Teachership
by Professor Nicholas Roerich

Nicholas Roerich, writer of this article, is one of the world's most eminent artists and cultural leaders. In New York, the Roerich Museum has been dedicated to his name, and his masterpieces are in the major museums and collections of the world. One of the greatest aspects of his life has been his efforts for peace in the creation of the Roerich Peace Pact and Banner of Peace, based upon the principle of "Peace through Culture", and now being furthered through the "Roerich Foundation for Peace, Art, Science, and Labor", with its headquarters in the city of Bruges, Belgium.

—Editor.

We have news before us from Chicago that the school teachers' salaries have been held up.

This sounds strange on the eve of the opening of the Chicago Centenary World Fair.

In the Literary Digest for March 18, 1933, under the title of "The Teachers' Battle for the Schools", the following most striking facts are given among many others: "Education must be deflated—so the order of the economists goes forth." . . . "We are on the battle-line," is the cry from thousands of educators gathered at the convention in Minneapolis of the Department of Superintendents of the National Education Association. . . . "Already," Dr. Cooper declares, "thousands of children in such sections are virtually without schooling. Two hundred districts in Arkansas are able to give but sixty days' school in a year, or about two years' education in eight. And similar situations prevail in Alabama, Oklahoma, and Idaho." . . . "We would prefer to make personal sacrifices," states Prof. J. K. Norton of Teachers College, "rather than have children denied their educational birthright. It is this loyalty that has won for teachers in many communities the admiration of parents, and that has paved the way for effective cooperation in defence of the schools." . . . "'What will it profit the nation if we maintain the credit of industrial corporations and deny education to America's children?' asks the report of the Committee on Lay Relations of Toledo, Ohio." . . .

In the last issue of the New Haven Teachers' Journal there is a complete succession of the most remarkable information about the similar conditions in educational matters. In the leading editorial we read the following: "The crisis confronting public school education in New Haven is now in such an alarming state that one does not hesitate to say that we have arrived at the point where we feel each impending decision may be the fatal one." The article concludes with a call for rigorous justice. The following article, "Human Rights versus Money Rights" states, "Taxpayers are groaning under the weight of the expense of Government compared to their reduced incomes". "It has become increasingly evident that what was called in the beginning 'the Depression' has now become 'the Bankers' Panic'."

A third article in the same Journal, under the title—"The Citizens' Conference on the Crisis in Education"—is most characteristic for our present-day perturbances and gives among other items, the "Declaration of Policy", which affirms the importance of education for the nation, protesting against the intervention of politics in school life and again calling attention to the necessity of proportionate salaries with regard to the cost of living. The declaration is compelled to repeat old axioms, apparently because there is sufficient reason for their repetition. Thus the fourth paragraph of the declaration states: "Education is a necessity, not a luxury, since the growth of the child cannot be halted or postponed during an economic emergency". And the thirty-third paragraph Remarks quite justly, "If the State is to have, during

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the coming generation, institutions adequate to serve its needs, it must not now unwisely weaken the human foundations of those institutions."

Such significant statements are found in this copy of a New Haven Teachers' Journal sent to us. But even without this, we have lately read an endless list of various "necrologies" about curtailing and cutting of educational institutions especially. Verily, not in one country but everywhere, people seemingly have agreed to think no longer of the future and to discontinue the growth of educational undertakings. The condition of the teaching staff under the constant threat of sudden curtailments has become altogether unstable, thus bringing harm to education of youth.

Everywhere there are special Ministries of Public Education, Departments of Science and Art, and it is strange to observe that such institutions, which would seem to be the most essential for the progress of a cultural country, are the first to be subjected to continuous cuts. As if they were some luxury and not the most essential public necessity, without which all other ministries and departments could not even exist! People do not dare to discuss the curtailment in salaries of many other departments, but it has become a general trend of mind to suggest the cutting of salaries of teachers, which are already meagre. The teacher, who as a rule has no savings, must exist in some miraculous way, and yet he must manifest full kindheartedness, satisfaction, balance, and all those qualities which are primarily demanded of a teacher. Depressed by worries as to how to make ends meet, the teacher must wear the mask of endless patience and the smile of wisdom, when at the same time his family may not know how to balance the daily needs. Why is such exceptional civic heroism demanded only from the teacher? Why should we expect continuous, endless sacrifices just from those who are most of all in need?

A country which is aiming at construction and the positive solution of life problems cannot ignore the condition of its teachers. To ignore them would mean to ignore the destiny of its future generations. Of course the teacher who is absorbed in educational work, which requires special concentration, is the least protesting element, unless he be compelled by hopeless hardships. People desire that teachers should not only teach well, and should not only continuously bring their knowledge up-to-date, but also that teachers should arouse the love of their students. Love is inseparable from reverence and, therefore, the nation ought to create for its teachers a specially esteemed position. It is impossible to divide the teachers arbitrarily into lower and higher ones, for the synthesis of knowledge is high everywhere, and one must apply a great deal of time and concentrated effort to become imbued and remain on the crest of this synthesis of knowledge.

The teacher is a friend of a positive, creative government, because the teacher exists for continuous constructiveness and for the affirmation of human dignity. Who else will tell the young generation of the most beautiful, of the most creative, of the most powerful, of the most heroic and progressive cognizance? Verily, we expect from the teacher the knowledge of the highest conceptions. We expect from him endless patience, incessant labor, and continuous renovation, and at the same time we do not exercise care that these high conditions and demands are sufficiently guaranteed.

