the entire caravan already became uplifted—thus far around does the aura of a holy ashram act.

Another vivid recollection arises from the path to Triloknath. A long line of Sadhus and Lamas stretches along this road—the old sanctuary, the site of pilgrimage and prayer. These pilgrims have met here from many different roads. Some already completing their spiritual journeyings, are walking along with a trident; some carry bamboo staffs; others are without anything, even without clothing. And the snow of the Rotang Pass is no impediment for them.

The pilgrims proceed, knowing that the Rishis and the Pandavas dwelt here. Here is the Beas of Vyas; here is Vyasarund—the place of the fulfilment of all wishes. Here, Vyasa Rishi compiled the Mahabharata.

Not in legend alone, but in reality, did the great Rishis live here. Their presence breathes life into the cliffs which are crowned with glaciers, into the emerald pastures where the yaks graze and into the caves and the roaring torrents. From here were sent forth those spiritual calls of which humanity has heard through all ages. These calls are taught in schools; they have been translated into many languages—and this crystal of acquisitions has been stratified on the cliffs of the Himalayas.
"Where can one find words with which to praise the Creator, after seeing the incomparable beauty of the Himalayas?" sings the Hindu. Along the paths of Guru, along the peaks of the Rishi, along the mountain paths of the pilgrims of the spirit, lies that treasure, which no torrent of rain can wear away, nor any lightning turn to ashes. He who walks towards the Good is blessed on all paths. How touching are all the narratives which tell of the meeting of the righteous ones of various nations. The tops of the deodars in the forest touch each other in the wind. Thus, everything that is of the highest meets without injury and harm. Time was when quarrels were settled by single combat and decisions were reached by a conference of chiefs. So do the deodars discuss matters between themselves. What a meaningful word: deodar—the gift of God. And this significant name is not without reason; for the resin of the deodar has healing powers. Deodar, musk, valerian, roses and other similar substances comprise the beneficent medicines of the Rishis. Some have wanted to do away with these medicines by substituting an invasion of new discoveries; however, humanity again reverts to the foundations.

Here is a photograph of a man who walks through fire without harming himself. This is not a fiction. Witnesses will tell you of the same trials by fire in Madras, Lucknow, Benares. And not only does the Sadhu walk harmlessly on the flaming coals, but he leads behind him those who desire to follow him and hold on to him.

In Benares a Sadhu sits in sacred posture upon the water of the Ganges. His crossed legs are covered by the brim of the water. The people flock to the banks, amazed at the holy man.

Still another Sadhu has been buried alive for many days; another swallows various poisons without any harm. Here is a Lama, who can levitate himself; another Lama by means of 'tumo' can generate his own heat, thus protecting himself against snow and mountain glaciers; there a Lama can give the death stroke with his 'deadly eye' to a mad dog. A venerated Lama from Bhutan relates, how during his stay in the Tzang district in Tibet, a Lama asked the ferry-man to take him across from Tzam-po free of charge, but the cunning man replied, "I will gladly take you over, if you can prove that you are a great Lama. A mad dog is running about here doing great harm—kill it." The Lama said nothing; but looking at the dog, he raised his hand and said a few words and the dog fell dead! The Bhutanese Lama saw this himself. One hears frequently in Tibet and in India of the same "deadly eye" and the "eye of Kapila". And on a map of the XVIIth century printed in Antwerp, by authority of
the Catholic clergy, is mentioned the name of the country, Shambhala.

If one can walk through fire, and another can sit on water, and a third remain suspended in the air, and a fourth repose on nails, and a fifth swallow poison and a sixth kill with a glance and a seventh lie buried without harm, then one may collect all those grains of knowledge in himself. And thus the obstacles of lower matter can be transmuted! Not in a remote age, but now, right here where Millikan's cosmic rays, Rhine's thought transference and the reality of finest psychic energy are also being studied and affirmed.

Every Rishi pronounced in his own language the sacred pledge for the construction of a revived, refined and beautiful world!

For the sake of a single righteous being, a whole City was saved. As beacons, lightning rods, and citadels of Good, stood the Rishis of various nations, of various creeds of various ages yet one in the Spirit of salvation and ascension for all!

Whether the Rishi came upon fire, whether he arrived home upon a stone, whether he came upon the whirlwind—he always hastened for the general Good. Whether he prayed on mountain summits, or on a steep river-bank or in a hidden cave, he always sent out his prayers for the unknown, for the stranger, for the labourers, for the sick and the crippled.

Whether the Rishi sent out white horses to save the unknown pilgrims or whether he blessed unknown sea-farers, or guarded a city by night, he always stood as a pillar of light for all, without condemnation and without extinguishing the flame.

Without condemnation, without mutual suspicion, without weakening each other, ever upwards, the Rishis ascended the eternal Mount Meru.

Before us is the road to Kailas. There rises one of the fifteen wonders described in Tibetan books: The Mount of the Bell! Along sharp ridges one climbs to its summit. It stands higher than the last junipers, higher than the last yellow and white mountain ranges. There Padma Sambhava once walked—this is recorded in the ancient monastery Gando—La. It is exactly here that the caves of Milaraspa are situated. And not one but many have been sanctified with the name of the hermit, who hearkened before dawn to the voices of the Devas. Here also are the spiritual strongholds of Gautama Rishi. Not far away are also legends which surround Pahari Baba. Many Rishis walked here. And he who gave the mountain its enticing name "Mount of the Bell"
also thought of the call of the Bell for all, of helping all, of the
Universal Good!

Here Rishis lived for Universal Good!

When Rishis meet on the mountain paths they do not ask
each other: "From where do you come?" Is it from the East, or
West, or South or North? This is quite apparent: that they
come from the Good and go to the Good. An exalted refined
flaming heart knows where is the Good and in what it can be
found.

Some of the travellers in our caravan were once discussing
the qualities of the various Rishis. But a grey-haired pilgrim,
pointing to snowy peaks, effulgent in their complete beauty said:

"Are we to judge the qualities of these Summits? We can
but bow in admiration before their unattainable splendour!

"Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram"