

## THE MEASURE OF A MAN

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This is a day of bigness. National income and national debt are spoken of in terms of billions of dollars. Our life span has been projected into many additional decades. Our grasp has reached out into infinity with rockets and missiles. The power at our command has so vastly increased that I, a nineteen year old girl, can control three hundred horses of energy at the mere flick of a switch. The material measurements of life, in effect, have increased far beyond the wildest dreams of our grandfathers.

But life consists of more than just physical measurements, and there are other standards by which we judge it which have remained constant. They are the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

The measure of a man depends somewhat upon the point of view by which we judge him. His worth is determined, in part, by what we value, or cherish most. In this regard, what we see in a man is determined more by what's behind our eyes than what's in front of them. If we esteem wealth, or the pursuit of wealth highly, that one who has accumulated vast possessions will be deemed great. But possessions are transient at best, and may be lost, or diminished, and pass with the possessor.

Sometimes men are measured by the power they wield. Long ago a very young man conquered the world, and then sat down and wept because he had no more worlds to conquer. The citizens of Macedonia hailed their young emperor as Alexander the Great--and indeed, by their standards, he was. But his greatness died when his power waned and his empire crumbled.

Men are frequently measured by the force of their personalities. Recently I read of a screen personality named Rudolph Valentino, who was the matinee idol of his day. At his funeral, my grandmother told me, a hundred thousand women bowed their heads in grief. But the glamorous personality of Rudolph Valentino died with him, and today only an old, silent movie reminds us that there was once a man named Valentino, who captured the hearts of movie-goers throughout the world.

These standards, then--wealth, power, and personality--are inadequate when viewed in the light of the ages.

Horace Greeley recognized this in his immortal dying statement: "Fame is a vapor, popularity an accident, riches take wing, those who cheer you today may curse you tomorrow. Only one thing endures---character." Character is the whole of a man--it is all of those things that go together to make up his entire being. It is the innate quality of man produced by his reactions to his environment--his thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, intellect. It is distinguishable from his personality in that his personality is that by which he is known to others; his character is that by which he is known to himself and to God. The actor in "Hamlet" discerned this when he entreated young Laertes, "This above all, to thine own self be true, and it shall follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man". John Milton expressed the same idea when he said, "There is nothing that makes men rich and strong but that which they carry inside of them". Character, then, is the indivisible part of a man's inner being.

An artist measures a face for a portrait with his thumb on the end of a paintbrush. A tailor stretches his tape across the shoulders and around the chest to take the size of a man. A psychologist gives a test to check the intelligence quotient of his pupil. Each is a measure of a man; but as the artist attempts to measure the face, the tailor the physique, and the psychologist the intellect, they measure only parts of a man. And in this case the mathematical principle that the whole is equal to the sum of all the parts simply does not apply, for the true measure of a man is his character, which cannot be delineated.

Recently we paused in memory of a truly great American. We are reminded of his greatness when we think of his immortal words, "with malice toward none, with charity for all". We are grateful for his leadership in the preservation of our country, but we stand in awe of Abraham Lincoln, the man, for he was infinitely greater than anything he ever said or anything he ever did. The impact of his character far transcends the parts of his greatness.



We cannot, therefore, define character by analysis, or by seeking out its component parts. We can only feel its influence for good, and realize that this influence often increases with the passage of time.

Long ago there lived a dynamic personality who was cruelly treated by the people of his day. He was stoned, beaten, ignored, exiled, and finally, thrown into prison, and executed. His murderer was considered great throughout the entire empire, and every coin bore his likeness, for he was the Roman Emperor. But the character of each of these individuals determined their destinies in the hearts of men. Today we name our dogs Nero, for the Roman Emperor, and our sons, Paul, for the despised Jewish Christian. His life has projected itself across the ages into eternity, where men of all ages will gain renewed inspiration from his shining character. This, then, is the true measure of a man.