It appears as if in the course of the last fifteen years or so Russia had been unveiling to the Western World her artistic gifts. The preliminary stage of this process came long ago—with Turgenev's novels. Then followed a long period nourished almost entirely by the interest in Tchaykovsky's music. After that, two entirely different features of Russian art arrested the keen attention of the Westerner—namely, Dostoyevsky's writings and the ballet. Opinion on Dostoyevsky divided into two camps: the fascination of the ballet never wavered. Then came an onrush of Russian music generally, which made its way triumphantly. With it came a fuller stream of Russian literature—but it was brought to a standstill before the essentially Russian element, i.e. that Russian speech which is inseparable from the old Russian wording and phrasing. Gogol, Stchedrin, and the playwright Ostrovsky...
Nicholas K. Roerich

will remain for ever almost untranslatable, because even William Morris's John Ball would not dream of their speech; the poetic as well as colloquial forms which existed several centuries ago are still life-thriving and natural to a Russian, side by side with his ceaseless creating of new words. Some of our modern writers must be classed as past-masters in the beauty of their native tongue, and a Russian letter (A. Remizov, V. Ivanov, and also N. K. Roerich).

But there is one more sphere in Russian art, an immense sphere, the language of which is universal—the art of painting. It is known in the West through a few artists only; and N. K. Roerich—the Academician, Professor and Director of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts—is among the few already appreciated in Western Europe and in some of the big centres of America. He certainly should be ranked amongst the pioneers (there are already known painters are Vroubel, Somov, Serov, Benois) because his "language" is more universal than that of any artist. It is not only international, but "interplanetary." It appeals not only to the mystical Russian, but to all those who have the faculty of hearkening, expectant, to the whispers of Eternity. The silence of Roerich's northern waterways speaks. The weight of his rocks and ancient walls breathes life.

"Wonderful landscapes?" No, it is not the landscape itself. Nearly always there is something, often most unexpected, a human figure, or figures, doing something full of meaning. And yet their action is not the main thing either: it is not underlined by the artist, there is no finesse, no intended subtility, it is simply "Man's place in the Universe." In other words, the only thing that matters.

Everything in Roerich's works, viewed from the ordinary standpoint, looks fantastic; yet all meets the eye of the onlooker as if it had always existed in the hidden depths of his own vision. Therein, in spite of the essentially Russian forms, Roerich is not only Russian, but human in the broadest sense. He is above theory, above tendency, even above style as such. He is not a follower of any other artist, or school, although some compare him to Gauguin, Blate, or Vroubel, others see the spirit of the Far East and Byzantium in his mural decorations and ikons. He devotedly follows his own path, linking it with his own excavations in Russia, his own thoughts engendered in Infinity remains to be tangibly, to be understood, to be comprehended. Roerich has given Roerich a complete grasp of the object of the idea; he makes them tangible to us. For Roerich, as for Giogio Vasari, an artist's gift is the key to the convincingness of his creations. They fill you with the desire of hearkening, expectant, to the whispers of Eternity. The silence of Roerich's northern waterways speaks. The weight of his rocks and ancient walls breathes life.

"The Last Angel."
and the Rhine Academy; also of the Vienna Secession, his connexion with which he severed in 1914.

In 1907 Roerich was first inspired to compose scenery for an opera (Wagner's "Valkyries"), not to order, but "for himself"; very soon he became a past-master in that branch of art, wonderfully harmonizing his creations with the music of the operas and the spirit of the dramas. His were the sceneries for several operas in Sergey Diaghilev's productions, and for plays at the Moscow Art Theatre and the Ancient Theatre. He has recently completed the scenery for Rimsky Korsakov's "Tsar Saltan" (Pushkin's fairy tale), in pursuance of a commission given by Sir Thomas Beecham.

The Pochayev Cathedral and two or three private chapels are adorned with numerous mural paintings, done with Roerich's ever-present inspiration and love both for the subject and the technique suitable for it. He also worked enthusiastically for two years at Talashkino, the famous estate of Princess M. Tenisheva, where Ruskin and William Morris would have found all their ideals carried out by a group of inspired and inspiring people.

