In India a glorious Renaissance of Art is approaching. New schools shall be opened. Exhibition halls shall be built. Museums shall grow. Besides state museums many private collections shall be founded, not only of antique art, but of modern art as well. It would be instructive to have the annals of the names of the new private collectors. In the History of Indian Art the names of these ardent lovers of Beauty shall be given a place of great honour.

The illustrious patron of Art, the Duke Moro, once told to Leonardo da Vinci: “He who shall venerate the name of Leonardo shall also remember Moro.”

From ancient times collecting has been a sign of stability and introspection. It is very instructive to survey the various means and ways of collecting and of studying art from our days down to the heart of antiquity. Again, as in all the spirals of accretion, we see almost complete circles, yet at times, an almost elusive heightening of consciousness forms another step which is reflected in many pages of the history of art. We see how specialization and synthesis alternate. Collecting formed by the inner consciousness of the collector and united by one general idea is replaced by a classification almost pharmaceutical, sometimes destroying completely, by its pedantry, the fire of new discoveries. Not so long ago the combining of Gothic primitives with modern aspirations would have been considered a proof of dilettantism. It would have been regarded altogether taboo to have simply a collection of beautiful medals and coins. Pedantry was wont to confine its scope of vision to a certain epoch, limiting it to objects of a certain type and character. Thus icons and primitives glowing with colour, were turned into iconography in which the descriptive part obliterated the true and artistic meaning.

Thus not very long ago the history of art was taught as a collection of anecdotes of painters’ lives, while the exposition of sculptures and the technique of painting were reduced to summary of proportions and to the mechanics of construction, diverting and distracting attention from the essence of creative work. Peculiar text-books began to appear in which one would come across such chapters, for instance as: “How to paint a donkey”, in connection with which gray paint—which does not exist—was recommended. I remember that my attention was arrested on a boat by the typical argument between a mother and her little girl in which the mother earnestly asserted that the mountain in the distance was black, while the child affirmed candidly that it was blue. It seems to me that the mother’s eyes must have been dimmed by some text-book she was studying about the way to paint donkeys.

What a joy it is for children, when from their tenderest age in their homes they see objects of true art and serious books. Of course, it is necessary that these artistic objects do not cease to “live” and do not find themselves in the pitiful situation of remaining upside down, sometimes for an entire decade—which means that the soul of the collector has long departed for the cemetery and that his heirs have for some reason become morally blind.

During the very recent years we have had occasion to rejoice many times over the synthetic system of
collecting which has again come into existence. Not afraid of being called eccentrics or dilettantes the sensitive collectors have begun to group their treasuries of various objects according to an inner meaning. Thus, the most modern pictures could be combined with those masters who, in their time, burned with the unquenchable fire of bringing new ways to creative work.

In the newest collections one sees such giant pathfinders as El Greco, Giorgione, Peter Breugel and all the noble galaxy of those who were not afraid to be considered the seekers and innovators of their epochs.

And how convincing among modern paintings are the forms of Roman art and the collaborators Giotto and Cimabue, and the icons of Novgorod and ancient Chinese artists.

As all conventionalities of division and demarcation vanish, the combined creative and spiritual findings shine before you like beacon lights outside the conventional boundaries of the nations. If circumstances do not permit the bringing of originals into the homes, then sketches and even well-reproduced copies could permit one to entertain happy dreams about the future.

I have had occasion to write the stirring story of those collectors who began their activities when still at school. Probably many painters have had experiences like mine of having little boys, coming to one of my exhibitions, who would bashfully hand me a dollar, asking to be given a sketch in return.

Another still more moving case was when public school pupils raised a collection in order to purchase a painting. That meant that within them ardor was stirring and taking shape, and that they wanted to transmute meaningless words into facts, into conscious action. Without such an imperative impulse to action, how many light-winged, thought-butterflies sing themselves in their flutterings!

In various countries we can help by experience and advice, in the question of how to begin collecting. To open the door to those who knock timidly is one of our immediate obligations. And not only to open the door, but also to explain that they should knock with a firm hand without entertaining the prejudices that the use of art is a privilege only of the rich. No, first of all it is the privilege of bright and courageous spirits, who long to beautify their existence and who have decided—instead of taking the deadly hazards of gambling—to strengthen themselves by the manifestations of the spirit of man which is like an infinite dynamo—breaths life into everything made by it. Great joys are to be found at this feast of creative impulses. And many dark places in life can be so easily brightened by the brilliant rays of admiration. It is our sacred duty to help in this.

We are speaking about collecting. Someone smiles wryly: Is it timely? Is it timely to speak of artistic values when even the richest countries are horror-stricken by the general crisis? Let us answer him firmly and with the realization of the import of our words—Yes, it is timely!

According to the latest reports, in spite of the tremendous business depression in America the prices for art objects have not suffered any depreciation and this does not surprise us in the least; on the contrary we consider this to be a characteristic sign of the existence of the crisis.

