

John Welch
1102 West 12 Street
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Dear Victor Hugo,

“Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more” (Luke 12:48). This verse has haunted me for the better part of my life because I have been given the world. I have lived a life rich with great opportunities and barren of great hardships. For this I am eternally thankful. I believe that the true test of a man is how firm he stands in the face of adversity and how low he bows before the eyes of God. It is because of my own standards, and because of influences such as your book, *Les Miserables*, that I see myself owing a colossal debt to this world.

I read about Jean Valjean, a convict who ascends to martyrdom, and I blush. This Valjean rises from the bowels of society to the pinnacle of honor. He is no warrior, he is no celebrity—he is a man. He is a man in the highest sense of the word. Jean Valjean embodies a sense of glory and decency that I fear is lost to this world, and is perhaps lost even to me. Temptation rests its awful weight on him, just as it does on the rest of us. He sits atop such a high pedestal in my eyes because of the dignity with which he bears this burden.

Jean Valjean is beaten, broken, slammed, shunned, drained of his last drop of will, yet he still perseveres. For all this, life awards him with another test, another obstacle that he must hurdle in his race through perdition. He meets each test with a courage that inspires in me a deep admiration. I want to be this galley slave, this soiled saint who sacrifices himself for the happiness of those he loves. I want to be this convict whom I revere and respect. I want to be this man—I want to be a man.

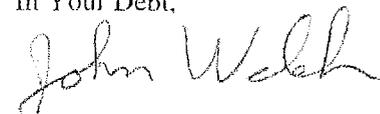
What hope do I have for glory? Jean Valjean comes from nothing, and still he achieves so much. Even if I were to achieve a comparable success, it would be no amazing feat due to my truly blessed beginnings. So for what, then, do I have to strive? I must do exactly as Valjean did, and not strive for glory at all. I must first strive to be a man. This must be my primary goal, and whatever I achieve along the way will be a direct result of the fortunate star under which I was born.

Never had these thoughts come so clearly to my mind as they did the day that I first opened your book. You have shown me that true glory can be found not only in the minds of geniuses or the flesh of warriors, but also in the hearts of honest men.

Some day my test will come. Some day I will be faced with a hardship unmatched by any that I have seen before. When this day comes, I will look to the honest men of my life and to the honest men of literature, among them Jean Valjean, for courage and counsel.

Thank you for giving me a hero.

In Your Debt,



John Welch