

“ROERICH DAY”

A SYMPOSIUM ON NICHOLAS ROERICH

THE MAN, HIS MEANING AND HIS MESSAGE

HELD TO COMMEMORATE BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-BOUWERIE

NEW YORK

SUNDAY, APRIL 29, 1928

PUBLICATION OF THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS OF ROERICH MUSEUM

INTRODUCTION

by

DR. WILLIAM NORMAN GUTHRIE

Rector at Saint Mark's in the Bouwerie

On April the 29th we had at St. Mark's Church our annual effort to draw vivid attention to painting as related to religion. Our subject this time was Nicholas Roerich: "The Man, His Meaning and His Message," and a symposium was arranged to achieve our purpose in a broad and yet organic way. The program included:

SPEAKERS:

FRANCES R. GRANT, *2nd Vice-President of the Roerich Museum*
ASPECTS OF THE LIFE OF ROERICH.

IVAN NARODNY, *Writer and Critic*
FOURTH DIMENSIONAL VISTAS.

CHARLES WHARTON STORK, *Critic, Poet and Playwright, Compiler of Contemporary Verse Anthology, etc.*

THE INTERNATIONAL SPIRIT IN ROERICH'S ART.

STANISLAV REMBSKI, *Portrait Painter*
AN ARTIST'S REACTION TO ROERICH.

MARY SIEGRIST, *Poet and Translator of Roerich's Verse*
ROERICH, POET IN WORDS.

My own special message on the occasion was two-fold in its bearing. On the one hand, the fact that world union requires a truly inclusive world religion. There are barriers between organized religion, and these barriers are most easily passed by the Saints on the wings of mystical devotion. But lacking such spiritual gifts, it is through the appreciation of the art incidental to the worship of the diverse religions that a genuine understanding and sympathy can be established. Roerich has



THE ARCHIVE OF
NICHOLAS
ROERICH
MUSEUM

been marvelous in the interpretation of the mystical call of diverse great religions through the classic lands and expressive civilizations of which he has sympathetically passed as an open-eyed seer and painter. To know his best work is to take a higher course in comparative religion. I call attention also to what perhaps is responsible for my greatest immediate response to the painter—namely, his systematic mode of poetic ethnological thinking. He is always the poet who sees the whole past in the present. He thinks out the local in terms of the universal, but he loses no element of charm of potency in the local; on the contrary, he emphasizes it. He deals with the past as one whose eyes are after all on the future. He would give immortality to that among things by-gone which belongs to the holiest evolution of the race, but his prophecy is kept sane even when most apocalyptic by that remorseless grasp of significant fact—of the fact apart from its significance. He feels the beginnings of things in their flowering and fruiting, and in their flowering and fruiting remembers the seed sown ages ago. It is this singular, intelligent reverence, then, incident to his evolutionary and ethnological thinking, that gives his artistic work so strangely poignant an appeal to those interested in the preservation and progress of human culture.

ASPECTS OF THE LIFE OF ROERICH

by

FRANCES R. GRANT

In this service of today, dedicated to the cause of the unity of peoples and faiths, as made manifest by the voice of a great creator, I am asked to tell you something of Roerich's life—something of the seed that gave so perfect a flowering and one so vital and necessary to the very needs of our day.

The life of a man is important if in its texture there has been interwoven a design, direct and telling; if its warp and woof are so spun as to present a pattern of perfect harmony and balance. So it is with the greatest of men—and in Roerich we have one of the greatest since the Assissian! I speak of the Assissian advisedly because some one has said of St. Francis that he was the Morning Star of the Renaissance and that he it was who evoked the new era of beauty. And in the New Renaissance which is to be, in this new dawn of beauty and spirit—it is such works as Roerich's to which we must look to as our Magian star.

If I were to try to transmit to you the one thread, the one predominant force, which flashes its way through the life of Roerich, perhaps I would best turn to the words of the Eastern Teacher—"Oh thou keen blade, oh thou smiting hammer, I am coming, Master Builder, I am coming."

Such is Roerich's call—his is the way of the builder, his is the song of labor and of action, and his banner is of the new community of the world. He is the spirit moving onward indefatigably—inde-fatigably conquering.

I shall briefly speak of his life—of those special factors which may explain the background of his world spirit. Roerich was born in Russia of families which had settled in Russia for centuries. But far back in Roerich flowed the strain of the Nordics—the indomitable conquerors. Through the ancient line of his mother's side—one of the oldest in Russia—one already senses

the pulse of Asia. Thus Roerich contained within himself that crystal of understanding of the true East and West.

