

Friendship

(Alumini Prize Essay 1913-14)

IN every normal person there is an innate desire or natural craving for congenial companionship. The human soul yearns for the society and intercourse of kindred spirits with which to reciprocate the varied vicissitudes and fortunes contingent upon its exile within "The mortal tenement of clay." Solitude is altogether foreign to the attributes of human nature. Ever since the time of man's creation when to him was given a partner and companion in the Garden of Eden, his spirit has delighted in the sympathetic regard of intimate acquaintanceship. Even the cloistered recluse, though not in personal contact with his fellow-beings here on earth, is at the same time, daily, yes hourly mindful of them, and in communion with God, is ever solicitous for their spiritual and corporal welfare. Friendship is, as it were, an element of our nature, and to imagine a man as lacking that element is to degrade his status as a member of the human family.

How barren and empty would be our existence if deprived of all the felicities of friendship! How cold, material, and mechanical would our life become without the warm, soulful, and emotional influence of social contact! How repugnant it is to us to conceive of happiness in a man beyond the touch of friendly intercourse! Let us try to imagine a solitary inhabitant upon an oasis in a desert. Let that fertile spot yield for him every bounty desired for a man's corporal existence. Give him there every material pleasure and enjoyment for which he could wish. Will he be happy? No! Wealth, luxury, or natures profuse plenty cannot fill that immeasurable void, cannot gratify that insistent longing of the heart; only through the medium of friends can this be attained.

But real friendship consists in something more than mere social relationship. True friendship plays a much higher role in the drama of life than that of a

means to the end of pleasant personal intercourse. We do not look upon friends, in the best sense of the word, as instruments at our disposal to be used for the purpose of relieving the ennui of life by our finding in them a source of diversion. We do not consider a friend as a commodity conveniently accessible to us when we feel that our pleasure might be enhanced by his favour. Neither are true friendships formed for the sake of obtaining therefrom some material gain or comfort. Far above all such sordid ends are the motives which underlie and are the foundation of that sublime superstructure of the soul. In fact no motives can be said really to constitute the formation of true friendship. Its inception is not the effect of tangible causes, but it is the spontaneous birth of mutual intimacies according as one soul finds in another a character happily adapted to its own tastes. Thus two persons may meet who were hitherto totally unknown to each other. Their meeting and acquaintanceship may have been by the merest chance or accident. These persons are thrown into contact for some time, perhaps by a circumstance of environment. Hence they are given an opportunity to fathom each other's soul, and, as it were, to read by word and action the emotions therein. A congenial disposition is mutually discovered and this acquaintance ripens into an intimacy the sincerity of which, neither change of place nor fortune will affect. Though they should live in daily intercourse for the remainder of their lives, frequency of meeting would, in no degree, detract from that perennial freshness and interest always reciprocally found in their companionship. Let acres or oceans divide their abodes, and still that magic bond of friendship unites them by a spiritual tie which distance only binds the closer.

Nor does a difference of opinion on matters of material import in any way influence the dispositions of friendship's regard. Not even the most determined opposition and rivalry in affairs of the world can part asunder the connecting link forged in the fervid fires of true friendship. History is resplendent with glorious examples of such magnanimity displayed between some

of the world's greatest figures. Do we not know of rival statesmen whose contrary policies and vaunting ambitions have brought them into daily conflict, but notwithstanding this, their mutual personal esteem has remained unimpaired. "Do as adversaries do in law, strive mightily but eat and drink as friends" is an aphorism which suggests itself in the personal relationship of contending ambitions in almost every walk of life. Often does manly antagonism but serve to increase the chivalrous devotion and unselfish respect between friend and friend; for then the two natures, beholding in each other a common appreciation of high ideals, recognize an identity of feeling which unites them, despite the contentions of life's struggles.

But though selfish convenience has naught to do with the notion of friendship, yet the value of friends in the economy of life is inestimable. Often has the example or precept of a friend impelled a man towards the course which ultimately led to the attainment of eminence. Many a time has a friend served as a stimulus to rouse another to greater effort or to awaken in him a fuller realization of what might be accomplished by the wise direction of his abilities and talents. Frequently the greatest hinderance to our attaining an end, is the want of confidence in ourselves, a feeling of immeasurable remoteness from the object of our ambitions. Then it is that the reassuring counsel of friendly solicitude serves to bestir our initiative and to inspire us with a determination to overcome all obstacles. A few words of encouragement or kindly advice prompted by a friend's sympathetic interest may lift the gloom from one's point of view and throw the whole prospect of life into a brighter perspective.

In every phase of fortune common to the lot of life, friendship's worth is felt and appreciated. When we are favoured with success and enjoy the world's goods in generous abundance, then the pleasure and enjoyment of these acquisitions, are further enhanced by our friends rejoicing with us at our good fortune. Again when stern adversity thwarts our plans, and sorrows or afflictions befall us; when our happiest hopes are most hopelessly shattered and our most roseate visions

of the future are suddenly engulfed in the gloom of unfeeling disappointment, what greater earthly consolation can we find than the sincere sympathy of friends! What an unspeakable solace it is to have a friend to whom your sorrows are as his own, one who is anxious to share with you your troubles and assist in bearing them. It seems to be a trait of our nature to long for association and neither to joy nor grieve in secret. The human heart in its fullness yearns to unburden itself unto the sympathies of another; thus even the communication of our troubles to one in whom we can confide, robs them in a large measure of their poignancy.

When death deprives us of a friend we are, quite naturally, very much grieved. That grief, notwithstanding the occasion of it, has its acuteness lessened from the fact that as this person was the embodiment of our own conception of virtue, we cannot but believe that he is enjoying virtues reward. And what more could we desire for him! But when one whom we considered and trusted as a friend, proves unworthy of that implicit confidence,—the concomitant of friendship's compact,—when he in whom we had reposed the keeping of the most priceless treasures of our souls has been found recreant to the sacred trust, are we not pained even more than by the death of a true friend? Yes, then the poignancy of our feelings is beyond grief. A wound has been inflicted upon us and every thought of our misplaced confidence but tends to deepen the wound. Then indeed we more fully realize the sublimity of the covenant of friendship, and more sincerely appreciate the possession of true friends.

It is a homely dictum but one pregnant with truth that "you can live without your relatives but not without your friends." Relationship does not imply that mutual kindly disposition embraced within the pale of friendship. Relationship may mean nothing more than the name. But friendship, in itself, as an essential element of its being, involves that mutual assistance and attachment, that interdependency between man and man which unites us all in a common fellowship.

Thus it is that we esteem friendly intercourse as

beyond value in terms of any worldly commodity. Whether we exult in the smile of prosperity or pine under the frown of adversity ; whether we attain public preferments or lead a life of peasant simplicity ; whether pleasures delight us or sorrows deject us—midst all the caprices of fortune there remains one happy consistency—TRUE FRIENDSHIP.

“ So soon may I follow,
When friendships decay,
And from Love's shining circle
The gems drop away.
When true hearts lie withered,
And fond ones are flown,
Oh ! who would inhabit
This bleak world alone ? ”

JAMES A. MACDOUGALL, '15.



Beauty is worse than wine ; it intoxicates both holder and the beholder.

Between us and Hell or Heaven there is nothing but life, which of all things is the frailest.

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed ;
Or like the snowfall on the river,
A moment white—then melts forever.

A peace above all earthly dignities,
A still and quiet conscience.

Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.