THE GREAT IMAGES

By Nicholas Roerich

When great images reach us from remote antiquity, it is somehow very simple to accept them. Even if they are veiled in myths and legends they are very convincing. During a long lapse of time anything is possible. Writers and painters of all the ages apply their best inspirations to these distant images. Many generations are guided by these inspiring distant heroes and heroines. Nobody is jealous of them, nobody is interested in the manner of achievements,—what is preserved is purely a monument of human ascension.

Entirely different are images from the recent past, to say nothing of the present. Take the description of great people recently deceased. So many unnecessary, non-characteristic traits are emphasized which only shows that the exact nature of their lives has not been considered and not evaluated. The most doubtful, entirely unproven details are brought up, and the conclusions even though they are not necessarily negative are at best belittling. Of course, with passing ages the scales will be balanced. The judgement of the people eventually will remove such of the dirt and dust as fills the eyes of the contemporary observer. The justice of ages does not belittle. Even within the expanse of a century we see that many things attain their own balance. The printed sheets on which great characters were disparaged and despised are still existing. In the time of our forefathers the people laughed cruelly and unjustly at certain manifestations which in less than a hundred years became the pride of their country and even of the whole world, and we may witness now the same.

We shall not discuss separately the many writers, poets, scientists, social workers and leaders, whose names and whose very images have been transfigured in people's minds within the shortest time. Everybody knows many of such cases. Although our contemporaries severely condemn the ignorant prejudices of yesterday, they themselves often repeat such mistakes. It has been suggested that the dictionaries and encyclopedias alter their evaluations with every new edition. We may recall a number of great names who at first were described in dictionaries and encyclopedias as charlatans and agitators but later were considered most noble and honorable. Such a metamorphosis happens sometimes within one generation. Is it not remarkable for the history of human thought?

It is difficult to say what causes this, although the fact remains. Is it wickedness, envy, ignorance, or perhaps plain stupidity and laziness?
Someone is responsible for the most peculiar proverb: “Angry words do not hurt.” Probably this strange saying is attributable to some bully who wanted to justify his peculiarity.

Sometimes people reach such absurdity that a mere attempt to give a friendly opinion, even a very reasonable one is considered as something untimely and unacceptable, while at the same time any criticism that is scandalous and perverted will be taken calmly and even with hidden approval.

Meanwhile, so many beautiful truly great images have been coming to teach humanity, and not in ancient times, but right here, very near. It seems that these images, being so real, so concrete should have inspired many people. But this happens so rarely.

We find these unforgettable, inspiring images sparkling not only in ruler or leader roles but also in ordinary daily life. Only the few can realize their deep significance for humanity. In this also somehow and sometime the scales of justice will be balanced. However, it is strange that people are using so little of what already has been generously given to them, and which could be widely applied.

Beautiful, heroic, exemplary men and women are living in our time; they are true creators of culture, and it would seem most desirable to know something about them immediately instead of leaving the construction of their images to the exaggerating imagination of people of some future day.

Let us consider a great feminine image. From early childhood the girl likes to retire secretly with a large heavy book. With an effort she carries away the large volume and secretly admires the pictures, later on she learns to read all by herself. From the same bookcases of her father, she takes philosophical treatises, and unusually early, in spite of the noisy, distracting surroundings she enters into a deep contemplation of the world as if it were a familiar realm discovered a long time ago. The constant search for truth and justice and the love for creative work changes the whole of life around the young, strong spirit. The whole house, the whole family, everything seems supported on the same beneficial foundation.

The family bears all difficulties and dangers under this same firm leadership. The girl’s accumulated knowledge and aspiration toward perfection brings unconquerable solutions of problems, which leads all the others to one luminous path. Ignorance, obscurity and wickedness are painfully sensed. Wherever it is possible a physical and spiritual healing takes place. From early morning till night, life becomes full of true labour, and all for the benefit of humanity. A large correspond-
ence is built up, books are written, extensive essays are translated; and all this is done in a remarkable tirelessness of spirit. Even the most difficult circumstances are conquered by the true faith, which becomes a straight knowledge. Wonderful accumulations were necessary for such wisdom. Such an unwearying life of labour, with daily great deeds of benevolence and constructiveness should be the ideal of all youth.

When facing innumerable difficulties it is particularly valuable for youth to learn about these achievements through untiring labour. Often one may think that certain things are unsurmountable, that evil cannot be conquered by good. This is the kind of delusion, which the confused human mind likes to tolerate. And as a counter-measure the true examples of the heroic life are particularly fitting. We may rejoice that we have these beautiful examples, so encouraging to all beginners in constructive work. The constructive principle must be affirmed. It is necessary to replace doubt, negation and retreat by inspiring encouraging work.

Some may consider themselves retired and useless, not suspecting that here, not far from them, over all obstacles, all the impediments of obscurity, the unsplashed chalice was carefully carried. If one would realize this, how much new vigour and combined with it new possibilities would come! How much dark absurdity would be replaced by the thoughts about creative, constructive work, which is possible in all stages of life. Is it absolutely necessary to be burned at the stake like Joan of Arc? Will the scaffolds still be necessary when we realize the true value of moving, guiding words and exemplary work? Sooner or later humanity will have to give up everything that keeps back, impedes and hardens. The one who will be able to find a maximum of good indications will complete a most noble marathon. The true marathon has no occasion to stand on one leg! But only to find the maximum of good constructive indications! In these indications will be found real peace for which all churches are praying ceaselessly.

In order to achieve this true peace it is necessary to exercise much care and much benevolence. Is it possible to talk about benevolence or about something abstract and inapplicable? Is it possible that there are such brutal hearts as could oppose every constructive benevolence? It is impossible. In every living heart there must be some tolerance and kindliness. With such kind approach the great images will be distinguished and their work will be justly evaluated.