One of Roerich's earliest interests—one which gives a key to many of his future paintings—was his interest in archaeology. The story has often been told of how he unearthed the great mounds on his family estate in northern Russia; how he there found the early examples of Stone Age man, striving toward creative beauty. The importance of this early interest lies in this: that in turning the pages of time, long since sealed, Roerich learned to read those ancient runes of beauty; he perceived the great spirit of that man of the past of whom he has written.

Thus early Roerich learned to realize the unity of man and earth—of spirit and matter. He perceives that that fiery thread of creation runs through the history of earth; that in the flux of all things this call to beauty, the great impetus to creation, is the thread which has united the past with the present, the progenitors with posterity.

Roerich's father was an eminent attorney and he desired to have his son follow in his steps. Desiring to turn his path towards the creation of beauty, Roerich nevertheless demonstrated early that remarkable quality of containment and absence of denial by attending both the academy and the university at the one time, graduating from both with honors. In the academy he worked under Kuindjy—that rugged stalwart force for the best in art. When he graduated from the academy there came to his genius a signal recognition—his painting "The Messenger," which was exhibited, was bought by Tretiakov, astute connoisseur, for the Tretiakov Gallery at Leningrad.

A year in Paris enabled him even more firmly to define his own style and crystallize his medium. And thenceforth he turns to the widest gamut of world fantasy for his subjects. Roerich returned then to Russia where he was appointed secretary of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts. Here again that tremendous creative force which is his, manifests itself in a new

facet and enables him to make this organization under his guidance one of the most powerful in Russia's culture. And that same power of Roerich's manifested itself in every phase of her creative life—as first president of the Mir Iskusstva, as collaborator in the Moscow Art Theatre, and with such men as Stravinsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff and others in their creative ideas. Thus the full force of his activity manifested itself in each field of cultural work.

In 1920 Roerich arrived in America—it is to me one of the unique consummations of our artistic life that America should have so opened her heart to Roerich and that wherever his paintings were shown through this country there was a leaping out to this messenger of the new spirit of America. And here Roerich vindicated the faith he had shown in this country some twenty years ago when he organized the first American exhibition in his country thereby signifying his faith in our great creative future. As Roerich has said in his farewell word, before setting out on his mission for the cultural benefits of American life—"Great and young is America, young and great are her aspirations."

It was shortly after his arrival that Roerich brought into being in America an institution which he had long since conceived—the Master Institute of United Arts uniting all arts and giving to young America the spirit of creation. And this institution has continued since its inception with constantly increased vigor. The second institution, Corona Mundi, International Art Center, was founded the following year with the aim of going beyond school walls directly to the people. Since then, this institution has founded a center of arts where exhibitions devoted to the arts of all peoples are shown. It has sent exhibitions to all parts of this country, into schools, museums, libraries, community centers—and last year even into prisons, with the feeling that art should bring its benefits to all. Numerous other activities of this country have gained also from

Roerich the force of his creative ideas.

In 1923 Roerich realized his dream of going to Asia—and it was shortly after his departure that the Roerich Museum was founded to his art. It is rare that an institution has been devoted to one master and perhaps never before to a master in his life time—but this museum was a monument to a spirit whose creative word made its appeal to all people, and whose utterances have merged with the spiritual language of all peoples. In dedicating the Museum to Roerich's art it has been consecrated to the spirit of unity, to the spirit of all-containment to which we are dedicating ourselves upon this occasion.

In his Expedition to Asia—Roerich has completed another step in a life which knows no barriers and which is ever searching new summits of spirit. No traveler to Asia has ever been better prepared for the passage to Asia—her life and her spirit—than Roerich. He went joyously as one searching new heights to conquer and the Himalayas which beckoned to him, evoked new symbols of spiritual attainment. Since he has started, Roerich's way has been a visible evidence of the invincibility of a man stirred by the desire of service to his fellows. Undaunted by the perils of his way, by the almost unendurable hardships which he passed, he has been enabled to send back to America his cherished treasures which are among the greatest additions to the store of America's beauty. In addition, he has gathered great scientific data and has brought out of the East a new wealth of knowledge. To the West, in his art and in his writings, he has brought a true image of Asia, he has shown her physical beauties, and has also reflected the spirit of Asia—the great brooding spirit in which has gestated each religion of earth in turn.

