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CONTENTS

1. Way Signs
   By Nicholas De Roerich
   157
2. C. Jinarajadasa – the Artist
   By Gurdial Mallik
   163
3. The Soul of Japan
   By Mr. Yone Noguchi
   165
4. Fairy Music (Poem)
   By F. Henry Aldhouse
   172
5. Life in an English School
   By Mrs. Tait
   173
6. President Masaryk
   By S. V. Ramalingam, B. A.
   182
7. Great Thoughts
   By T. Ramalingam Pillai
   184
8. From Press and Platform
   187
9. Smile Awhile
   191
10. From All Quarters
    192
11. The Scholar Science Corner
    194
12. In Memoriam
    199
13. Malabar District Co-operative Conference
    200

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Way Signs.
(DIARY LEAVES)
BY NICHOLAS DE ROERICH

HOW many milestones are there on every path and how little attention do we pay to them! To a friend of mine an acquaintance complained: “My whole life I have been awaiting a Sign. I send my best thoughts but I have no reply. Is this just?”

My friend asked her to tell him about her life. And she told him the following: “I was very rich and this gave me the possibility to help people and to support a great many. Then, not of my fault, there came ruin. It is true, I do not starve, but I have no longer the possibility to help as I did before. And this is my constant sorrow. I fail to understand why it was necessary to ruin me and thus place me under eternal complaints for not being able to help”.

My friend explained to her: “Don’t you see, your expected answer had already been given, but you did not understand it. You mistook the good advice for a misfortune. For, you unfortunately imagined that help should only be financial. Thus you destroyed the most precious realization that a spiritual help achieves far greater results than a financial one. Admit it you took pleasure in giving away from your surplus, not submitting yourself to any privation, nor to danger nor to difficulties. And even now, not everything has been taken away from you. You do not starve, and it seems that you could help others all the more with your own worldly experience. How many new and
useful advices you could give. From your own experience you could prove to others the insignificance of material means, if they can be destroyed so easily. But if you will consider your present position as a misfortune, then what further reply can you expect? Only when you shall realize the usefulness of your present state, when you shall understand that the conception of money was perverted in your own mind, only then you shall be ready for the next step.

The same friend has also narrated another case. He was told to show to a certain lady at Chicago a portrait. The lady was greatly moved upon seeing this portrait and said: "How do you know the drama of my life? Once we were at Paris with some American friends, and were sitting in a small cafe. Unexpectedly the same person entered, whose portrait you have just shown me and having seated himself not far from the door, began looking at me attentively. I understood within my heart that I should approach him and that in this would lie the future of my life. On the other hand the conventionalities of behaviour whispered to me that it would be inadmissible in the eyes of my friend to leave them and go to the stranger. A great struggle took place within me and he continued looking at me, expecting me to choose my path. Some more time passed, the conventionalities kept me to my seat, the stranger got up and went out. I understood that I failed to answer the call and have decided my fate according to conventionalities. In this lies the drama of my life."

On a later occasion my friend told me of another remarkable way sign. He was told to open in a certain city an educational institution. After investigating many possibilities, he decided to talk over matters with a certain lady who had come to this city. She made an appointment to meet him in the morning at the local museum. Reaching there with expectations, my friends noticed a tall stranger, who passed him several times. Then the stranger stopped next to him and pointing to a tapestry hanging on the wall, he said: "They knew the style of living, we have lost it". My friend replied accordingly, and the stranger invited him to sit down on a near-by bench and placing his finger upon my friend's forehead (the crowd of people—it being a Sunday—did not notice this unusual gesture) he said: "You came here to talk about a certain matter known to you. Do not talk about it. For another three months nothing can yet be done along this line. And then everything will come to you of itself." Whereupon the stranger, having given a few more important advices, quickly got up and waving his hand in a friendly manner said "good luck" and went out. My friend, of course, took the advice, never mentioned anything to the lady what he expected, and in three months everything took place as predicted. My friend cannot comprehend up to now how it was that he never asked the name of this remarkable stranger, of whom he never heard since and never met him again. And this is precisely how things happen.

