

Some touching episodes about the loving care of books are not forgotten. Unforgettable is the story of one poor writer who wanted to give his bride as a wedding present, what to him was the most valuable thing, A Monograph on the creation of an artist who most inspired him. It is also unforgettable when this touching love towards books is kindled independently in the most early youth. A small girl in a very rich home, carries with difficulty the Bible with illustrations by Doré, too heavy for the child strength. She is not permitted to take this book, but she takes advantage of the absence of her elders, not for mischief and play, but in order again to utilize this moment of freedom to commune with the great Concepts.

Dear to us are these children, the bearers of the best Concepts, who, directed by their hearts, independently seek the bookcase in their search for this unchangeable friend of true happiness.

Because Edison spontaneously sought the bookcase and from early childhood realized how he could benefit humanity. In the community instinct of newspaper work is also expressed a hearty striving towards the spreading of the useful.

Let us also remember the great mind, Ruskin, who so touchingly contributed his first efforts and inspirations towards the great Biblical Epos. Let us remember many glorious ones. Long ago the power of thought was already spoken about as well as the art of thinking. But every art must be developed and nurtured, and shall not be the hearth of this sacred art be near a bookcase?

Let us turn to the bookcase not only as to a comforter and guardian, but also as to a leader and vitalizer. Do not the consistently creative minds of great thinkers emanate from it? Or vitality? Or does not the resistance to all evil and to all the unprecedented obstacles of existence come from it? And does not creative joy come from it?

## FIRES OF THE HEARTH

BY NICHOLAS ROERICH.

When Armageddon is raging, when innumerable arrows of hatred, separation, destruction and decay are piercing the space, should we not then cherish every spark of friendliness?

When in ignorance the highest concepts are being defiled, should we not then gather around the hearth of the spirit all sacred fires?

When falsehood and superstition attempt to besmirch the most pure in order to increase the abysses of chaos, should we not then seek in the best chronicles for runes of true co-operation?

In the most ancient chronicles it is stated as the highest praise to Yaroslav, Prince of Kieff; "being a master in books he read them by day and by night and wrote them too, thus sowing seeds of written wisdom in the hearts of faithful people, which we now reap, imbuing ourselves with the wisdom of books. These are like rivers, nourishing the whole universe as sources of wisdom. Deepest reverence is due to books".

In such terms the ancient chronicles expressed their highest praise.

Verily it is one thing to tolerate books and an entirely different matter to love the book in full striving and devotion to sublime enlightenment.

One recalls an incident: In the office of a certain president are two visitors. The walls of the old room are decorated with massive oak book-cases. Through the glass panels temptingly glow the backs with their rich bindings. Although the bindings are not old they are heavily gold-leaved. Apparently, here is a lover of books. How splendid that at the head of this undertaking there is a collector who has not spared money in his tempting bindings.





One of the visitors yields to the temptation of turning the leaves and holding in his hands this treasure of the spirit. The book-case is apparently unlocked and raising his hand, the book-lover attempts to take one of the volumes. But, oh horror! the entire shelf falls on his head, revealing that these are false bindings without any sign of a book. His most sensitive wish violated, the book-lover with trembling hands, replaces upon its shelf, this unworthy imitation: "Let us get away from here soon. Can one expect anything decent from such a clown!" The other visitor smiles: "Here one is punished for loving books. Because it is a happiness not only to read a good book, but even to hold it in one's hands."

How many false libraries are spread all over the world! And whom do their owners presume to cheat—their own friends or themselves? In this falsification lies hidden an unusually subtle disdain of knowledge and a refined insult towards the book as the witness of human achievement. And not only are the contents of the book being violated but in such falsifications, objective as well as in words, is being assaulted the very significance of the creation of the spirit.

"Tell me who are your enemies and I will tell you who you are", said the ancients. One may say, "Show me your bookcase and I will tell you who you are."

One of the most exhausting tasks is the search for a new apartment. But through this involuntary intrusion into numerous dwellings, you undoubtedly discover observations about the facts of life. You pass through numerous apartments of approximate wealth which are not yet filled with furniture. But where is the bookcase? Where is the writing desk? Why are the rooms sometimes overcrowded with such strange ugly objects, yet these two friends of existence—a writing desk and a bookcase are lacking. Is there a place to put them? It appears upon examination that a small desk could still be placed somewhere but the walls are all so figured out, that there is no place for a bookcase.