For America, his visit to Asia has been an epochal event. Throughout the heart of Asia, Roerich has carried the message of America; there, where the name of America was little known—he has transmitted the word of her virile young spirit. He

has carried the flag of this country so beloved to him, into remote fastnesses and to far-off peoples—and everywhere he has made new friends for her striving soul. And now through Asia, many nations look toward this young country as the new friend and example of The East.

Before ending, I shall speak briefly of Roerich's art. Someone has said that the cosmogony of Roerich's art may be compared to Wagner, beginning in the fundamental tones of world chaos and attaining the apotheosis of a Parsifal. Truly in Roerich's art one sees the reflection of the great spiritual processes—the great evolution. All things are in flux, all striving toward the eternal, towards perfection. Thus, in Roerich's nature-paintings he has evoked a world in the process of becoming, a world in evolution. In his paintings of early man, of folk lore—one sees the dawn of man's spiritual striving, the beginning of spirit. In his sacred pictures, one finds that same spiritual devotion which is reflected in the primitive masters. Then came his prophetic paintings—that thunderous series, beginning in 1910 and including such works as "Human Deeds," "The Last Angel" and other works which seemed to reveal the threatening catastrophe, the conflagration which would envelop the world. But if Roerich with his great inner vision, sensed then the impending world conflict—since 1920, when he arrived in America, his prophetic eye has foreseen a new future. In the works in America, as well as in those paintings in the Himalayas, one discerns his vision of a new future—one of achievement. He sees before him the new dawn, a new intercourse of humanity, where labor and attainment shall be exalted and where the spirit may reach its heights. In his final paintings—in his "Banners of the East" series, in the Mongolian series—one knows that he has felt the pulse of the future. He sees the fulfilment of the new communion among men.

Roerich's way has been indeed a triumphant journey—the path of the freed spirit reaching attainment. He has given to

his fellows fully from his creative bounty—a bounty luminous and inexhaustible.

Claude Bragdon has said of Roerich that he was “Like an indefatigable hunter,” ever seeking the beauty which is truth. Let me but add—Roerich is verily the Hunter and like the Hunter in his own Poem—he is bringing his quarry to the Sons of Light!

In Roerich is the living evidence of the fulfilment of his word—“Beauty will open all the sacred gates. Beneath the sign of beauty we walk joyfully. With beauty we conquer. Through beauty we pray. In beauty we are united. And now we affirm these words—not on the snowy heights, but amidst the turmoil of the city. And realizing the path of true reality, we greet with a happy smile the future.”

FOURTH DIMENSIONAL VISTAS IN ROERICH'S ART

by

IVAN NARODNY

When I was a young boy, my mother told to me tales of the wonder-working holy pictures by emphasizing that all the icons in the churches and in the homes had the magic power of influencing the worshippers. Not far from our home was a simple country church with a number of icons, among which one, the image of St. Nicholas, was said to be a wonder-working holy picture before which the worshippers knelt, prayed and lit the candles.

“But how about the other beautiful paintings?” I asked my mother. “How about the pictures of ‘A Moonlight Night’ by Shishkin, or ‘The Idyll’ by Bruiloff, of which we had excellent copies?”

“Not every work of art has the magic of miracles,” commented my mother. “There is a sacred and a secular art.”

This was great news to me and I began to brood about the magic of art. I wondered what it was. I looked at the beautiful pictures in the museum and I looked at the so-called sacred paintings, which were less beautiful, but weird.

In order to see the miracle-working power of the sacred paintings, particularly of the St. Nicholas icon in our village church, I decided to test the secret magic by praying for hours for a new suit of clothes and a watch. I left the church and waited for the miracle; but nothing happened.

I then decided to test the icon with another appeal. I took from the nest of a pigeon a freshly laid egg, carried it in my hand into the church—in a time when nobody was there—and knelt before the icon of St. Nicholas, praying for a miracle of a live pigeon to fly out of the egg. I prayed for hours, in fact the whole night, and no pigeon flew out of the egg. Nothing whatever happened after my numerous tests with the wonder-working icon, and I realized the stories that my mother had told

me of its magic was nothing but an allegory or a fairy tale.

Years went by.

I grew to young manhood and still beheld many people praying before the wonder-working St. Nicholas, fully believing in its miraculous powers. By this time I had become an agnostic and, like all the rest of our sophisticated educated youth, energy and matter, tangibility and scientific theory meant everything to me.