One more sign. A friend—an artist—was telling me that at the time his exhibition was held at a seaside city, he was in great need of a definite sum of money. But despite all the outer success of the exhibition, the sale was not progressing. It seemed that the more the friend was anxious inwardly the more difficult the situation became. The more so, since he did not want to make his need of money known in public. As if all kinds of unforeseen circumstances had come up against him, someone got sick, someone went away and had not as yet returned. The exhibition was coming to an end and the friend was in a very sad mental state. A few days prior to the closing of the exhibition, in the morning, it was not yet 8 o'clock, the telephone bell rang and the voice of a young lady said nervously and hurriedly: "I have only fifteen minutes before my boat leaves. I am at the door of your exhibition and I must have one of your paintings. Please come immediately to advise me which to select". Needless to say, my friend hurried to get there and found at the door a very nice young lady from Honolulu, who with a cheque in hand was waiting to decide about the picture. Having made her decision, she took the painting off the wall, and disregarding the protest of the man in charge of the exhibition, hurried to the automobile that was waiting for her. Of course, you will not doubt that the cheque was exactly for the amount which my friend needed. Likewise you will not doubt that the young lady did not know, nor could she know the sum needed by my friend, but that is just how it happens.

I remember another very significant episode. My friends decided to visit a certain country, whereas another part of the world had been indicated to them. From good motives my friends yet persisted and had even bought tickets for the mentioned country. Yet the indication had to be fulfilled and something unusual took place. All means prepared for that trip, suddenly vanished in two-three days and thus my friends had no other choice but to fulfil the indication. Such signs clearly point out what measures must be applied in order to safeguard the predestined.

And yet another sign. One of my friends had to see a man who was very dangerous for him. Of course, all thoughts were directed to avoid this fateful meeting. By strange circumstances several times this meeting did not take place, some unexpected impediments suddenly arose. But in the end apparently it could
the meeting place awaited the appointment. The time had be no longer avoided. Probably the power of the thoughts sent arrived. But the dangerous man had not as yet appeared. And suddenly a great excitement arose and it appeared that this evil man could not turn up in the end—for his heart had failed. Such measures also take place—when there is no other alternative.

And here is another sign of long memories. The aunt of my wife with her husband and son went in a cold winter to visit a far-off estate. They lost their way. Night came. The storm increased. And they had to think of some kind of shelter. All of a sudden they noticed a manor unknown to them. They drove up to the gate. It appeared that the owners had not lived there for a long time, but the watchman agreed to open the house for shelter. As soon as their sleighs stopped at the door, the aunt of my wife, who had never been in this place before exclaimed in horror: "No, I shall never enter this place, some terrible drama has taken place here". When her husband and her son began to persuade her, she said: "go in and see for yourself." And then she described all the interior of the house and mentioned in detail a large painting of a lady in white. When the worried travellers entered the house they were amazed to recognize that which was described to them, and when they reached the room with the portrait, they themselves were so upset that they immediately left this unhappy house. Many such signs can be met if we but find within ourselves enough attentiveness to discern them.

And one more sign of answer. Our friends moved into a new house. The luggage had already been brought in. And among these was an old clock, that was broken and which had not been wound up any longer. The lady was thinking how long they would live in this new house. And all of a sudden the old unwound clock loudly struck ten times. And this was the exact number of years that they stayed at this place. But many perhaps, would not have paid attention to the mere striking of a clock.

Another sign. It had been indicated that a very valuable packet will be received. Time passed. Our friends had almost forgotten about it, having reached Paris on their travel, when all of a sudden a message was brought from the Bank "Bankers' Trust" to the effect that a packet had arrived. And it appeared that in this most usual way the most unusual sending was delivered. As you see, it may also happen thus.

