

FRIENDSHIP

An Oration

by
Marcus Tullius Cicero



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FRIENDSHIP
An Oration

Marcus Tullius Cicero

From Cicero's Commentary on Moral Duties.

The subject of friendship is a splendid one.

I urge you to prefer friendship to all human possessions for there is nothing so suited to our nature, so well adapted to prosperity or adversity.

But first of all, I am of opinion, that except among the virtuous, friendship can not exist. I do not analyze this principle too closely, as they do who inquire with too great nicety into those things, perhaps with truth on their side, but with little general advantage; for they maintain that there is no good man but the wise man. Be it so; yet they define wisdom to be such as no mortal has ever attained to; whereas we ought to contemplate those things which exist in practice and in common life, and not the subjects of fictions or of our own wishes.

Those who so conduct themselves, and so live that their honor, their integrity, their justice, and liberality are approved; so that there is not in them any covetousness, or licentiousness, or boldness; and that they are of great consistency, let us consider these worthy of the appellation of good men, because they follow (as far as men are able) nature, which is the best guide of a good life. For I seem to myself to have this view, that we are so formed by nature, that there should be a certain social tie among all; stronger, however, as each approaches nearer to us. Accordingly, citizens are preferable to foreigners, and relations to strangers; for with the latter, nature herself has created a friendly feeling.

Now friendship is nothing else than a complete union of feeling on all subjects, divine and human, accompanied by kindly feeling and attachment; than which, indeed, I am not aware whether, with the exception of wisdom, anything better has been bestowed on man by the immortal gods. Some men prefer riches, others good health, others influence, others again honors, many prefer even pleasures; the last, indeed, is the characteristic of beasts; while the former are fleeting and uncertain, depending not so much on our own purpose, as on the fickleness of fortune. Whereas those who place the supreme good in virtue, therein do admirably; but this very virtue itself both begets and constitutes friendship; nor without this virtue can friendship exist at all. Now let us define this virtue according to the usage of life, and of our common language; and let us not measure it, as certain learned persons do, by pomp of language.

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