In those years an idea came to me, to get even with the superstitious tales of the church which had "fooled" me and continued to "fool" the worshippers, as I thought. And I decided to play a trick, by exchanging the icon of St. Nicholas for a reproduction of Rembrandt's famous "Prodigal Son," and other icons for some beautiful paintings of well-known masters, so that the church could have real works of art.

About a week or so after a police officer called on me and arrested me for what was termed "desecration of the church" and I was placed in jail. According to Russian law, this was a terrible crime, and I faced banishment to a monastery prison for years or exile to Siberia.

To be regarded as such a terrible criminal for exchanging the works of art—more for fun than anything else—was a shock to me. And for a long time I could not get over my accusing conscience: "Man, you are a criminal."

After having spent months in jail for no other reason than that of trying to prove the fraud of miracle-working icons, I began to consider the term "criminal" as meaning something *socially failed* but *individually heroic*, and thus from an agnostic I became an intellectual anarchist like Bakunin, Kropotkin—in fact any philosophical anarchist of today. I did not believe in any miracles, nor in any pictorial magic.

Years and years passed.

I had been living already for years in America—in fact, I considered myself a rooted New Yorker—when something hap-

pened that upset my agnosticism and intellectual anarchism.

It was shortly after the end of the World War—in 1921—when I had grown disgusted of all idealism, all worthy aspirations in life. In fact I was a cynic of the worst kind, on the verge of a mental and physical breakdown.

Mr. Hunt Diederich came to me in one of the gloomiest moments of the time and dragged me along to see a "new Russian artist arrived from England" and his exhibition shortly to open at the Kingore Gallery in New York.

It was the exhibition of the works of art of Professor Nicholas Roerich. His canvases were just hung on the walls and I was alone with Hunt Diederich looking at them like one dazed after a heavy illness. The longer I looked on them the more I felt relieved of the uncanny pressure on my heart.

I had heard of Professor Roerich's art faintly and had seen some of the reproductions of his dramatic settings, but I beheld his works in a systematic array for the first time. Here were his "Old Pskoff," so familiar to me from my youth in reality, his "White Monastery," his "Sadko" sets, etc. I began to feel the magic of their "aesthetic rhythm," the metaphysical tones of their designs and color harmonies and I felt like a new ray of light was falling on my disillusioned soul; I had actually sunk into moments of silent devotion or prayer.

When, after an hour's quiet rejoicing over the new impressions, I left the Kingore Gallery, I felt that something strange had happened to me—I was a changed man. From a depressing melancholy and cynicism of life I had been transformed by the sight of the canvases of Nicholas Roerich into an aesthetic optimist, a believer in the mystic powers of beauty.

After I had left Roerich's exhibition I began to realize that the pictorial magic, of which my mother had spoken to me, actually existed—and here it was. A miracle had been performed within my soul—my conscious state of mind. The Roerich's pictures had healed me from a serious oppression. It

was the inner nature of his pictorial magic—that metaphysical quality of art, which had been attributed to the iconographic art of the past. It is something elusive and intuitional, which neither technical terms nor academic arguments can explain.

Thus I found—after 30 or more years—that there is a transcendental basis to the legends and mass beliefs of the miracle-working art, which I have found most outspoken in the creations of Professor Nicholas Roerich.

During the last summer I visited the Soviet Republics and I had occasion to find my views corroborated in a little country church between the Esthonian boundary and Leningrad.

As the train on which I travelled from Esthonia to the Soviet Republics was held up for over an hour by repairs of the road, I walked to a nearby village church, where the people were gathering. To my surprise I found that an exhibition of art and handicraft was being held in the church, and I was told it was the new Living Church of Russia. On the exhibition table among other things of art I noticed two reproductions of the paintings of Nicholas Roerich, taking the place of the icons on the altar.

“There is something sacred about these pictures,” commented the priest.

I smiled and told to the priest the story of my experience with the “sacred art” in my early youth.

There is something “sacred” with the art of Professor Roerich—an emanation that only those can feel who have the power of an “inner sight.”

AN ARTIST'S REACTION TO ROERICH

by

STANISLAV REMBSKI

In his book, “Paths of Blessing,” Professor Roerich expresses views on art and life so broad and universal, and going so far beyond any group spirit, that one can and should approach his art only from that angle. As his mind and spirit look out into the future, embracing and uniting nations, peoples—humanity at large—his art, being a result and expression of each individual step towards this goal, cannot but be a link of the chain holding humanity together and identifying it as one entity.