The Landlady, noticing your disappointment, points out a small inside closet and with a smile of condescension indulging your demand says — "If you have so many books you can use this closet instead of using it for other domestic things." Thereby you see that the minute measures of the closet appear to be regal for such a luxury as books.

In this regrettably "patronizing" attitude toward the book you recall the priceless libraries which are apparently thrown out on the street-markets. And you once more sorrowfully recall all the stories of how herrings and cucumbers were wrapped in the priceless pages torn from most rare editions. Then, when you look upon the small bookcase that is being offered to you and you calculate that only with difficulty could even a hundred volumes fit there, you again hear the "worldly" sages tell you — "why, then, to keep so many books at home?"

The absence of a writing desk is explained quite definitely by the reminder that a writing desk is supposed to stand in an office. Herein is apparent a definite suggestion that outside the office, there should be no mental occupations and evening relaxations are meant for a hilarious time which should not burden the brain. And thus the so-called relaxations, which should be most priceless hours of accumulation and refinement of consciousness, are dissipated like pearls thrown in the dust of the street.

And thus the book in contemporary usage becomes an object of luxury. The "sane" mind categorizes bibliophiles as luxurious maniacs. The mediocre consciousness altogether un-learns to read, as he even good-naturedly confesses. "I cannot read long books"... "I cannot concentrate"... "I haven't got the time"... says a man on his way to a boxing match or to throw balls into the air or simply to busy himself gossiping about his neighbor.

And there is both time and money to possess houses which are a treasury of knowledge, but the thought about



these treasures simply leaves our daily habit. By what do people live? Through many objects. But the realization of this, as well as the beauty of the book itself as a creation, passes out of the life.

So also can one observe the character and the essence of a friend, according to the condition in which they return the books loaned to them. It is true very often you meet with a most careful, a most honourable attitude towards the book, and then you understand why certain volumes remained from the seventeenth and fifteenth centuries. But to one's sorrow more often the books are returned in an irreparably harmed way, so that one's soul aches for the desecrated author. To burn a book with something, to turn down the leaves, perhaps to tear away the corner, and sometimes even to cut out the illustration which one likes is not considered a sacrilege. Every Librarian will tell you about his grievances not only regarding lost books but also about editions mutilated forever.

He who destroyed a book reveals the low condition of his consciousness. Truism though this be, let whoever reads it be afraid to soil or tear a book. This already will be of good. In the midst of universal crises, material as well as spiritual, the general attitude towards books will be one of the convincing circumstances. Yes, when we will again learn to love a book disinterestedly, as a pure creation of art and heartily to safeguard it, then also some of the most difficult of life's problems will solve themselves. Without discussions, without evil thoughts and clashes. And in our dwelling we will also find a place for bookcase and for a writing desk as well as for the sacred images which by their presence remind us about the Highest, the Beautiful, and the Infinite.

Someone may say, "I knew this long ago, this is not new to me". How good it is if he says so; may be on the strength of that, he will read one more book and his attitude towards these true friends of every home will be more soli-

citous, and in turn, he will say that which is so known to him and to others. Because it is often about that, which they do not apply, that people say—"I knew that long ago". One must say to them again, "the worse for you".

The books of recent editions have become very meagre — both in measure and in their specific contents. The author is seemingly afraid to bore, because the publisher dins into his ears about the peculiar demands of the reader.

And suddenly you discover that most of the books are being read by poor people and the desire of true realizations live in people who with difficulty earn for themselves the bread of tomorrow.

Looking over the almanac of World Information you will with keen interest follow the statistic of literacy as well as the number of volumes in public libraries of the world. How inconsistent with many official presentations are distributed the number of books in these National Treasures! Let us not quote these instructive numbers because the World Almanac, a yearly book, is in reach of those who desire to get acquainted with the consistency of these acquisitions. For many people, the figures will contain great surprises.

Because that, let us not forget that literacy although undoubtedly a step to culture is of itself not yet a guarantee of the reading books or their sane cultural application. If one could take another census, namely as to how many of the literate people do not read books, the results would be very instructive. Then also, if from the number of readers would be eliminated the readers of cheap fiction, we would see that the entire number of serious books and editions is supported by a comparatively minute amount of people, out of the entire population of the world.

This condition still further demands a careful attitude not only towards serious editions but also towards those individuals who make out of them a wise and proper application.