Ancient Sources.

(Diary Leaves).

BY NICHOLAS ROERICH

"WHEREIN lies the truth of ages? In laws and commands or in proverbs and fairy tales?" In the first the will is tense and in the second is the impression of wisdom. The shortest proverb is permeated with resoundings of place and age. And in the fairy tale, as in a treasure trove, is hidden faith and the striving of people. The proverb may be sad, but it will not be destructive and likewise will one not find vulgar fairy tales nor repulsive songs. The proverb as well as the fairy tale is for the good. But the sources of the command are different. How many commands become obsolete and quickly evaporate! But try to eradicate a proverb or legend. They may go underground, but they will nevertheless emerge again.

"Know how to catch by the tail the smallest devil and he will show you where his superior hides"—this old Chinese proverb points out the significance of the slightest details for revealing the most important. Truly, the most minute detail will be the best key to a great achievement. It is wrong to think that details are unnecessary for the path of ascent. Even the most excellent heroic acts rested upon details which were timely foreseen. How carefully notices he, who follows the Teacher, all the stones! He will miss nothing that lies outside. Only a poor disciple will say: "Guru, in my exaltation I broke my nose". Such incommensuration will only show how far the disciple is from..."
being observant. The Chinese proverb has yet another meaning. "The greatest criminal will be easily detected by the smallest details of his conduct".

It is wonderful to observe the subtlety and correctness of all details in proverbs, legends and fairy-tales. Of course, sometimes in an inaccurate translation something may appear superfluous or clumsy, but one must only turn to the original to find that the old proverb: "one cannot omit a word in a song" has a deep meaning. And not only can a word be omitted, but neither can it be transposed. And from this point of view it is instructive to observe the forged conciseness of the language of the people. Thus the best seeds are separated by repeated winnowing, thus in the furnace of the ages is being forged the tongue of folk-wisdom.

In all ages all people will always have short periods during which all these accumulations will be haughtily rejected. Like treasure troves they will go underground for the time being. As in the forbidden catacombs there will only remain the whisper of prayers. Thus somewhere and yet in full care will be safe-guarded the signs of observations of people and again they will be unearthed from their hiding places. Again with renewed fervour they will be studied. And again precisely from these inexhaustible sources will be renewed the foundations of Culture.

Some thoughtful explorers will again go deep into the unravelling of the sense as well as the form of ancient heritages. Again they will admire the refined details of these forms, so well forged, so well worked, born in long patience of by-gone rhythms of life.

Precisely one wishes to emphasize that in these ancient heritages the meaning as well as the structural form can give an equal joy to the student. Only the superficial, perhaps, will speak of the old-fashioned language, but a true revealer of the runes, an inquisitive scientist will admire how remarkable and how simple and appropriate are the definitions and in what combinations is brought out the greatest emphasis, stressing the importance where necessary.

Take any ancient proverb and try to change the sequence of words in it. You will see that as a result of such practice much of the sense will be lost. We have seen many distortions of sense due to translation. Only quite recently languages begin to be studied without prejudice and therefore in certain known great monuments of the past, new translations reveal new and significant details. The historical names themselves have undergone in the various translations such a multitude of expressions, that at times it is difficult to realize that the one and the same person or place was meant. Especially guilty of this were the text books of the middle schools. A multitude of children in their hurrying through a study course, at times learned such names which later in mature years, were again met by them in an entirely different denomination, which gave rise to unnecessary complications. But now in the many branches of science we turn to the original sources with open mind and inquiringly. A thoughtful study will help again to appreciate the many most characteristic, most minute details and definitions.

And what may be more profound and all-embracing than the observation upon the thought itself and its structure. Not without reason people speak about the art of thinking. Precisely in the structure of thought is expressed the same general conception of creativeness. Lovers of art for art's sake will always especially emphasize not only that, which is said, but also how it is said. The way things are said, the way they are done, the way they are thought—all these are sources of delight for every observer; and now, when so much has to be spoken about the loss of the quality of everything in life, precisely the quality of all, what is created is especially significant.

All problems which require a hurried solution are in need of a high quality of expression. The famous "somehow or other" is more than out of place. Everyone must realize the responsibility for his way of thinking and action. Let us not imagine that the mode of thinking is unimportant; as in all creativeness the way of expression, of technique, have an enormous significance. A painting is only then convincing, when it has been constructed in such a way, that it cannot be changed; when the observer feels that it could have never been otherwise and that that which has been presented him, has been composed as is necessary. What a great observation of all details is necessary for this convinciness!

What a wonderful school of convinciness is contained in the true folk-creativity—anonymous—full of character and always living.