Nicholas Roerich as a man has grown beyond the limits of a nationality or race. And yet his first thinking, life and work were typically Russian in character. He started out as a realist. He accepted his immediate surroundings (as they appeared) as truth and in all sincerity rendered on his canvases what he saw. One can be a very great painter by rendering in a great manner what one sees with the physical eye alone. We have had many a painter of great renown who achieved this kind of realism. But Roerich in his earnestness and sincerity, in his eternal search for truth beyond the perceptible fact, looks behind the visible surface. He realizes the law behind the manifestation—a law unformulated by any human authority, and so not deadened and devitalized. He continues to be keenly alive. Guided by the immortal spirit of life he perceives every day new vistas. He beholds a living world as the image of this All-permeating, All-knowing, Ever-present Principle. He becomes humble beholding this grandeur. There is that true humility which only faith, risen to true knowledge, can bring about. He becomes an Initiate. He knows now the manifestations of God from his own experience. He is surrounded by such a plenty, he is so preoccupied watching, absorbing these miraculous phenomena, that he becomes one with them, loses all thought of self in consciousness of the whole. He becomes

like a focus of a lens, having no dimensions of its own, yet refracting all the universe within the lens's field of vision. Having become one with the Spirit of Life, how can one paint anything but the vital, the universal, the cosmic?

The man having been sincere in following the impulse of the soul's craving for union with its Creator cannot help but be sincere in all he does. And being sincere means remaining sincere. This sincerity alone—this glory of childlikeness—is the key to the gates of Heaven.

Having consciously planted the Spirit of sincerity in the soil of his Occidental education and culture, Nicholas Roerich finds himself at home in the Orient. And how has this been accomplished?

Earnestly he searched for truth, harmonizing his soul-life with his physical experiences. The aged soul-knowledge he strove to bring to a common denominator with the fleeting sensations of the tangible world surrounding him. This is what performed the miracle.

Not only does he absorb the accumulated wealth of the East. Like a horn of plenty he pours out upon the world these countless treasures. Is it then an accident that the Roerich Museum was founded in the metropolis of the Western World—the City of New York?

Only an individual as simple and yet as complex; as receptive and yet as active; as much of the soil as of the spirit, could be one of the chosen, to serve as a link between the East and West.

NICHOLAS ROERICH AS POET

by

MARY SIEGRIST

Not strangely, Nicholas Roerich is master of the singing word no less than he is of the singing form and color. Not strangely, indeed; for truly "the arts are one," and the medium, it would seem, follows naturally—is chosen spontaneously—when the great ocean-tides of the spirit rise and flow. His poetry has the same vibrant touch of the master, the same sense of cosmic unfoldment, the same direct, arrow-like quality that is to be found in all of his paintings. His lyric words, like so many singing arrows, fly straight to their invisible goal. In them breathe the same depth and intensity, the same rhythmic sweep and exaltation that characterize his work as artist. That astonishing luminosity—the unearthly radiance as of a light that never was on land or sea—rays out powerfully from his lyric lines just as it does from the planes and masses of his illumined canvases. With the unerring touch of the master he "makes in flame as nature makes," guided by that "Light whose touch kindles the universe." Indeed, an unmistakable feeling as of great Presences—of their continual inspiration and guidance—broods like a great wing, unseen but felt, upon his lines.

That sense of mysticism, that intangible but all-pervasive fourth dimensional quality that inheres in all great art, is constantly manifest. The lines have the sweep and exaltation, the surge and upthrust of a beauty that is born in the region of the Great Within.

Much might be said of the subtle qualities of technique, of the elements of light and shadow, of that delicate and unobtrusive craftsmanship by means of which each word, each phrase, becomes pregnant with meaning. In this brief space of time, however, let us deal rather with wholes than with structural effects, with the substance of the poetry of Roerich, its spiritual message, its philosophic import, rather than with for-

mal matters of prosody. For here again Roerich as technician is overshadowed by Roerich the poet. His words group and arrange themselves easily, like flocks of birds. This ease, this naturalness and simplicity are characteristic of all art that has permanence.

Again, in Roerich's lyric utterance as in his expression in form and color, there is the same rainbow quality—the same arresting promise of the future, the same striking prophecy of dawn, of the greatness and fulness of Tomorrow. "The great Today shall be dimmed Tomorrow," he declares, and again his prophecy rings out:

Where can they be—
The sacred signs? Today, it may be
We shall not find them.
But Tomorrow will be
Light. I know—
We shall
See.

