

THE

SLAVIC AMERICAN

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NIKOLA TESLA - Poet in Electricity

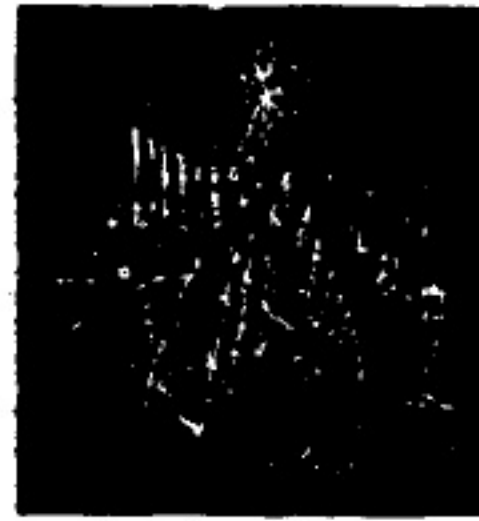
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Nikola TESLA



Whose daring imagination and concrete accomplishments are among the wonders of our age.

By PAULINE KLOPACKA

WHEN Nikola Tesla died in January of 1943 in comparative seclusion in a New York hotel, he owned no more than the few personal possessions that had become dear to him during the 86 years of his life. Yet his estate was so fabulous that its value can never be truly assessed. And his heirs were the men and women of all the world.

What price can be put on the work of a man who brought into being the electric power era? The industrial giant that the U. S. is today rests on the series of brilliant discoveries and inventions in the harnessing and transmission of electricity conceived

by Nikola Tesla, who came to this country from the land of the South Slavs when he was 28 years of age.

It was at midnight between July 9 and 10 in 1856 that a son, Nikola, was born to the Rev. Milutin Tesla and Djouka, his wife, in the little Serbian village of Smiljan, in the province of Lika. Now a part of Yugoslavia, it was at that time under Austro-Hungarian rule.

Tesla's father, a Serb, was a priest of the Greek Church, and his mother of a distinguished Serbian family, came from a long line of inventors. Both father and mother gave to the child a valuable heritage and culture

developed and passed on by ancestral families that had been community leaders for many generations.

It was at first planned that the son prepare for the priesthood but Nikola would have none of this. Physics and mathematics fascinated him. He would be a teacher of these favorite subjects. But then he switched to electrical engineering and at the age of 25 a graduate of Prague University—earlier training had been obtained at the Graz Polytechnic in Austria—he was set for his first job.

At that time the American Telephone System was brought to Europe and an installation set up in Budapest, where Tesla was a successful applicant for a position.

THREE years later, in 1884, he was U. S. bound. There were 4 cents in the young immigrant's pocket when he arrived in New York, but that did not disturb him. He had the names of friends. He would soon get to work.

His confidence was well founded, since within a few years he was counted among the ranking scientists of the country, his discoveries bringing in handsome royalties.

It is interesting to note the description of Tesla at this time by his biographer, J. J. O'Neill in the book, "Prodigal Genius": "Tesla was a



Drawings by Alvina Seckar

spectacular figure in New York in 1891. A tall, dark, handsomely well-built individual with a flare for wearing clothes that gave him an air of magnificence, who spoke perfect English but carried an atmosphere of European culture. He was an outstanding personality to all who beheld him." One of his colleagues described him as "immaculately groomed, and of delightful courtesy and charm."

A review of Tesla's work is nothing short of amazing. To quote from J. J. O'Neill's book:

"It was Tesla's invention of the polyphase alternating current system that was directly responsible for harnessing Niagara Falls and opening the modern electric super-power era in which electricity is transported for hundreds of miles to operate the tens of thousands of mass production factories of our industrial system."

"Every one of the tall, Martian transmission lines that stalks across the earth and whose wires carry electricity to distant cities is a monument to Tesla, every dynamo and every motor that drives every machine in the country is a monument to him."

