DIARY LEAVES

By Nicholas Roerich

THE THREE SWORDS

The Wooden Sword.—The ancient Ostrov in the Pskov province, on the river Velikaya, and the fortress on the island! In 1879 we visited our grandmother, Tatiana Ivanovna Korkunov-Kalashnikov. At Lipenka there was an old house, with a large garden, run wild. The first floor was of white stone, the upper floor and the attic were of wood, painted in ochre, and the shutters and window frames were painted white.

Beneath, flowed the Velikaya, and behind, was a park belonging to a large estate with a white house, in the style of Catherine.

There were bushes full of berries and burdock in grandmother's garden and I wanted to fight with these dragons but had no sword. In the neighbourhood, however, was one Ivan Ivanovich Chugunov, a building contractor, who had all sorts of workmen. Things have a way of getting round, for he heard of my desire and brought in a brand new wooden sword. It was well made, with a long blade, and the hilt was carved. My only regret was that it was made of the wood of the lindentree, yet it was painted to look like bronze. All the same, I decided that it would serve my purpose and many dragons were laid low in my grandmother's garden.

The Iron Sword.—1896. The Academy of Arts. The idea of painting the suite "Slavonic Russia" was projected while other pictures, such as "The Messenger", ("Uprising of the Tribes"), "Meeting of the Elders", "The Campaign", and "Building of the Town" were executed.

I read much history. At Izvara an old chicken house was converted into a studio.
I began collecting wolf and lynx skins. The Slavs also had to have arms. A village blacksmith, covered with soot, forged a real iron sword for me, made to resemble those found in the Kurgans. For a long time this sword hung in the store room. George remembers it.

*The Fiery Sword*—1913. The fiery sword is brought to the sleeping sentinels. My painting, the "sword of courage" is now a necessity. The dates are being fulfilled. At the beginning of 1914 "The Red Dawn" ("With the Belgian Lion"), "The Cry of the Serpent"; "The Crowns" (disappearing in the clouds); "Human Deeds"; "The Doomed City" were hastily executed, together with all those pictures whose meaning we only understood later.

The "Fiery Sword" is for the threshold of a new world. And now in 1939 we recall these three swords.

In Western Tibet, three swords have been carved on the rocks from time immemorial. The boundary? Victory? The symbol of the three swords comes to memory.

"The Sword of Courage"!

**GOODLINESS OF QUALITY**

In the time of Akbar, it was forbidden, under severe penalty to sell perishable colors. Again, the ancient *shastras* speak about the good quality of paints. It would seem that civilization ought to have increased the durability of materials. But civilization aims at other goals. It has abandoned the humanities and forgotten about quality. Certain machine-made products lack durability when compared with those of the past. As to artists' materials, they have had to suffer considerably from "civilization". Thus many colors cannot stand the sulphur fumes and other chemical effluvia with which the atmosphere of cities is now filled. Instead of preservation there is a loss of value. If gasoline fumes on the Paris boulevards have caused the trees to wither, one can imagine how similar emanations can harm people in body and mind.