We have seen that during the most acute crisis in Russia, Austria and Germany, the prices of art objects did not fluctuate noticeably. In some cases it happened that the objects of art were instrumental in bringing an entire state out of financial difficulties. We preserve this irrefutable fact as a proof of the true value of the spirit of man. When all our conditional values are shaken, the consciousness of man instinctively turns to that which,
amidst the ephemeral, proves to be relatively the most valuable.

And the spiritual, creative values which have been neglected during the triumph of the stomach, again become a shelter of refuge. Therefore it is always timely to speak of the growth of spiritual creative power and to lay stress upon collecting and preserving, but this is especially needed when evolution passes through difficult moments and does not know how to solve the actual accumulated problems. To solve them, however, is possible only in spirit and in beauty.

In my address on the significance of art, I gave formulae which have become the motto of the International Art Centre. I said: "Humanity is facing events of cosmic greatness. Humanity already realizes that all occurrences are not accidental. The time for the construction of a future culture is at hand. The revaluation of values has taken place before our very eyes. Amidst heaps of valueless occurrence humanity has found a treasure of world significance. The values of great art march victoriously through the storms of earthly commotions. Even the ‘earthly’ people have understood the vital importance of beauty."

And I closed the address with the following: "Not on snowy heights, but in the turmoil of the city we pronounce these words. And realizing the path of true reality we greet with a happy smile the future."

These words were based on forty years’ experience. Ten more years have elapsed since. Have the formulae then expressed change during the period? No, the experience of many countries confirmed and even strengthened them. And we must base our conclusions on experience, and on nothing else. Theory for us is only the consequence of practice. And that same practice brings forth the happy smile with which we greet the future. May the smile of knowledge and courage become the banner of our meetings? We unite to make application of knowledge and may such crumb of knowledge add spirit to our smile.

How are we to bring art into everyday life? Where are these blessed paths? Perhaps they are inaccessibly difficult? Or they may require countless wealth? Or only spiritual giants may venture along these paths of beauty?

All assurances will be unconvincing. These doubts can be answered only by a page out of real life.

I shall take the portraits of four of my friends. They have all left us now. Only one of them was rich in money, the other three were rich only in the brightness of their spirits.

The rich collector was the Moscow merchant Tretiakoff. There was nothing in his family to dispose him towards art. Rather did that old merchant family look with suspicion on the art it did not understand. But unexpectedly young Tretiakoff was drawn into a new path. And gropingly, guided by personal feeling, he began to collect pictures of the Russian school. He went his way alone, only now and again listening to the advice of some artist friend. And it was not by chance that the now famous Tretiakoff Gallery in Moscow began to come into being. With the true intuition of the picture-lover, Tretiakoff understood that the Government generally filled its museums mostly with official productions passing over the best work of the artists. And this official physiognomy of the museums could not reflect the evolution of the national school. So has it ever been. So far, I fear it will be in the future.

Art has always blossomed with an ardent personal urge, which will comprehend and find and preserve and give to the whole nation. And so the merchant Tretiakoff grasped the
national task of art. And he found out fresh artist powers and lightened their path. And he preserved their work, surrounding them with pure delight. But he made his joy a national joy, and while still alive gave the whole of his remarkable collection to the city of Moscow. And the task which he had set himself was no small one. He had not simply gathered together a mass of valuable pictures, but made his collection reflect the whole of the Russian school. Everything that was new, brilliant, important came under the eye of Tretiakoff. This taciturn, grey-headed man, in his large fur coat, indefatigably visited all exhibitions, and nothing could hold him when he considered a picture important. He would mount the steep stair leading to the studio of the young beginner in art. He was first to see a picture finished. He was first at the opening of the exhibition. But he was also first in the possession of the best and most characteristic work.

It came to pass that the prizes given by the highest art institutions were considered as naught compared with the purchase of a picture by Tretiakoff. And the destiny of the beginner in art was decided not by the Academy, but by this sincere and taciturn man. When there was no more room on the walls in his house, Tretiakoff built another beside it. If this was needed it had to be done. And art was not to suffer any loss.

Of course it may be said that with Tretiakoff's great wealth it was possible to collect on this vast scale. He was able to choose the best and could gather enough to represent the whole of the Russian school in his collection. It was true that his wealth made this scale possible, but the quality of collection, his love of the work, and his living creative work in the choice itself of pictures and of men—all this proceeded not from the amount of his means, but from the countless riches of his spirit. Thus did one man, strong in spirit, do an infinitely important national work. And now, should the Government seek to have a new Tretiakoff Gallery, it would find itself powerless, for it was the urge of the spirit that created that inimitable combination of beauty.

This is an instance of ideal creativeness within national limits.

Now for another spiritual portrait. Here we have the same power of spiritual urge along with a mighty struggle with means. It was Count Golenishtcheff-Koutouzoff, a well known poet and worker in the sphere of culture and the Chamberlain at the Imperial Court. In his case family traditions conduced to the development in him of the love of art. His historical knowledge was great, special deep poetic gifts were his.

