



THE MEASURE OF VIRTUE

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THE CROWN of virtue should rest uneasily on any man until he has given evil a setback. This is to say that virtue is a quality of character born in victory over evil.

Ever so many persons think of themselves as virtuous simply because they have done nothing they conceive to be wrong. This is like thinking of oneself as victorious when there has been no contest. Viewed in such a light, victory or virtue is pretty thin stuff.

The wealthy individual who has no temptation to steal may think of himself as honest. But, how does he know that honesty is one of his virtues? If put to the test of Victor Hugo's Jean Valjean, he might find himself as much a weakling as those whose frailty he scorns. Only if he does not falter "when the chips are down" can he properly lay claim to virtue.

How easily integrity is presumed when the motive to lie is absent! But whether or not integrity is a personal virtue remains in question until we meet and yield, or yield not, to the temptation of the lie.

Applying the above to our day-to-day political life, many of us think of ourselves as virtuous because we disapprove TVA, subsidies to farmers, wage, price, and production controls, and other socialistic indulgences. Political virtue, however, is a false claim until our affinity to right principles has been tested and found unbreakable.

Will we stand against socialism when we realize that our own pet project rests on federal aid? When such things are at stake as a downtown parking lot or a children's hospital or our alma mater's expansion program or a foreigner's purchase of our gadgets or our town's slum clearance?

There is no manly virtue in mere lip service to right principles. Our virtue or manliness is unknown until each of us faces his own temptation. The measure of character is recorded in how each of us responds to the question, "Do I yield or triumph over what I believe to be wrong?"

Virtue is the crown of victory over the temptation to moral weakness!