



TESTING STRENGTH

By Nicholas Roerich

(From letters to the "World League of Culture").

Rishi Narada took upon himself the difficult mission of the great disputor, provoking an exchange of opinions, thus by counter-action evoking the power of positive efforts. Ancient history in its various aspects has repeatedly explained the significance of forces, which counter-act the forces of Good with the sole purpose of consciously evoking the tension of energy, necessary for the process of creation. The blacksmith needs an anvil to forge the sword, which serves as a weapon for achievement. The tension of the anvil which eventually results in the good forging of the sword, is as significant as the labour of giants who bear on their shoulders the burden of the whole universe. Thus macrocosm reflects in microcosm.

It would be unwise to attribute these manifestations of conscious opposition to the good, only to the realm of the evil. Evil, as such, may feel as disturbed over these manifestations as it does over those of Absolute Good. For evil understands that the basic meaning of these is Good. This underlying principle is invoked as an immediate tool for constructive work, whereas the principle of evil has as its purpose only decay, so as to multiply chaos. If Good means the loftiest Art for the sake of the Art of Creation, then conscious evil to no less degree, desires to destroy and decompose for the sake of decomposition itself, since decay is accompanied by smouldering and chaos is nourished by decay.

When we speak of enemies—and not only speak of them but also feel the pressure of their assaults—let us examine them well first and be sure that we do not mistake decomposition and decay for the anvil. There may be a certain resemblance between these two ideas in many of their manifestations, but in their inner significance, as is proven by the results, they are entirely different.

When the so-called basic principle is Good, it multiplies the sparks caused by the forging of the sword and as such, it frequently disappears without trace, merging ultimately into the constructive Good produced. But the conscious evil forces do not disappear;

they remain in themselves a constant evil-breeding force, leaving unmistakable traces of the poison of decay, ultimately resulting in chaos and inertia.

What then is it that evil wants to effect? Not a stronghold of achievement, but the effluvia of decay; it desires to transform the human spirit into a swarm of creeping worms, which in their crawling, slimy amorphy drag into the mire that, which has begun already to shape itself out of the chaos. Of course each of us is aware of the difficulties and tedious task of creating out of chaos; and in comparison how swiftly the shameful process of retrogression into the original formlessness is accomplished. Let us apply all that has been said thus far to our own circumstances. No one must imagine that I would attempt, even to the slightest extent, to compare the mission of Rishi Narada with the blackmail and trickery practised by the sowers of darkness. Let these dark ignoramuses be relegated to the function of the dummies at fairs on the market place, that challenge people to try their strength by hitting them. Let them be just only "testers of strength" and serve after their own fashion to strengthen the principle of Good.

Verily, testing stones and building materials are multiform. All sorts of pipes, shavings, slag and dross find their way into the walls of a building with the knowledge of the builder. But let us not express glee over the large number of testers of strength who present themselves. It is only the passerby at the fair who boasts that his strength forced the dummy to pull his tongue. Builders are not in the least concerned about the kind of convulsions that contort the features of these ignoramuses. Such contortions may even give them grounds for thought, making them think of matters beyond the earthly plane, which might otherwise have never occurred to them. The builders must hurry so as to complete the building before winter sets in with its rains and severe storms so as not to leave the building uncovered.

The efforts of the challengers of strength are one thing; but the negligence of leaving the gates of the stronghold unlocked at night is an entirely different matter. Let the Guiding Will send as many testers of strength as necessary, but let us not try to waste someone's energy only because of forgetfulness or lightmindedness.

There is a great and elevating responsibility in wisely utilizing the testers of strength without permitting any negligence or disrespect toward the thing which we ourselves consider within the scope of the desired Culture. Let us take, for example, the history of entire countries. What do we find? Have they sustained injury solely from external enemies or did they primarily themselves contribute to disparagement and destruction by their own inner measures. "Seek more closely"—these wise words are the utterance of sages. Why should so many hopes be set and accusations heaped upon the testers of strength; are not circumstances instrumental right in the house and at its very hearth, which create difficulties and even peril?

When the ancients decreed: "Keep your hearth in cleanliness, keep it in holiness", they certainly did not intend it to apply solely and literally to the kitchen only. Indeed, this was one of the sagacious indications of the significance of spiritual life, with its many accumulations, even hardly noticeable, but which lead to irreparable and often severe consequences.

Thus first and above all, seek closer: And if anyone, instead of making the dummy pull his tongue, smashes his fist against him without achieving the desired results, let him not blame the tester of strength, but the inaccuracy and inadequacy of his own stroke. Even at a fair, a more experienced passer-by, before preparing his blow, looks well, so as to gauge the distance and not become the laughing stock of the onlookers. When soldiers are training with a sword against clay dummies, it is noticed very often that the inexperienced recruit breaks his sword against the soft clay dummy without any effects. To this the experienced observer would remark: "Why, you idiot, you are chopping like a wood-cutter; it is not the force of the stroke that counts, but its skillful application". The novice after breaking his weapon, puzzles long on how the sharpened blade could break in striking such soft substance. But he soon learns that it is much more difficult to cut flexible rods than a solid oak branch. Hence remember examples of battle even in times of peace—for strategy is an accomplishment of life itself and not one that should come from without. And finally, again in everything—seek closer, especially

when you wish to look into the distance—into the future. For the times are difficult at present and everybody is responsible for this crisis and for the making of the future.

Good does not imply formlessness, "gelatinousness" nor day-dreaming. Good means striving, determination, constructiveness, not only mentally, but heartily in all its Infiniteness. And in this infinity many things find a new place for themselves. It is precisely the heart, with its broad understanding, that will appreciate, where is the indisputable, constructive and creative effort.

The heart is imbued with Agni! The sparks come from a blow! Blows are impellers! Let us conclude with the following passage from the "Fiery World": "The seed of the spirit is as if in need of strengthening blows. The deadly well-being and the aimless squandering of life is an action against nature. People cannot conceive the healing quality of blows that push one ahead, as if the discharges of motors. The explosions of energy move humanity. One must cognize to what an extent Agni begins to act only during manifested energy. One may observe many examples in nature but people prefer to exclude themselves from the law of unity. It is true that without an understanding of the future, the blows, the impellers are incomprehensible. They may generate complaints and despondency. Therefore it is necessary to realize the fundamentals of self-perfectioning for the great future. The striving towards the future will mean already the manifestation of Agni. Do not think that it is superfluous to reiterate about Agni and the future. The infant must be reconciled with its first pain. The complaints are already evidence of non-understanding of the problem of life. During the impelling blows, it is especially difficult to cognize their true meaning. But the beginning of a heroic deed is already the acknowledgment of the blows—the impellers. Let us not forget the formula of the blows—the impellers!"