For twenty years I, myself, was at the head of educational institutions. Among thousands of students and hundreds of professors and teachers, one could observe in full multiformity the complexity of human interrelations. Indeed, teachership stands high, and it is most difficult. In the continuous flow of the schools' elements, one has to retain an equilibrium and must inex-
haustibly provide joy to the young spirit, that must enter life full of real hopes and high aspirations. It is to this that the teacher has pledged himself.

The conception of teachership widely permeates the whole of life, beyond school hours; how valuable if we can safeguard for our whole life in our hearts a love and reverence towards our first teachers and guides. If students entering life could realize that their teachers had suffered undeservedly and had been overburdened, many regrets would occur in the name of love and friendliness which are the foundations of education.

For the sake of these fundamentals of public life, in other words, for the sake of the foundations of Culture, one should give special attention to questions of education as the most precious, as the most sacred. If in the time of its greatest welfare the nation must give the greatest care to the solving of educational problems, then during the time of material and spiritual crisis it should most carefully guard the conditions of educators.

The safeguarding of the foundations of education is the primary aim of the League of Culture. Without care for education, the very existence of the League of Culture becomes useless. We may and do unite in the name of knowledge, in the name of the beautiful, in the name of hearty cooperation. Therefore, one must ask all members of the League, each in his own activity, and each in his own field, to give serious attention to the plight of the problem of Education.

Let us not feel relief that after all education still exists, and that teachers exist somehow. This is not sufficient. Education must thrive beautifully and teachers should be in good circumstances, as befits a progressive positive nation. If everyone, according to his ability, will apply thought and care to this essential problem, I assure you that much good will result for the benefit of a truly national necessity.

In my book "Shambhala" I paid tribute to teachers in the following passage of an essay entitled, "Guru—The Teacher":

Once in Finland I sat upon the shores of Lake Ladoga with a farm lad. A middle-aged man passed us by, and my small companion stood up and with great reverence took off his cap.

I asked him afterwards: "Who is this man?" And with special seriousness, the boy answered, "He is a teacher."

I again asked, "Is it your teacher?"

"No," answered the boy, "he is the teacher from the neighboring school."

"Then you know him personally?" I persisted.

"No," he answered with astonishment.

"Then why did you greet him with such reverence?"

Still more seriously my little companion answered, "Because he is a teacher!"

Verily in this little boy, who bared his head before a teacher, is contained the healthy seed of the nation, which knows the past and knows the significance of the words "to build".

Let us close with the following lines from the book of the East. "Fiery World": A mother was relating to her son about a great Saint. She remarked, "Even a pinch of dust from beneath his feet is already great." It came to pass that this holy man came through the village. The boy followed his footsteps and took a pinch of this earth, sewed it in a bag and began to wear it around his neck. When he recited his lessons at school, he always held this holy relic in his hand. Thereupon the boy became filled with such
inspiration, that his answers were always remarkable. At last, when he was leaving the school, the teacher praised him and asked him what it was that he had always held in his hand. The boy replied, “The earth from underneath the feet of the Saint who passed through our village.” The teacher added, “The earth of the Saint serves you better than any gold.” A neighboring shopkeeper who was present, said to himself, “What a foolish boy to take only a pinch of this golden earth. I shall await the Saint’s coming and shall collect all the earth from underneath his feet. Thus I shall receive the most profitable goods.” And the shopkeeper sat at his doorstep and waited in vain for the Saint. But the Saint never came. Covetousness is not in the nature of the “Fiery World”.

“Shame on the country where teachers dwell in poverty and want. Shame on those who know that their children are being taught by a man who is in need. Not only is it shameful for the nation that does not take care of the teachers of its future generation, but it is a sign of ignorance. Can one entrust children to a man who is depressed? Can one forget what emanation is created by sorrow? Can one be ignorant of the fact that the spirit which is depressed will not evoke enthusiasm? Can one consider tutorship an insignificant profession? Can one expect of children the enlightenment of spirit if the school is a place of humiliation and offense? Can one feel construction during the gnashing of teeth? Can one expect the fires of the heart when the spirit is silent? Thus I say and repeat that the people who have forgotten the teacher have forgotten their future. Let us not lose an hour in order to direct one’s thought towards the joy of the future. But let us take care that the teacher shall be the most valuable person in the institution of the nation. The time approaches when the spirit must be educated and derive joy from the true knowledge. The fire is at the threshold.”

“The hearts of teachers must be softened that they may abide in constant cognition. The hearts of children recognize that which is aflame and that which is extinguished. Not a prescribed lesson, but the mutual striving of the teacher and disciple discloses a world full of wonders. To open the eyes of disciples means together with him to love the great creation. Who does not agree that one should stand on firm ground in order to aim at the far-off distances? The marksman will verify this. Thus let us learn to take care of everything that affirms the future. The fire is at the threshold.”

“Every abuse of the Saviour, of the teacher, and of heroes is a thrust towards savagery and a plunge into chaos. How is it possible to explain that chaos is very close: there is no need to cross an ocean to find it. It is equally difficult to explain that savagery has its inception in the most minute. When the treasure of solemnity is lost and the pearls of knowledge of the heart are scattered, what remains? One may remember how people mocked at the Great Sacrifice. Has not the whole world become responsible for such savagery? One may see how the latter is reflected in shallowness. There is nothing worse than shallowness. I affirm—be blessed all energies, only not to fall into the marasmus of dissolution. Thus let us remember all Great Days!”

“One may imagine how beautiful can be the co-service of multitudes of people, when their hearts aspire to one ascent. We shall not say—impossible or it is rejected. From Power one may borrow, and from Light one may become enlightened. Only to realize in what lies the Light and the Power. Someone already roars with laughter but he laughs in darkness. What can be more horrible than laughter in darkness! But, Light will abide with him who desires it.”

_Urusvati, Himalayas, April, 1933._