

# OF FRIENDSHIP

## (TEXT)

It had been hard for him that spake it to have put more truth and untruth together in few words, than in that speech. *Whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god.* For it is most true that a natural and secret hatred and aversation towards society in any man, hath somewhat of the savage beast ; but it is most untrue that it should have any character at all of the divine nature ; except it proceed, not out of a pleasure in solitude but out of a love and desire to sequester a man's self for a higher conversation : such as is found to have been falsely and feignedly in some of the heathens ; as Epimenides the Candian, Numa the Roman, Empedocles the Sicilian and Apollonius of Tyana ; and truly and really in divers of the ancient hermits and holy fathers of the church. But little do men perceive what solitude is, and how far it extendeth. For a crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures ; and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love. The Latin adage meeteth with it a little ; *Magna civitas monga solitudo* ; [*A great city is a great solitude* ;] because in a great town friends are scattered, so there is not the fellowship, for the most part, which is in less neighbourhoods. But we may go further, and affirm most truly that it is a mere and miserable solitude to want true friends, without which the world is but a wilderness ; and even in this sense also of solitude, whosoever in the frame of his nature and affections is unfit for friendship, he taketh it of the beast, and not from humanity.

A principal fruit of friendship is the ease and discharge of the fulness and swellings of the heart, which passions of all kinds do ease and induce. We know diseases of stoppings and suffocations are most dangerous in the body and it is not much otherwise in the mind, you may take sarza to open the liver, steel to open the spleen, flower of sulphur for the lungs, castoreum for the brain ; but no receipt openeth the heart but a true friend ; to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes suspicions, counsels,



and whatsoever lieth upon the heart to oppress it, in a kind of civil shrift of confession.

It is a strange thing to observe how high a rate great kings and monarches do set upon this fruit of friendship whereof we speak : so great, as they purchase it many times at the hazards of their own safety and greatness. For princes, in regard of the distance of their fortune from that of their subjects and servants, cannot gather his fruit, except (to make themselves capable thereof) they raise some persons to be as it were companions and almost equals to themselves, which many times sorteth to inconvenience. The modern languages give unto such persons the name of favourites, or privadoes ; as if it were matter of grace, or conversation. But the Roman name attaineth the true use and cause thereof, naming them *Participes curarum*; [*Sharers of their cares*;] for it is that which tieth the knot. And we see plainly that this hath been done, not by weak and passionate princes only, but by the wisest and most politic that ever reigned ; who have oftentimes joined themselves some of their servants ; whom both themselves have called friends, and allowed others likewise to call them in the same manner ; using the word which is received between private men.

L. Sylla, when he commanded Rome, raised Pompey (after surnamed the Great) to that height, that Pompey vaunted himself for Sylla's over-match. For when he had carried the consulship for a friend of his, against the pursuit of Sylla, and that Sylla did a little resent threat, and began to speak great, Pompey turned upon him again, and in effect bade him be quiet ; for that more men adored the sun rising than the sun setting. With Julius Caesar, Decimus Brutus had obtained that interest, as he set him down in his testament for heir in remainder after his nephew. And this was the man that had power with him to draw him forth to his death. For when Caesar would have discharged the senate, in regard of some ill presages, and specially a dream of Calpurnia ; this man lifted him gently by the arm out of his chair, telling him he hoped he would not dismiss the senate till his wife had dreamt a better dream. And it seemeth his favour was so great, as Antonius, in a letter which he recited *verbatim* in one of Cicero's Philippics, called him *venefica*, witch, as if he had enchanted Caesar. Augustus raised Agrippa (though of mean birth) to that height, as when he consulted with Maecenas about the marriage of his daughter Julia, Maecenas took the liberty to tell him, that he must either marry his daughter to Agrippa, or take away his life ; there was no third way, he had made him so great. With Tiberius Caesar, Sejanus had ascended to that height, as they two were termed and reckoned as a pair of friends, Tiberius in a letter to him saith, *hoc pro amicitia*



nostra non occultavi; [*in consideration of our friendship I have not hidden these things from you;*] and the whole senate dedicated an altar to Friendship, as to a goddess, in respect of the great dearness of friendship between them two. The like or more was between Septimius Severus and Plautianus. For he forced his eldest son to marry the daughter of Plautianus; and would often maintain Plautianus in doing affronts to his son, and did write also in a letter to the senate, by these words: *I love the man so well, as I wish he may ever-live me.* Now if these princes had been as a Trajan or a Marcus Aurelius, a man might have thought that this had proceeded of an abundant goodness of nature; but being men so wise, of such strength and severity of mind, and so extreme lovers of themselves, as all these were, it proveth most plainly that they found their own felicity (though as great as ever happened to mortal men) but as an half piece, except they ought to have a friend to make it entire; and yet, which is more, they were princes that had wives, sons, nephews; and yet all these could not supply the comfort of friendship.