And how many letters from unknown places of origin have been received! How many necessary books were pointed out as if by chance, and how many remarkable dates may be heard by an attentive ear! How many benevolent signs are given in life! If these signs are given for the good, if their sole object is to help humanity, then verily they will be truly good signs. Some light-minded people fear whether they are good and do not know how to interpret them. But look heartily through the magnifying glass of the future and listen to the megaphone of coming events and you shall see what is the purpose of these benevolent signs.

If a sign is given for the upliftment of the heart, the purposes of healing, for the overcoming of difficulties, for faith and perfection, it means this sign is useful, and one must know how to discern it. And let us again repeat, that one must not expect those signs, which would be dictated by our selfishness and limited egoism is already evil and limited. One must find within oneself sufficient benevolence, in order to accept the signs in that form, in that expression, which the Highest has ordained as the best.

When people pray for the protection against nightmares and ghosts, this will be one of the very necessary prayers. Truly, one must protect oneself against all kinds of dark phantoms, from everything that tends to plunge us into the darkness, and first of all, one must guard against ignorance. The lack of desire to know, and to accept—will this not be already a succumbing to the power of evil spirits? The man who leaves this earth and does not think about the future, will be like the one who received a most valuable book but who did not open it beyond its binding.

Attentiveness in life will not be conventional and a morbid abstraction. On the contrary the more attentive is man, the more beauty will open up for him. Every minute of concentration and silence he will consider as one more merging into the beautiful height. He will think over and guard more carefully that which has been accumulated by him earlier. And the accumulated is not phantom like, but of the spirit-eternal.

I remember a reliable story of the sea. A certain captain of a steamer fell ill and because of the incurable disease, was taken into hospital, thus having to leave for ever his beloved ship. The new captain who was just as experienced, on passing a rocky island some distance away, decided to lie down to rest. At this moment, through his dream he hears a voice: "Take to the right ". But he did not get up. Then the second time he heard the same command. And finally a thundering voice shouted for the third time: "Take to the right ". Then the captain got up and ran up to the bridge, repeating the order: "Take to the right ". And it was high time, for the ship was heading straight to the reefs. At the same time, in the far away hospital, the former captain of the ship, threw himself out of the window with the same command on his lips. Admiral T. will substantiate this true story.
Some people consider all such signs as Christmas fairy tales or as coincidences not worth attention. The majority of these would-be sceptics, are very timid themselves and, therefore, are even afraid to think that above their everyday life, besides their backyard weeds, there may be something that makes it worth while to think and pay more attention to life. The spasmodic attitude towards faith, or the accidental reading of related books helps but little, because everything is required in persistent, careful and attentive striving. It is not yet sufficient if man now and then shows signs of attentiveness on his part. One must be always attentive. One must penetrate into the surrounding conditions as if it were a profound and beautiful book, given for everyday application. Again, certain thoughtless people will call this way of thinking abstract philosophy. They understand high expressions in a narrow meaning. But is it not from love for sane pondering that the most solid and irrefutable facts are formed? The same thinking will safeguard from cruelty and coarseness. For why should not refinement and upliftment of our consciousness go hand in hand?

What a wonderful impression is made by a person of whom one may be certain that he will not admit cruelty nor coarseness. Besides, the refinement of consciousness once reached is a guarantee against savagery. If you meet a person who has retrograded and relapsed into savagery, one may be sure that originally he did not try hard for the common good, neither to improve himself.

Along the vast snowy plains one may sometimes notice withered twigs, which have been placed there by someone to indicate the hidden road. Sometimes a traveller will attentively watch for them, and will direct his steed along these signs. But there are also conceited travellers, who surprized at the seemingly unreasonable windings of the road, continue their way without paying heed to these indications. How many unexpected difficulties and dangers they may call upon themselves amidst the hidden hillocks and ravines! An experienced coachman when noticing the tracks of those deviating from the signs, will regretfully wave his hand and exclaim: "Look, how the devil lured them away!"

Precisely an evil force, precisely ignorance and conceit distract the attention of the unwise from the signs, which had been so carefully safeguarded for them. The lessons in attentiveness will be also experiments in benevolence, and on these paths is already prepared a true protection. And along these waysigns travellers will proceed.