

FOUR FACETS OF FRIENDSHIP

Let us think about friendships and the mark they leave upon us. Let us look at the four jeweled facets of friendship that can best be remembered by the four proverbs: (1) "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." (2) "Birds of a feather flock together." (3) "A faithful friend is the medicine of life." (4) "Never forget a friend when prosperity comes your way."

Friends are not wished upon us. We do not deliberately choose friends. We win them. And not every man or woman has that disposition; not every man or woman is possessed of that inner grace wherewith to win friends. Just as some ears are deaf to music and some eyes blind to painting - hearing but not comprehending, and seeing but not discerning - so there are hearts that are closed to friendship.

People who are usually absorbed in other relationships, who are too completely dominated by other interests, or too self-centered, too egotistical, too self-sufficient; or the contrary people who are too timid, too locked up, escapists who run away from what they fear, from commitments and entanglements - all such people often miss the completing and exalting experience of friendship.

Friendship, like all other human forms of culture, takes time and thought. It must be carefully cultivated, and it requires time for seasoning and ripening. It is the old friends who are the true friends, just as it's the old wine that is the good wine. Jewish writings tell us: "Forsake not an old friend, for the new is not comparable to him. A new friend is as new wine. When it is old thou shalt drink it leisurely." Those who are too busy with other concerns have not the time, therefore, for the proper husbandry of friendship.

All great religions and all great literatures stand in the presence of the phenomenon of friendship as if in the presence of the mystic, something magnificently great. In the Old Testament we read the story of Jonathan's friendship for David which was so profound that Jonathan gave David the sceptre of a kingdom-a kingdom that could have been his.

The Book of Ecclesiasticus, which is recognized as sacred scripture by our Roman Catholic brothers but not by Protestants, has a lot to say on friendship. Ecclesiasticus was composed by an eminent physician, Ben Sirach, in the second century before Christ. He was a wise man who travelled far, learned much, gathered wisdom and published his findings in this book of the Apocrypha.

Francis Bacon, an Englishman living at the time of Queen Elizabeth I, wrote concerning friendship: "A principal fruit of friendship is the ease and discharge of the fullness and swellings of the heart, which passions of all kinds so cause and induce No receipt openeth the heart but a true friend, to whom you may impart griefs, joys, hopes, suspicions, counsels, and whatsoever Beth upon the heart to oppress it, in a kind of civil shrift or confession."

Let us consider the first facet of the great jewel of friendship. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Make friends with ideas. Then let those ideas become the driving force in your life. Then select your friends from those who share your same vision of greatness. Institutions such as the church, or Freemasonry, dedicated to sharing these great ideals, often provide the common ground that creates lasting friendships.

In a Declaration of Principles adopted by the Grand Lodge of the State of Illinois in 1939, the guiding ideals of Freemasonry were outlined as follows:

"Freemasonry is a charitable, benevolent, educational, and religious society Its only secrets are in its methods of recognition and of symbolic instruction Freemasonry seeks to improve the community. Thus it impresses upon its members the principles of personal righteousness and personal responsibility Inspires them with a feeling of charity, or good will toward all mankind which will move them to translate principle and conviction into action. To that end it teaches and stands for the worship of God; truth and justice; fraternity and philanthropy; and enlightenment and orderly liberty, civil, religious, and intellectual The Freemason will act in civil life according to his individual judgment and the dictates of his conscience."

Mr. Nightengale has become a very successful man in the field of human motivation because he discovered the importance of making friends with ideas. From the wisdom of the ages he distilled the thoughts of men from various cultures and civilizations. He condensed his findings into a system. Then he makes cassette tapes and instructs those who are looking for a way to be successful to listen to these tapes over and over again. Make that idea an intimate friend; then it will go to work for you.

In a very real sense, this is what the Masonic lodge is all about. The key truths of Masonry are reduced to ceremony and symbols which are re-enacted every stated meeting, so that men will not only marvel at the beauty of truth; these truths will become their intimate friends. Masonry is a progressive moral science, divided into different degrees; and as its principles and mystic ceremonies are regularly developed and illustrated, it is intended and hoped that they will make a deep and lasting impression upon the mind.

Make friends with great ideas. Then let those ideas become the organizing force and the dynamo of your life.

The second facet of the jewel of friendship is stated in the proverb: "Birds of a feather flock together." Select your friends from those who share with you the same vision of greatness.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews reminds his Christian audience of the great "Cloud of Witnesses" that once occupied the stage of human drama and acted out their faith. In that great essay on faith in Chapter 11 of Hebrews we are told:

"By faith Abel offered a sacrifice greater than Cain's By faith Enoch was carried away to another life without passing through death By faith Noah divinely warned about the unseen future, took great heed and built an ark to save his household By faith Abraham obeyed the call to go out to a land destined for himself and his heirs, and left home without knowing where

he was to go By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau and spoke of things to come By faith when Moses was born, his parents hid him for three months, because they saw what a fine child he was By faith when he grew up, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, preferring to suffer hardship with the people of God. Need I say more? Time is too short for me to tell the stories of Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the Prophets With all these witnesses to faith around us like a cloud, we must throw off every encumbrance, and run with resolution the race for which we are entered, our eye; fixed upon Jesus."