It is not to be forgotten what Comineus observeth of his first master. Duke Charles the Hardy; namely, that he would communicate his secret with none; and lest of all, those secrets which troubled him most. Whereupon he goeth on and saith that towards his latter time *that closeness did impair and a little perish his understanding.* Surely Comineus might have made the same judgment also, if it had pleased him, of his second master, Louis the Eleventh, whose closeness was indeed his tormentor. The parable of Pythagoras is dark, but true, *Cor ne edito, Eat not the heart.* Certainly, if a man would give it a hard phrase, those that want friends to open themselves unto are cannibals of their own hearts. But one thing is most admirable (wherewith I will conclude this first fruit of friendship), which is that this communicating of a man's self to his friend works two contrary effects; for it redoubleth joys, and cutteth griefs in halves. For there is no man that imparteth his joys to his friends, but he joyeth the more; and no man that imparteth his griefs to his friend, but he grieveth the less. So that it is in truth of operation upon a man's mind, of like virtue as the alchemists use to attribute to their stone for man's body; that it worketh all contrary effects, but still to the good and benefit of nature. But yet without praying in aid of alchemists, there is a manifest image of this in the ordinary course of nature. For in bodies, union strengtheneth and cherisheth any natural action; and no the other side weakneth and dulleth any violent impression; and even so it is of minds. The second fruit of friendship is healthful and sovereign for the understanding, as the first is for the affections. For

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he may not need society at all, is either a wild beast (in the first case) or a God (in the second), i.e., he must be "of a lower or higher nature than an average and ordinary human being. Cf. "I am altogether for the life contemplative."—Charles in his essay on "*The superannuated Man*". The reference is to the life contemplative of self-sufficient persons cf. Aristotle's *Ethics* (Bk. X. Chap. VI). "It is the highest kind of life, it can be enjoyed uninterruptedly for the greatest length of time, it is the most pleasant, it is the most self-sufficient, it alone is loved for its own sake and it implies leisure."

I. 5. Aversion towards—aversion from ; dislike for.

I. 6. Somewhat of the savage beast—he who shuns society shares to a certain extent the nature of a wild beast. It is most untrue etc.—whatever may be the agreement of this view with the Greek conception of life, it is opposed to the Christian view which establishes and insists on close relations between God and man. The former includes independence and superiority to ordinary human needs, and thus does not establish any close relationship between gods and human beings which the Christian view does. Cf. the Epicurean conception which makes gods independent of all human relations and pleasures as the highest good.

I. 7. Should have—has. Character—mark.

I. 9. Sequester—withdraw ; remain aloof from.

I. 10. Conversation—way of life. Found to have been—existed ; was. Cf. the French *se trouva*.

II. 10-11. Such as.....heathens—some of the non-Christians (Greek or Roman) were under the false impression that solitude would improve their mind. Feignedly—falsely.

II. 11-12. Epimenides the Candian—a poet of Crete who lived about 600 B. C. 'Candian' means *Cretan*, belonging to the island of Crete. The ancient name of Crete was Candia. Epimenides was a legendary Cretan soothsayer who is said to have kept asleep for 57 years as a boy in a cave. According to another account he was a poet and philosopher of Crete about whom many fabulous stories were current and who lived in the 6th century B. C.

I. 12. Numa—the legendary second King of Rome, about 700 B. C. His full name was Numa Pompilius. He is said to have tried to learn political and religious wisdom from a nymph called Egeria who visited him in a grove near a cave. She is also said to have been his wife. Empedocles—a Sicilian philosopher-poet who boasted that he held communion with the higher powers. He lived at Agrigentum in Sicily, about 550 B. C. His desire to investigate the crater of Mount AETNA proved fatal to him. It is said that he threw himself into its flames so that by his disappearance he might be believed to be a god. Lamb,



But all these things are graceful in a friend's mouth, which are blushing in a man's own. So again, a man's person hath many proper relations which he cannot put off. A man cannot speak to his son but as a father : to his wife but as a husband ; to his enemy but upon terms ; whereas a friend may speak as the case requires, and not as it sorteth with the person. But to enumerate these things were endless ; I have given the rule, where a man cannot fitly play his own part ; if he hath not a friend, he may quit the stage.

## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Analysis

I. The nature of a life solitude, *i.e.*, without the companionship of a friend.

Such a life lived in remote society with a friend is *bestial*, *i.e.*, irrational. It has nothing to commend it except when restored to for the purpose of *spiritual meditation whether*, (i) in lonely place like a desert, or (ii) lived all alone and friendless among a crowd of people.

II. *Advantages of Friendship*—are twofold—(i) those that affect the heart, and (ii) those that affect the mind or understanding.

(a) Friendship releases the pent up feelings and emotions of the heart, thereby disburdening the heart.

Kings and great men need the companionship of friends the most. They have often sought friends from the numerous walks of life open to their disadvantage and injury. Examples : (i) Sulla and Pompey, (ii) Caesar and Brutus, (iii) Augustus and Agrippa, (iv) Tiberius and Sejanus, (v) Severus and Plautianus. Friendliness is a kind of cannibalism ; it eats up one's heart.

(b) Friendship clears the understanding by, (i) giving shape and form to vague thoughts, (ii) giving advice against folly, and (iii) giving a means to continue one's own even after death. A friend is another himself, friendship is thus a means of prolongation of life.

III. *Occasion*. According to Spedding, the biographer of Bacon, this essay was written at the special request of Bacon's friend, Toby Matthew, to commemorate an intimacy which had been tried and tested on both sides by adversity and prosperity alike, and which endured right to the end without any interruption.—Vide Spedding : *Francis Bacon and His Times*, Vol. I, page 521.

### Notes

1. 1. *Him that spak it*—The reference is to the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, in his treatise (a formal essay) on Rhetoric (the art of speaking with propriety, elegance and force.)

1. 3. *Whosoever etc.*—a quotation from Aristotle's *Politics*. I.1. The simple meaning is, a man (says Aristotle) who cannot bring himself to form a unit of a community and who is so self-sufficient or egoistic that