



Forget Me Not ...

The other day I was on the train, and happened to be riding in the first carriage. The train was fairly full, and I ended up standing near the driver's compartment. On our local trains, there is a small window there, through which one can look into that compartment and see what the driver is doing. I noticed that each time the train was about to leave a station, he made a particular gesture with his gloved hand, pointing towards some kind of signal out on the line. I assume that this is a train company rule; each driver must make a physical motion toward the signal, in order not to forget to check it before setting the train in motion.

In recent years, I myself have taken to doing this same kind of thing on occasion. We are now in the coldest season of the year, and in the room where I sit at the computer, I have a hot carpet and a kotatsu. Although I think these appliances are actually very safe, I never leave them on when I am away from the room for any length of time, and certainly not when I am leaving the house. So as I pass through the doorway, I turn and point to each of the switches in turn - "Off? ... Check!" "Off? ... Check!"

Then, as I stand outside the house after closing the door, I pat my pocket to check that I have my wallet, and make some perfunctory gestures towards imaginary destinations, as I mentally check to see if I have everything I will need on that particular trip - "Newspaper for the train? Address for where I am going? Umbrella? ..." I have learned that if I don't check very carefully, then almost certainly I will find that I have neglected to bring some important item with me. Yes, forgetting things has always been part of my life!

I happened to pick up a book from one of my bookshelves the other day, and found on the flyleaf the name 'Greg' - a friend from more than 30 years ago. It seems that I probably borrowed it from him, and then somehow forgot to return it. And this works the other way around too. One day some years ago, my brother visited me here in Japan, and brought a wonderful present - a large box full of music CDs he had purchased for me. I was quite surprised at the gift, but he said that it was in return for "the money you had lent me". I had lent him money? I had no recollection at all of such an event.

It seems that I am perhaps the kind of person who carries such memories quite lightly. If you lend me something, please keep track of it, and don't hesitate to ask me to return it, because it's quite possible that I will never remember. On the other hand, if you were to borrow something from me, you're probably safe in keeping it forever! And there are quite a few 'empty' slots on my bookshelves here and there, testament to this! What books were there, and who now has them? I have no idea!

It's too bad that some countries aren't more like this. Country A and Country B may have perhaps had a dark history, but it would be far better for the world if they were to somehow manage to 'forget' those events. We are commonly told that "those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it," but I believe that this is backwards. It is those who remember too much who end up being drawn back into hostility again ...

OK Greg?

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