"He discovered the secret of transmitting electric power to the utmost ends of the earth without wires and demonstrated his system by which power could be drawn from the earth anywhere by making a connection to the ground; he set the entire earth in electrical vibration with a generator which sprouted lightning that rivaled the fiery artillery of the heavens. It was a minor portion of this discovery that he created the modern radio system. He planned our broadcasting methods of today 40 years ago when others saw in the wireless only the dot and dash message that might save ships in distress."

"Tesla was an inventor but he was much more than a producer of devices. He was a discoverer of new principles opening many new empires of knowledge which even today have been only partly explored. In a single burst of invention he created the world of power of today."

"He brought into being our electric power era, the rock bottom foundation on which the industrial system of the entire world is built. He gave us our mass production system for without his motors and currents it could not exist."

"He gave us every essential of current radio. He invented radar 40 years before its use in World War II. He gave us our modern neon and other forms of gaseous tube lighting. He gave us fluorescent lighting. He gave us the high frequency currents which are performing their electronic wonders throughout the industrial and medical world. He gave us remote control by radio."

Always proud of his national origin, Tesla spoke as follows during his visit to Belgrade in 1892 in answer to a speech of welcome by the city's

mayor: "There is something in me which is only perhaps illusory . . . but if I were to be sufficiently fortunate to bring about at least some of my ideas it would be for the benefit of all humanity. If these hopes become one day a reality, my greatest joy would spring from the fact that this work would be the work of a Serb."

Tesla dedicated his life to peace, to lightening the burden of toil from the shoulders of his fellow man. As every scientist who so interprets his function in society, he was stricken when he saw the coming of World War II and his inventions being prepared for destructive purposes. He sought desperately to prevent the war and made available a device which he offered to the world, maintaining that it would make any country, no matter how small, safe within its boundaries. His offer was rejected.

But once the war was an accomplished fact, and when the people's armies rose in defense of their nations in what appeared to be an unequal fight, he did all he could to rally his countrymen to work to the limit in the war effort.

Shortly before his death he wrote as follows to his nephew, M. Sava Kosanovic, now Yugoslav Ambassador to the U. S.:

"President Roosevelt and Donald Nelson, Director of our War Production have repeatedly urged the American people, workers and employers, to meet as fully as possible the goals established for the production of war materials. . . . For that reason, my dear brothers and sisters, as the oldest Serb, Yugoslav and American in the U. S., I am addressing this letter to you, asking you to answer the call of President Roosevelt."

"The achievements of our brothers in the old country are worthy of the spirit which permeates our folklore . . . the fate of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is inseparable."

Tesla was not satisfied with his achievements in releasing the earth's energies so that men could work with less backbreaking effort and live more comfortably. The man who could

draw up a design for a perfect motor was also concerned with drawing up a plan for a better world. When Tesla read the address of the then Vice-President, Henry A. Wallace, on The Future of the Common Man, he was fired with enthusiasm. The Yugoslav edition of the speech included a preface by Nikola Tesla written in October, 1942:

"Out of this war, the greatest since the beginning of history, a new world must be born, a world that would justify the sacrifices offered by humanity. This new world must be a world in which there shall be no exploitation of the weak by the strong, of the good by the evil; where there will be no humiliation of the poor by the violence of the rich; where the products of intellect, science and art will serve society for the betterment and beautification of life, and not individuals for the amassing of wealth. This new world shall not be a world of the down-trodden and humiliated, but of free men and free nations, equal in dignity and respect for man . . ."

This man, whose work was so advanced of his time that much of it still remains unexplored could have amassed millions, but he was so little interested in personal gain that to save his friend, Mr. Westinghouse, from bankruptcy he tore up a contract which would have brought him \$12 millions in royalties. Pressed for funds during the latter part of his life, many of his inventions are lost to the world.