There is no museum or art gallery in Russia that does not own Roerich's canvases and designs for decorative art. In all, his creations number now over seven hundred. A good many of them have been acquired by the National Gallery in Rome, the Louvre (Pavillon Marsan) and the Luxembourg museums in Paris, and public art galleries in Vienna, Prague, Venice, Milan, Malmo, Brussels, Chicago, Stockholm, San Francisco, and Copenhagen. London saw some of Roerich's works at the Exhibition of Post-Impressionists in 1911.

Besides being a connoisseur, Roerich has also been an ardent collector of old paintings. He possessed a valuable collection of these in Petrograd, the fate of which is unknown, because he would not accept the high post offered to him by the Bolsheviks. His collections also included 75,000 objects illustrating the Stone Age.

He does not claim to be the founder of a school : ever discovering new harmonies between colour, line, and spirit, he thinks that every one should work out for himself his own conceptions and technique.

The main series that can be traced in Roerich's paintings (leaving aside his church frescoes and decorative productions) are as follow :

(1) The Saints and Legends. St. Procopius the Righteous blessing the Unknown Travellers; St. Tiron discovering the Arrow sent to him from Heaven, etc. All these paintings breathe of the power of spiritual calm, although the heavenly word is nowhere enforced upon the onlooker : it is only a characteristic tone in the general harmony of the composition.

(2) The Fascinations of the Stone Age. To this category belongs the canvas depicting the aborigines in some arctic region invoking the sun which is a living entity to them, as well as the one called The Idols—a shrine the like of which must have existed in ancient Russia on the top of many a hill overlooking open vistas. Another version of this painting contains a figure of an old initiate shielding his eyes from the sun and absorbed in the speaking silence of the distance. This work was completed in Paris, where Roerich worked for a year (1900) under Cormon. Cormon fully realized the untrammelled bent of Roerich's genius; encouraging it, he said: "Nous sommes trop raffinés."

(3) Landscape, and Old Russian Architecture. The Call of the Bells shows a nook in Old Pskov, where the figure of the angel on the church wall is part and parcel of the responsive atmosphere.

(4) The Spells of Russia. Wizards, enchanted places, hidden treasures, spirits of eternal fairy tales, maleficent animals, a beautiful horseman ever guarding a city from evil powers (The Enchanted City), a little aboriginal creature furtively hiding his treasures. . . . It seems to be the fate of Russians to hide their treasures! Numbers of them are being hidden now, just as they had to be hidden in the tumultuous
times of yore. No wonder that whole codes of magic rules have come into being, teaching how to handle treasures both in hiding them and in searching for them. A hidden treasure is almost a living creature; it has its own whims and moods, it can choose to be benevolent or mischievous.

(5) In 1913-1914 another order of creations came into existence through the intuition of the master: it may be designated "The Prophetic Paintings." To this group belong: The Lurid Glare, which later on appeared to be the symbol of Belgium; The Doomed City, a lifeless city encircled by an enormous serpent; The Messenger, a phantom boat standing motionless before unapproachable cliffs; Human Deeds, wise men contemplating a heap of ruins; The Cry of a Serpent, since the creation of which Roerich learned of an Eastern legend that a serpent utters a cry when it apprehends the approach of peril to its country.

The Last Angel came with the series of the prophetic pictures; but Mr. Roerich cannot explain any details. Why is it the "last" Angel? What is his message to poor earth overwrought by the chaos and flames around him? What does his spear mean? All the master knows about it are the four (untranslatable) lines which came to him together with the picture as its title. Approximately, they mean the following:

"And the beautiful, ever beautiful, The terrible, ever terrible, Last Angel Flew o'er the earth."

A special series is called "The Treasure," and refers to some mysterious form of wealth. In the first painting of this series some aborigines are lowering the treasure from their boat into the sea; in the second, a witch—or a fairy—is cooking some wonder-working herbs in a silent nook of a sea-cove; then, The Command is being sent out (wireless!) across the sea, in which action the clouds also seem to take a part; the fourth is The Eternal Fire burning amid the cold rocks; the fifth is Ever-expectant—some women's figures sitting motionless near a fantastic hut, patiently waiting for something great to take place. Then we see The Death of the Giants; they are turned into rocks; and—probably as the result of this achievement—come The Conquerors of the Treasure—busy little humans carrying something from a cave down into a boat.

