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The Plight of Righteousness

IN THE ancient morality plays the various virtues were personified. Adopting this practice, we might picture Righteousness as an unpopular young lady: Poor Miss Righteousness! There she stands, alone in the corner, a "wallflower," her prospective partners out dancing with a faster set, the Misses Power, Popularity, Fame, Fortune, or what have you!

Not that there is a lack of admiration of sorts for Miss R; all attest to her high qualities, yet shun the young lady because her kind of charm is no longer fashionable. How could one keep his standing with the multitude were he to take Miss R as a "steady"!

Is this an exaggeration? Perhaps not. Man is a fallible being, imperfect in his grasp of moral and other truths. However hard he strives to discern the imperatives of the moral order, he can never do better than to approximate them. As close as he can come is that which *his own highest conscience dictates as right*. Integrity consists of living in strict accord with this insight; this is righteousness.

Rare indeed are those who scrupulously pair their words and deeds with their own innermost concepts of what's right. Far more numerous today are they who, instead of using righteousness as the guide to daily living, select several other lodestars; they take up with one or more members of the "faster set." What will some nebulous "they" think of me? What, I wonder, will lead most readily to my fame, or fortune, or power? What can I do to avoid disapproval before men? How shall I avoid unpopularity with my listeners, or readers, or observers? Never a thought of courting Miss R!

My concern at the moment is not the behavior of disinterested citizens whose concepts of right

and wrong rarely rise above what is presented to them through public media. Nor do I refer to those of the authoritarian persuasion. Of most concern to me are those of the libertarian faith, particularly the leaders, the philosophers, the ones out front. Integrity—the accurate reflection in word and deed of one's highest concept of righteousness—is the bedrock, the very essence, of the free market, willing exchange, private property, limited government *ideal*. Unless the libertarian thesis is wedded to and inextricably intertwined with integrity as if one and the same—at least by the high priests of the faith—forget the whole thing!

We must remember that the libertarian philosophy is an ideal to be sought after; that it is unattainable *in toto* by imperfect men; that man is, by nature, imperfect. Thus, in reality or practice, we can only hope to move in the direction of this ideal, but our advance will depend entirely on our understanding and observance of the ideal. Certainly, we cannot expect to advance toward this ideal—or any other—by deviations from idealistic behavior.

LET me now cite some typical deviations, not to lambaste my esteemed friends, but to show how even the best of us depart on occasion from our ideals.

The first, when asked why he included "that socialistic chapter" in his otherwise remarkable book on authoritarianism and its fallacies, confessed, "Well, I was hoping not to appear too much at odds with current thought; frankly, I was trying to be at once the economist and the statesman [seeker of praise before men?]."

The years since have revealed that his concession to socialism in no way enhanced his stand-