Certainly Roerich differs strikingly from many of our so-called "moderns" in this way—that he insists that "heaven lies about us AS in our infancy." Life for him is not a diminishing scale but a crescendo—does not grow less but greater with the years. He affirms that this perfect spiritual world that we contact in rare moments, in whose waters we sometimes unconsciously bathe, is here for our discovery and inhabiting, lies all about us, only awaiting our continual search and recognition. He is in all that he writes no less than in all that he paints the Great Believer. There is a quest. There is a pilgrimage. Therefore he is the unceasing searcher, the unwearable pilgrim. This note is dominant, reverberates again and again in his poetry. One feels throughout the body of it this spiritual awareness and prophecy, this deep consciousness of the sacred pilgrimage that must be made sooner or later by every human being born into the worlds.

And not only is there the recording of the experience of infinite search but no less the sense of rich discovery. The "Knight of the Night" and the "Knight of the Morning" in each of us who goes forth at the call of the awakened spirit within—of the Unseen Messenger—comes eventually upon the country of sunrise. There is a spiritual treasure-trove, a Holy Grail, to be found by each spiritual pilgrim. Always at the call of the Messenger he must arise and gird himself for the long journey. And the "knocking one" is finally "admitted." This is the triumphant major chord of the symphony. The "Last Gates" are stormed and entered. Often, significantly, the pilgrim journeys alone:

Once more shall my voice resound.
Whither did you go from me?
Your voices deafened
On the rocks. No more can I distinguish
Your voice from
A falling branch, from the flight
Of a migrating bird. My calls
To you were also drowned.
I do not know whether you will go
But I still long
To reach the height. The stones
Already stand bare. The moss becomes
Fainter, and the juniper
Whithers and stands weakly.
Your rope would be useful
To me too; but also alone
I shall ascend.

In all of the poetry of Roerich there is a fullness and expansion of consciousness, a vibration of light and color, a sense of prophecy and ongoing, of search, discovery and fulfilment that is as indissolubly a part of his singing word as it is of the colors and contours of his brush.

The poems I shall now read appear in the January number
of THE ARCHER:

SACRED SIGNS

By NICHOLAS ROERICH

Translated by Mary Siegrist

(From "Flowers of Morya")

We do not know. But they know.
The stones know. Even trees
Know.
And they remember.
They remember who named the mountains
And rivers,
Who constructed the former
Cities. Who gave the names
To the immemorial countries,
Words unknown to us.
They are filled with significance.
Everything is filled with achievements.
Everywhere
Heroes passed. "To know"
Is a sweet word. "To remember"
Is a terrible word. To know and
To remember. To remember and to know.
Means—to have faith.
Airships were flying.
Came pouring a liquid fire. Came flashing
The spark of life and death.
By the might of spirit stony masses
Ascended.
A wondrous blade was forged.
Scriptures guarded wise secrets.
And again all is revealed.
All new.

Fairy tale—legend—
Have become life. And we live again.
And again we shall change.
And again
We shall touch the earth.
The great "Today" shall be dimmed
Tomorrow.
But sacred signs
Will appear. Then
When needed,
They will be unperceived. Who knows?
But they will create
Life. And where are
The sacred signs?

AT THE LAST GATES

By NICHOLAS ROERICH

Translated by Mary Siegrist

(From "Flowers of Morya")

We were told "Forbidden!"
Yet we entered none the less.
We approached the gates.
Everywhere we heard the word "Forbidden!"
We wanted to see the signs.
We were told "Forbidden!"
We wanted to kindle the light.
We were told "Forbidden!"
—"Gray, seeing, knowing guards,
You are erring guards.
The host has permitted to ascertain.
The host has permitted to see.
No doubt it is his wish

That we shall know, that we shall see.
Behind the gates a messenger stands.
He brings us something.
Let us in, guards!"
"Forbidden!" we were told.
And the gates were closed.
But none the less many were the gates
We passed. We broke our way through
And "Permitted" remained behind us.
The sentinels at the gate guarded us.
And begged. And threatened.
And warned: "Forbidden!"
All forbidden? Forbidden all?
To all forbidden?
And only behind us "Permitted"?
But on the Last Gates
It will be traced "Permitted!"
And behind us "Forbidden."
So he commanded to trace upon the Last Gates.