I say "probably" because Mr. Roerich says that he does not know anything more about it! He just paints things as they are given to him, without deliberately inventing any details.

The clouds very often form equally telling subjects for Roerich's paintings: There is the famous Cloud—nothing in the whole canvas but an immense pale-malachite cloud rising, masterful, over a near horizon. One can gaze at it for hours: it seems to move. The Knight of the Evening is embodied in the sharply outlined fogs and clouds of a northern night. Then there is The Heavenly Battle—a conflict between clouds of all colours!—and the languid Fairy of Rain... The Sons of God come in glowing pink clouds to "the maidens of earth"—which results in the biblical race of giants (Genesis, ch. vi). This painting has been compared to the play of a black opal; its colouring is superb in the clarity of the deepest and richest tones.

Then there are the various forms and hues of stone, on each occasion playing a special part in the meaning of the picture. For instance, the overwhelming intensity of the cliffs (also in a luxurious darkling colour-scheme) which suggests many ages piled up on the crust of the earth, many eruptions and many floods—while Ecstasy alone stands motionless, unheeding in his contemplation... And what an individual rendering of "ecstasy," too! An old, old man, with a long, long beard, stalwart and powerful—but no flesh on his upright form.

Here again are the bellying, round towers of the ancient town of Izborsk, silhouetted against the greenish sky with fading stars; some secret deed is taking place here, as those stooping figures of the warriors disappear one after the other down the entrance of The Secret Passage. Or, yet another rôle of the stones: a veritable cradle of flame in the hollow between cold rocks: this is The Heat of the Earth—and an Angel is standing by it holding his sword in it in order to make it hot with wrath, because there is no wrath in Heaven! He is not enjoying his duty; he is just prepared for the task of bringing his sword...
The legends about St. Procopius are touching. This Saint was so poor that even the beggars turned him out when he asked for shelter in their hamlet; so the only home he had was the open stone entrance to a church where a warm wave would float through the air—so he knew that the Virgin allowed him to dwell there. Once he saw a cloud of stones menacing the town; he ran out into the field to meet it and prayed ardently, until the cloud changed its course. The picture illustrating the usual work of this Saint as he sits on a high bank blessing the unknown travellers, fills the onlooker with a profound feeling of relief. One begins to feel as if the Saint, the hills, the distant horizon, the human prayers and yourself were really blending into one harmonious whole.

In Roerich's work the spirit of freedom prevails both in subject and in technique. He ranges from the most translucent, moist, lovingly-gentle chords of colour (almost impossible to reproduce) to a startling effect of the weight of matter. He will apply the first of these mediums where, for instance, "St. Nicholas" is coming out of a morning to see whether all is peace on earth; or, when one of our forefathers is quietly piping his pipe, and a few bears are happily listening to him, and they are all of them as simple, yet full of meaning, as the green hills receding into the distance; or, where an old man came and sat down to live at the side of a wondrous stone; or, where a girl has come to "the edge of the sacred lake". Yes, Leonid Andreyev is right: Roerich is certainly at one with the life after death, with nature and our earth. This oneness is organic with him.

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Nicholas K. Roerich

himself with "the revelation" he sees in Jenetz, "building a town"; or, where "the giants standing lonely in the steppe, as if trees; or, where a little man is beyond the night is light"—and so on. While changing thoughts with God; or, "when arrests your attention where people are the weight of matter is the first thing that Lurid Glare, Dominus, The Last Angel, his native land, raises his head" to utter a sensing the approach of a catastrophe to shriek" for once in his life—but sees nothing except sharp, angular, heartless flames and conflagrations, his darkness, and his visions they saw around them.

