The Mongols.

(Diary Leaves.)

By NICHOLAS ROERICH

The Banner of Chengiz Khan was white. In different campaigns he used various symbols—the lion, the steed of happiness, the falcon, or the panther. Fundamentally the color of the Mongols is blue.

The laws of the great khan are extant even to this day, and we may recall many which are applicable to our present life. His severe penalties for theft, murder, adultery and other offences, could be placed upon the pages of our law even in the present times. Similarly with his other official acts, his orders to his officers and his steps for the progress of his country all of which were broadly introduced by the Great Khan.

In order to prevent pride and vanity among the Khans, Chengiz Khan forbade the adoptions of pompous titles. Freedom of religion and speech were observed and the love of God acknowledged. Clergy and physicians were freed from public taxes. Capital punishment was prescribed for spies, perjurers, sorcerers and those who accepted bribes. The marriage laws forbade marriage between the next of kin. And to raise the sense of honor, it was forbidden to employ one’s next-of-kin as servants. To abolish intoxication Chengiz Khan constantly disapproved of the use of strong beverages and urged his people to eliminate the use of these entirely.

A regulation is also known to have aimed at the abolishing of excessive superstitions. The ordinances of Chengiz Khan encouraged hospitality among his nomad population, and insured the safety of travellers throughout the vast extent of his empire. Rules were given in regard to camp sites and divisions of yurtas were made into tens, hundreds and thousands.
Along the caravan routes military stations with guards were established and at intervals of a day's journey posts for horses were set. The army was divided into divisions of tens, hundreds, thousands and ten-thousands. Capital punishment was meted out to all officers who deserted their posts.

Judging by everything which has come down to us, Chengiz Khan was a great leader and organizer.

"The Lord preserve us from the Mongols!" Such were the inscriptions found in destroyed cities. Danish fishermen did not venture into the open sea for fear of a Mongolian invasion.

This is one of the earliest descriptions of the Mongols, presented to Europe in the thirteenth century: "Lest human joys be especially prolonged, and the world's benevolence endure too long without tears," wrote Mathew Paris in the year 1240, "reviling creatures of Satan himself the countless Tartar hordes, broke loose and swept out of the boundaries of their encampments surrounded by mountains. Swarming like locusts over the earth, they brought terrible devastation to Western Europe and by fire and sword reduced it to a wasteland. They are small in stature, stocky, heavy, indomitable. With zest they drink the pure blood of their herds. Their horses are stout, strong and eat branches and even trees. Due to their short thighs they have to mount these horses with the aid of three-stepped ladders... They know no laws; they are completely lacking in any idea of comfort and are more ferocious than lions or bears... They have pity neither for age nor sex nor position. They know no language to converse besides their own, which no one understands, because up to recent times there was no contact with them and they themselves never came beyond the boundaries of their country. Thus there is no information available about their customs and personalities, such as is gained through the mutual intercourse of people. They travel with their herds and wives, and the latter are accustomed to fight as well as the men. To the destruction of Christendom, they suddenly appear and with the speed of lightning ravage and annihilate everything in their way, terrorizing everyone and arousing terrific hatred everywhere." This was the reputation of the Mongols when their name first reached Europe, accompanied by the sensational terror which usually preceded their attacks. The very word Tarter aroused terror; they were considered the scourge of God. The old writers called them the 'plague of God'—demons sent against men in punishment.

Europe did not regard the Mongols as human beings. It denied them the honor of being enemies or customary adversaries and
considered them some sort of superhuman creatures. In those times Europeans sincerely believed that Mongols had dogs' heads and devoured human flesh. This was the sort of wild terror that gripped Europe before the appearance of the Tartar. The danger which threatened humanity was regarded as so extreme that even Danish fishermen did not venture into the open sea for fear of Mongols.

The same picture is apparent at that time within the boundary of the Far East as well as in the Far West—on the shores of the Pacific as well as on the shores of the Black Sea. One of the Chinese historians of that period exclaims with dismay that "since the creation of the world, no nation has been as powerful as the present Mongols. They devastate entire countries more easily than we pluck grass. Why do the heavens permit it?" Another writer, describing the consequences of Mongolian supremacy, significantly remarks that "in Asia and Western Europe a dog can hardly bark without the permission of the Mongols".

After overwhelming all Asia and reaching the threshold of Europe, the Mongolian invasion seemed such an ominous threat that the rulers of Europe began frantically to take counsel with each other as to ways of meeting the threatening danger. It was decided to undertake united resistance against this human deluge, as no single country could cope with it alone. No proof is more evident of the fear which these Mongol hordes inspired, even within the limits of the greatest European countries of that period, than the call of Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor, to the entire Christian world to repel the invasion of the dreaded Mongols. Just imagine an appeal addressed to "Germany, ardent in battles, France, nursing at her bosom a fearless army, militant Spain, England, powerful in men and ships, Crete, Sicily, wild Hibernia, and cold Norway,"—asking them to organize international crusades against the nomad conqueror who came to Europe from far-off Mongolia.