His collection consisted of pictures of the old Dutch, Flemish and Italian schools. Its fundamental characteristic was not the search for the conventional name but the truth shown in wonderful creations. The collector understood that the name of Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Dyke are purely collective names, that only the lowest type of collector seeks in the dark for that which to him is but an empty sound. But a better knowledge of art shows us a countless number of artists engulfed in so-called great names. And the task of the cultured collector is to distinguish among these forgotten names for truth's sake."

In the name of truth, Count Golenishtcheff-Koutouzoff sought to discover the real names of painters and remedied, as far as he could, the sins of mercenary human history. And what loving intimacy breathed from his choice collection. Every picture, too, had been obtained with difficulty, with privation. Every new member of the collection was greeted with the disapproval of numerous relations who grudged the money spent on it. And money was
so scarce. His small Court salary was not enough to live on. And this collector departed this world surrounded by his real friends, his pictures. And he willed that his collection be dispersed to give new joy to new seeking souls.

Golenishtcheff-Koutouzoff was the type of the refined collector who, working and rejoining in new beauty and truth, sends it forth again to serve for the ennobling of the human spirit.

Now for the type of a young collector—an instinctive collector from his school days. Instead of the joys natural to his age, the boy develops a love for works of art. From childhood, without possessing personal artistic capacities, he is distinguished by education and developed taste. He is attracted by all that is beautiful. His spirit seeks to rise.

What pleasure it was to pass the time with young Sleptsoff. While yet a pupil of the Imperial Lyceum, he began to collect picture. His purchases were not chaotic, not accidental. He knew what he was doing. And all the money given to the boy by his mother for pleasures was spent on his noble pursuit. And if sometimes he was short of money, his enthusiasm for his general task never suffered from this.

And this general task was a fine one. The boy developed a love for a certain very subtly selected painters, and decided to have specimens of each of them in all the periods of their work, to preserve and to hand on to posterity a complete picture of the creative human life of each. The youth dreamt of the future; each painter was to have a separate room and the whole furnishing of the room was to correspond with the character of the art represented in it—the furniture, the embellishment of the walls and ceiling the character of the lighting and floor covering. From this we may gather what subtlety of preception lay in that young soul and what deep love and care surrounded each of the artists represented. In these special rooms choice singing and music were to be heard at times. Or suitable passages were to be read aloud. In a word the dream of Harmony of the unity of art was to be realised.

It was a joy to hear how a new work of art was selected for the collection. What subtle and truthful considerations were expressed for discovering and bringing out a new and worthy feature in the creative work of an artist. And you could see in this treatment of art no mere fancy, but a real cultural need. And this subtlety of culture infected those surrounding him. Both thought and speech were purified by this bright ascension of the spirit.

Sleptsoff dreamt of handing over his collection to the nation, without any care for his name. But he left us too early to do so. And he left us in an unusual way. He went out for a ride and did not return. He passed over unexpectedly, in the midst of Nature listening to the harmony of the Cosmos. An eviable passage—a passage to new beautiful labours.

This was the type of a sensitive soul with ingrained feelings of a future harmony and unity.

Now for one more touching type of a collector.

A very poor officer in a line regiment, stationed in a distant provincial town, reaches out to art with all his soul. Depriving himself of many things Colonel Kratchkovsky, always pleasant in manner, always active, burning with enthusiasm, seeks to gather a collection of specimens of Russian painting. Of course he is unable to collect large pictures. So he collects small pictures, sketches studies drawings. But in its essential value his collection becomes a very considerable one. He seeks for the
best painters; he understands that often the sketch is more valuable than the picture itself. He seeks to bring out the character of the artist in its most typical features. This is not a buyer of cheap pictures. This is a true collector. And there with all he himself is often in want of ten roubles (five dollars) and for him it is a matter of the greatest consequence whether he has to pay ten roubles more or less for a picture. And he asks the painter to let him have the picture and persistently persuades him to a lower price. And his words, produced their effects and the sketches were given him. And he would rejoice with the bright joy of a child, and would write enthusiastic letters about his new treasure. How he loved art, and with what lofty meaning he surrounded the conception of true creative work.

In his will he bequeathed the whole of his collection for public use. More than that, he commanded that all his modest property, all that he had in daily use, be sold and the proceeds applied to the purchase of more works of art which were to be added to his collection.

This is the type of an outwardly unnoticed but deeply important worker for the culture of the future. His example drew the attention of many.

And if you could see his letters written from the battlefield! He was a pure soul. Colonel Kratchkovsky left us during the late war.

I might show you many more characters, full of noble seeking in different spheres of art. But even these four types show the level of those cultural aspirations which are so necessary for humanity.

So do things happen, not in dreams, but in real life—sincerely and actively. And such pure labours are accompanied by a smile of joy. How near are the seekings of art to the attainment of the spirit.

It is time to understand, to note and to apply to life these wondrous channels.

And when art has entered actively, irresistibly and simply into all spiritual development of public life, then it will be brought also into the whole of modern life.

And it is through these channels that the true paths of blessing will draw near to every human heart.

"Art will unify all humanity. Art is for all. The gates of Sacred Source must be wide open for everybody. Young hearts are searching for the Beautiful. Bring Art to the People."

"Peace is better than war,"

—Ancient Egypt Preordenet.