Mr. Roerich thinks that this is because he paints all his landscapes as he really visualizes them; he studies all his clouds and stones before he re-creates them on his canvas; but then every painter does that—yet it is not every one that opens an additional window in people's mental vision.

Roerich's freedom is not the reckless licence which sometimes finds its self-expression in dwelling on details; on the contrary, he subordinates all details to the leading idea with severe discipline. His freedom is the freedom of imagination in the higher planes; therefore, it finds its self-expression in the variety of subjects, and it makes him treat each composition as a whole—as a clear note in the harmony of the Universe, and not as a chromatic scale of realistic details. It is only when the details are inseparable from the established style of work that Roerich carries them out with the daintiness of a miniaturist. Such are his numerous icons and church frescoes. There the grave beauty of the figures dwells within its long-ago-established harmony with the effect of dazzling conventional ornamentation of Byzantine origin.

It is interesting to quote here some paragraphs from the Russian poet Bal-trushaitis, who, amongst others, wrote several pages in the beautiful volume published for Roerich's jubilee:

"It is as essential to see the feast of colours in Roerich's paintings with one's own eye, as it is essential to hear a musical composition with one's own ears, in order to conceive its individual nature. In the very structure of his works there is the presence of some inexplicable musical rhythm, which makes the onlooker not only look at them, but hear the something with his spiritual hearing. . . .

Roerich is past-master in colour-harmonies; yet he is so severe with himself that he obviously rejects the temptation of a colour-play when the idea of his vision does not call for it. . . .

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of 'the real Roerich.' Since then he has become dear to me, and is growing dearer and dearer.

"However complete and expressive it is now, his art is still ripening, growing still more serene, simple and sure, and its highest achievements are still to come.

"We are of different origin: I am a Southerner, almost a pure Latin; Roerich is a Northerner, almost a pure Scandinavian. I am drawn to the slender cypresses, to the domes of the Alps barring the horizon, to the shining azure of the sea; he is the inspired singer of the spongy hills of the North, made soft and shapeless by the ice-drifts, of the sickly silver-birch and spruce, of the shadows running across the steppes. He is thrilled and stands in awe before a moss-covered hamlet, and still more, before the tent of a nomad; whereas I shall not exchange for anything in the world the smartness of San Pietro and the imperial harmony of the Escorial!

"Roerich is attracted by the desert, by distances, by the aborigines, by the first lisp of forms and ideas; he insists on his conception that goodness is in the powerful simplicity of soul and in Infinity, and thinks that we ought to begin again from the beginning... He would not mind returning to the scanty speech of the aborigines as long as their instincts could be expressed clearly and directly, as long as the untruth and the muddle of so-called civilization could be kept away. But, as usual, the real truth lies hidden between the two extremes, and we are approaching it from two opposite directions..."

"It is a characteristic whim of human fate that Roerich—a 'native,' a 'forefather,' a collector of stones, an excavator of shapeless mounts—is at the head of one of our greatest Russian centres of artistic culture, and is known as one of the most prominent connoisseurs and collectors of paintings of the old Western schools. In my turn, I have acquired in recent years a deeper 'insight into the earth' and her primary laws. Besides San Pietro and the Escorial, I have learned to love that very 'lisp' of Nature and Humanity which inspires Roerich the Varengian.

"From a youthful illustrator of ancient Russia, Roerich has developed into a poet. But, in his self-evolution, he has succeeded in remaining true to his original elements—and therein lies the power of his personality as well as the importance of his part in the general current of our art...

"Roerich remains a typical Norman. Since his illustrations to Maeterlinck's creations he has assimilated Western romanticism and has shown himself not only a great master, but a poet-seer. Some of his scenery for 'Princess Maleine' and for 'Sister Beatrice' are amazing in their true sense of the medieval North..."

"The philosophical value of Roerich's work is very great. I see in it more than merely artistic individuality. He is the representative of a whole school of thought, even of a whole sphere of culture. For expressing the gist of his philosophy he does not adopt abstract forms, but remains within the circle of concrete images and pictures of life—a life, maybe, remote from and dead to our minds, yet very convincing in its past existence and calling forth a familiar echo in our hearts..."