But though he was often short of money he would walk over to Herald Square and feed the pigeons. It was almost a sacred trust, feeding the pigeons twice a day. They had been his personal responsibility through the years, and if he could not be there to do the feeding, a Western Union messenger boy would be hired to do the job in his stead. Often he would forget an important engagement so that he might keep his "date" on Herald Square. The pigeons were a way to relaxation, a note of warmth in an otherwise rigidly disciplined life. He had few friends and never married, since he felt a scientist must keep himself free of personal relationships that would be unduly demanding.

Restless and eager to unravel every possible unknown to the very end of

(Continued on page 49)

GEO MILEV

describes only from the standpo. of his art. . . . In his attitude toward various events in the life around him, which impress him strongly, he does not take sides. He does not praise one and hurt the other; he merely describes everything he sees, describes it with the delicate, sweet colors of poetry. . . ."

Geo was fined 20,000 leva and sentenced to one year in prison. He could not believe that the court could make such a decision. With joking reference to the dullness of "their Honors," he left the courtroom believing that the decision would never be carried out.

He was right. Unable to enforce their decision legally, the government resorted to illegal means.

Next day, May 15, 1925, Geo was kidnapped from his home and killed by underlings of Prime Minister Alexander Tzankoff.

The cultural world of Europe protested Geo's death. Henri Barbusse, of France, visited Bulgaria to investigate the case. In his book "The Murderers" he made reference to the circumstances of Geo's death. Max Reinhardt protested and "regretted the loss of a very gifted theater director." Oskar Kokoshka, in Vienna, recognized the loss of "a precious critic and learned connoisseur of modern art."

Many Bulgarian writers were silent. Fearing for their lives, they did not dare to speak a word for Geo Milev or express regret for his death. The more courageous of them stated that "talent such as Geo's is born only once in a hundred years," that "He was the most cultured Bulgarian," "The most honest and courageous."

THE youth and the common people deeply mourned for Geo. They knew they had lost a sincere friend and a great writer. Unable to use the Bulgarian printing presses, they copied his poems by hand and learned it by heart. Bulgarian students abroad printed it in Paris, and in Belgrade. In Prague it was translated into

TESLA

(Continued from page 4)

his life, he read a paper on the occasion of his 80th birthday on the perfection of a tube for atom smashing. As if that were not enough, he also presented a system of interplanetary communication.

Thus the fragmentary story of the life and work of a Yugoslav immigrant who, like so many tens of thousands of his fellow countrymen, left their homeland rather than live as subjects within the Austro-Hungarian empire.

He made a unique contribution to his adopted land, so ideally suited to the full scope of his genius, "the like of which in all history could probably be counted on the fingers of one hand."

It is to be hoped that just as he brought electrification to the U. S. in the short span of ten years, his adopted country might assist in the full electrification of the Balkans, reversing its present policy toward New Yugoslavia.

Czech and in Russia into Russian.

A few courageous young people in Bulgaria printed pamphlets about Geo. They were promptly tortured and imprisoned.

We, his family, searched for him for months, but we never learned exactly where and how he was killed.

There were rumors that he had been shot in the mountains, that he had been burned in the furnace of "Public Safety." These measures were used by Bulgarian Fascists long before the world knew of Hitler. Both stories, however, avowed that his spirit was not crushed.

Geo's voice was silenced forever. The murderers triumphed, but they forgot that he who speaks for the freedom of a tormented and deprived people does not die. In today's New Bulgaria, Geo Milev is honored as one of her most cherished sons. Geo's poems are celebrated especially by the youth of today, the heirs of the September Revolution of 1944, which fulfilled his prediction of a decade before that "September will be May."

THE AMERICAN SLAV COMMITTEE of Canton, Ohio

welcomes the new magazine

THE SLAVIC AMERICAN

and projects best wishes for its success. This organ, we know, will be a great contribution to the enlightenment of the homes of American Slavs.

Greetings to the Second Issue
of

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and

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in the Coming Year

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