Excerpts from this manifesto eloquently remark the "Mongol terror" which surrounded Europe in 1240. "These people", wrote the emperor, "have emerged from the far ends of the world, where they have long been concealed in an atmosphere of terrific climatic extremities, and have suddenly and brutally swept upon the Northern countries, swarming like locusts. No one knows whence this fierce race has gained its title of Tartar, but one thing is certain, it is apparently God's will that this race has been preserved from prehistoric days as a weapon to scourge people for their transgressions, and mayhap even for the fall of Christendom. This brutal, savage people has not the least conception of humane principles. They have a leader whom they revere and whose command they blindly obey, calling him the earthly god. They are small in stature, stocky, strong,
with great resistance, and have unbreakable faith. At the least sign from their leader they throw themselves with reckless valor against the most incredible perils. They have broad faces, slanting eyes and emit the most terrifying shrieks and outcries, which indicate vividly the savagery of their hearts. They know no other raiment except the skins of oxen, asses and horses, and up to now their armor is only crudely and badly-soldered iron plates. But now—and we cannot mention this without a shudder—they begin to improve their armor by looting that of the Christians. Soon the Lord’s wrath will descend on all of us and these barbarians will begin to kill us, to our shame, with our own weapons. The Tartars already are learning to dress richly and elaborately, and at present they eat the most savory food. They ride beautiful horses and are inimitable archers. It is said that their horses, when they have no other fodder, eat foliage, bark and roots of trees and yet preserve their courage, strength and agility.” Thus Europe estimated the Mongols.

In later times these estimates become more exact and more detailed. For instance, Timur, instead of the former evaluation of a destroyer, received from the French savant, Grousset, a completely different estimate. Grousset says that Timur, “who combines the subtle strivings of Iran—Hindu culture with the austere mold of an ascetic, appears as one of the most colorful figures of the Indo-Iranic world”. Thus the great son of Chengiz Khan in the clan of Barlass is presented in a new light by the reflective scientist, Grousset. Similarly, many rulers of the world, who were hastily condemned, as quickly revealed themselves in a completely different light. Is this not the case in Russian history with Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great?

In recalling the descriptions of Grousset and the notes of Plano Karpini about the interest in arts and sciences of Mongolia, we may consider that the Mongolian apotheosis reached its zenith in Akbar the Great. Of course there have been prejudiced judgements of him as a bloodthirsty tyrant, but there has finally emerged a brilliant picture of the resplendent unifier and cultured ruler of a great country. And to this luminous image of Akbar, already apparent, new studies can only add new valuable signs. And the wisdom of the people which is just at its base, will add the aureole of a Saint to the image of the Great Emperor. Thus through the centuries the people can revere a consistently great service. In regard to the characteristics of Mongols, I also recall other notes by contemporaneous travellers. There are many valuable and benevolent tokens. One should likewise remember the sacred Mongolian books, with their covenants about the Bodhisattvas, and their admonitions to compassion, self-sacrifice and help to one’s neighbour. Let us also recall the Nestorian times. In short, let us not in any way disparage that which was so real a factor in the life of this strong and courageous people.
How many beautiful hours we recall from our own travels in Mongolia. I remember the hearty greeting of welcome of the Mongol Rinchin. How much we valued also the fiery exclamation of the grey headed Buriat, "Light conquers darkness"! I remember how valiantly the Mongols acted in our encounter with bandits. I remember the building of the Suburgan and the gracious offering of their treasures. If we go by the marks of benevolence we will find many of them. No matter how often a nation finds rebirth, its foundations still prevail. The same may be observed with many other peoples. Circumstances may change, bringing happiness or ill fortune, but the soul of the people remains. And one may trace this folk soul by its ancient songs, its sayings and its parables. In these indestructable folk mementos, one can find the worthiest characteristics.

In the laws of the Mongolian Khans, in the heroic epic of these people, is reflected a nature that is firm, courageous, often ascetic, patiently enduring the vicissitudes of their time.

And perceiving these covenants of the past, which have not been lost in the currents of the present day, should we not help this people, which desires peaceful progress?

There was a time when the circumstances of life and the yearnings of their heart enticed the Mongols into far off places, because man often thinks that the beyond is more alluring—" Splendid are the drums beyond the mountains". But contemporary thought has directed the Mongols towards the treasures of their own lands. To appreciate our own possessions, to learn to evaluate that which is defined by destiny, is a great accomplishment. It so happens that the Mongols as such, having concerned themselves with remote places, did not as yet exhaust their own inner treasures. Not to use, means not to waste. Therefore it is but just to direct attention to Mongolia with benevolence and friendship.

No one will make the error of exclaiming again " Lord preserve us from the Mongols!" On the contrary, thoughtful persons will send hearty wishes for the peaceful regeneration of their people.

Rigden Djyepo himself, in resplendent armor, is galloping on. The Mongols do not forget the visions of the Great Lama in 1927. So it is also said in the prophecies: "On the slope towards the sunrise a white stone will be revealed with an inscription...and though you hew out this inscription it will never disappear, but will for ever emerge again"
There was a time when the appreciation of art was the key to understanding the Mongols. The paradigm of the Mongol was the Golden Horde, and the central concept of their art was the "Emissary's Eye." Among the Mongols, the "Emissary's Eye" was the central concept of their art. The "Emissary's Eye" was the central concept of their art, and it was the key to understanding the Mongols.

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