"His figures are lost in his landscape, but that landscape itself has acquired a distinct physiognomy. Roerich's best pictures are those in which nature is defiled, in which the artist is at one with his heroes, the primitive men. He attains special beauty and power when he trembles before the approach of an awful thunderstorm; or when he contemplates in ecstasy the boundless distances punctuated by the monotonous rhythm of the primitive forms, and prays to Perun and Yarila—or curses them with shouts of vehemence. Equally beautiful is the kindred spirit of the moon searching for something behind the clouds; or his enthusiastic reading of the future in the hieroglyphics of a Heavenly Battle..."

"There is something very deep in all this. The innate 'primitiveness' of Roerich, his myths and superstitions, link the cultured social worker, the leading spirit of a modern art school, with the aboriginal inhabitants of our marshes and forests; the all-but-broken threads are reappearing, linking up millenaries of human life.

"Some might wonder: 'What are those animal-like forefathers to us? They are dissolved in Eternity, they are gone and decayed!' But Roerich knows best... He knows that those ancestors of ours..."
NICHOLAS K. ROERICH

"CHURCH IN SUZDAL"

possessed a power which is still alive and still good enough for us. Roerich believes in their insight and grieves with them that the black sword of material culture penetrates the breast of Nature, and that the trampling on the Mother-earth grows more and more sacrilegious with men's efforts to turn the stream of her history into channels of absurd material greed. That is where Roerich and I meet each other. I shall never be tired of describing the beautifully wrought forms of the Vatican and the Escorial, while Roerich will continue his hymns to the vague beauty of the steppes and to the soft expansion of the architecture of the clouds; but we shall speak of the same thing: of Beauty—of that great secret gift which is granted to Man. We two should be not foes but allies and—if God wills it—friends. Our foe is the same: it is the hooliganism of those who want to forget about all the whispers and spells of Nature. . . . To them, all the best buildings, best pictures, and best books are only a film on their eyes which hinders them from keeping their ledgers in order. . . .

"True, Roerich's mind and taste are still Varangian: he loves and understands best that land which was conquered and loved by his ancestors; its very austerity gave them health and poured power into their veins. A serene tenderness kindles in Roerich's heart for those firesides where a whole file of his forefathers nursed the men, the girls, the mothers of their clan. But, at the same time, Roerich has learned from the voices singing in his soul to love and to understand humanity in general. . . . He wants to see guests coming from overseas he wants to see their lands and all the world in its boundlessness and complexity. He will always gather his health and strength from the soil of his own kindred Novgorod which is saturated with iron, but he will dedicate that strength not to narrow nationalism, but to humanism in the broadest sense. . . ."

"At this present hour when peoples are possessed by the devils of enmity and untruth, Roerich withdraws into his desert—as I withdraw into my temples—to create prayers to the Lord of peace and beauty."

"Having given this amusingly drawn psychological parallel, I feel nevertheless inclined to quote a few of Roerich's own lines from one of his early literary works, because I know that he has remained true to this conviction:

"There is nothing alarming in the contrast between the beauty of town and the beauty of nature. Just in the same way as fine contrasting colours do not kill each other but form a new powerful chord, so the beauty of nature and the beauty of town dwell hand-in-hand, intensifying each other. They are the two tones of the chord—its third tone being the beauty of the Unknown."

"Roerich does believe in culture; only he is convinced that art is a much more lofty international factor of evolution than the "mechanical civilization" of the last half-century."

"There is no reason to disbelieve the main outlines of the very old Russian legend which says that the ancient Slavs were peaceful, simple people who had no ambition to rule, to command, or to fight; that all they wanted was to be left in peace at their work on the land. "So they went across the sea to ask the Varangians to come and be their Princes and to rule over them." . . . "Three brothers came and settled down in the Russian Land; Rurik, Sineus, and Truvor." Presently the traces of the two youngest of these disappeared; but Rurik was supposed to have started a whole dynasty, the last of which on the Russian throne was Theodor, Ivan the Terrible's son. Then came the so-called "Tumultuous Times," after which a young Romanov was elected Tsar—again as the nearest to Prince Rurik's descendants."

"I had to remind the reader of this very probable origin of the Russian rulers (in any case, the Varangian, i.e. Norwegian, merchants and warriors were the first people of their kind to appear on the "great waterway between the North and the Greek land," and had all the chance to get into power—whether by invitation or by force!) because I wanted to mention a most interesting réve de notre modern writer Alexey Remizov. The beautiful form of his writings disappears in translation because they are given in that ancient Russian speech which has been mentioned before. Many of Roerich's pictures could be best interpreted by means of Remizov's poems inspired directly by the artist's
work—but, alas! those poems-in-prose must remain a treasure for the Russians only, because five words out of every ten have no parallel whatever in the known old English.

Nevertheless, I take my courage in both hands in order to give an approximate rendering of one of Remizov's pages; it is a most interesting rhapsody, and leads to what may be called a revelation—if you feel inclined to be theosophical!

"From beyond the sea there appeared, moving into the Russian Land across the quaking marshes, the ice-flows, and the crackling undergrowth, a man hard as flint.

"He made a fierce bonfire and built for himself a town in stone.

"And his throne was of red moss, his crown of moonstone, and his sword and shield of granite.

"Beyond the seas and the mists the tale spread of the Viking who went away and did not return. The Skalds composed a saga about him, the Giants mused and wondered—Why was there no sign of the Viking for so long a time? The grey-haired Morun worked spells in watching his waves—but, 'No,' said the waves, 'the Viking will never return.' Obolensky himself—of a brighter green than the green of the sea-grass—having licked his blind, cold cubs for the night, would tell them the long tale about the Viking who went over to the Russian Land.

"And his throne was of red moss, his crown of moonstone, and his sword and shield of granite.

"From beyond the Varengian Sea moved Viking the Flint into the Russian Land, along serpents' paths, and settled in his stone town.

"In the blue twilight of the autumn he would ascend his tower, and his eyes glowed like blue flames in the blue mist; they could see as far as beyond the third sea. And in the night the noydas of Lapland would join him and weave their spells o'er the stony range, o'er the wind, and o'er the waves.

"And the glare from the bonfires spread for miles around the town, hot and high.

"Like one born of the Russian Land, the Viking started putting it into shape.

"He went with Sviatoslav to Tsargrad, and saw what he never could forget: an Angel in the fiery skies, and a winged fire, and blue arrows that came down on the fleet of Russian boats, burning them.

"He heard Perun yell in anguish in christened Novgorod, and saw him toss and beat against the bank of the Volhov river.

"He saw the Hungari appear from beyond the Ural mountains and cross the Russian Land and vanish, darkling, behind the Carpathian Range.

"He was with Prince Igor on the Kayal river, and he will never forget the lament and the tears when the treason of the Russian Princes opened to the foe the gates of the Russian Land.

"One after another the centuries passed; and, resting under a snow-clad stone, he heard the Terrible Tsar Ivan raging recklessly over the Russian Land.

"Then the last threads of memory sank into darkness.

"More centuries went by.

"And then there again appeared a man—and settled in Petersburg on the Moyka: no more from the Varengian Sea, but from Kostroma-town; and no more Rurik (as they called Rurik in Old Novgorod)—but Roerich.

"And again, as of old, he built for himself a stone town. The memory came back to him as in a dream, and he told us about the rocks, and about the seas where he used to sail with his Friendships of Warriors, about the giants and the serpent, and the noydas, about the Terrible Angel, and about how Russia was being built up, and how the treason of the Russian Princes opened to the foe the gates of the Russian Land.

"The Blue is the Blue of the Northern Twilight;

"His Green is the Green of the sea-grass;

"His Red is the Red of bonfires,

"And his Flame—from Byzantine arrows.

"He built for himself a stone town—as roomy and as free as the Old Novgorod that was its own Master—and the glare from his bonfires is again spreading hot and high over the Russian Land."

"Tsargrad" is the ancient Russian name for Constantinople, until of late used by the Slavophiles.

† The Jupiter of the ancient Slavs.