We are familiar with the glorious history of our Judeo-Christian heritage, but do we understand the part Freemasonry plays in that history? Rear Admiral Homer N. Wallin, speaking in Seattle, Washington, in 1955 said: "America is indeed a monument to the principles and the ideals of the Founding Fathers - a monument to the truth we seek, to principle, to self-sacrifice, to the loyalty and devotion of its people. And it is correct to say that our kind of America is a monument to the ideals and principles of Freemasonry, not only because of the accord in principles and ideals, but also because a large number of our Founding Fathers were Freemasons. Masons have inherited the right to say, 'Behold the flag of our country, an emblem conceived by Freemasons and representing Masonic ideals'."

Among the Signers of the Declaration of Independence, Masons were well represented. I know at least two - Benjamin Franklin and John Hancock - were Freemasons. You may recall John Hancock made his signature very large on this historic document so that George II could read it without putting on his glasses.

Fourteen American Presidents were Masons. This list would include George Washington, who was Master of his lodge in Alexandria at the time of his inauguration as President in 1789. He was sworn into office on a Masonic Bible. It also includes James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, William McKinley, the two Roosevelts, and Harry Truman.

The early influence of Freemasonry is illustrated in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Most of those directly involved in the purchase were Masons: Robert Livingston and James Monroe. The area was explored by Masons: Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, Zebulon M. Pike, and Andrew Henry. It was governed by Masons. Lewis was the first Governor, Clark the Indian Superintendent, Frederick Bates, Secretary; Judges Otho Shrader, Silas Bent, Pierre Chouteau, and Bernard Pratte.

The impressive list of Masons in the military would include General Douglas MacArthur, General Charles Augustus Lindbergh, Captain Edward V. Rickenbacker, Admiral Richard Byrd, General Henry "Hap" Arnold, and General James Harold Doolittle, just to name a few in this century.

From this list one might get the impression that a man had to be a Freemason to get ahead in politics and government service. This was not true, for the list of non-Masons is greater; but it is interesting to note that this charge was levelled by dissident clergy against the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Church more than a century ago. They claimed that all the good churches were filled by Methodist ministers who were Masons and those who refused to join the

lodge received what crumbs were left. This group of dissident Methodists also became upset over pew rents that were being charged members and said that church pews ought to be free. They found the main body of the church disinterested in their reforms and broke away to form the Free Methodist Church, which survives to this day as a small group which does not permit its members to join any lodge.

Masonry began in the dim light of the almost forgotten past. Some say it had its beginnings at the time of the Greek Philosopher Pythagoras, some five hundred years before Christ. Certainly it borrows heavily from his geometric truths. In the modern era the first Grand Lodge was organized in London in 1717. From fragments of history we know that Freemasonry was in existence in the fourteenth century. While one might assume from what I have said that Masonry is primarily an American organization, this would not be true. It is world-wide in scope, as the Master Mason Rudyard Kipling has illustrated in his famous poem, The Mother Lodge.

The church and the lodge provide a common ground for men who have caught the vision of greatness to meet and become friends. What a rich legacy is ours in this brotherhood!

The third facet of the Jewel of Friendship is the proverb: "A faithful friend is the medicine of life." There is healing in friends. It is agreeable to have another human being share with us those things which burden us, filling our hearts beyond their own capacity to bear them. In this way, a faithful friend is the medicine of life - and in another way, too. Not only by sharing our burdens with others, but by taking into our lives the griefs and the hopes and the problems of our friends, we cleanse our own souls of self-coddling; we save ourselves from becoming too wrapped up in ourselves. We make ourselves well by giving and receiving.

There is another profound comment on friendship found in the Bible: "Just as iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Friendship challenges us. A true friend is one who will warn us when we are being less than our best. For true friendship demands the best that is within us. We are not on parade before our friends. True friends can have sharp differences of opinion without losing their esteem or affection for each other.

The fourth facet of the Jewel of Friendship is the proverb: "Never forget a friend when prosperity comes your way." This is to say that friendship makes demands. Friendship is not a matter of personal convenience. A friend is not there just to receive our intimate confessions, to counsel us, to soothe us, to agree with us, to justify us, and always approve of our ways.

Friendship calls us to duty. Our Lord lived His life in obedience to the higher duty of God and for His friendship to man laid down His life. "There is no greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends."

We are living in perilous times, times when the quality of life has been polluted by desires of quantity. Mr. Alvin Toffler in his best selling book, Future Shock, has vividly described what is happening. He says that living in the last half of the twentieth century is like living in the center of a tornado. Things that we thought were secure, resting on good foundations, are suddenly flying overhead like aircraft. The church, the lodge, the public school system, our government - all these things which we thought were resting on good foundations have come unglued.

Novelty, confusion surrounds us. Rowboats aren't in the water; they're flying through the air. Our rapidly changing environment is taking a heavy toll on personalities. Never did we need companionship more. Never has the call to duty to fight for and preserve our friendships been a more important call. Collectively we can maintain our sanity in this tornado ravaged world. Individually we will lose our sanity, if we don't have lasting friendship.

In our sacred literature we are cautioned to prove and to test men before we admit them into the sacred sanctuary of friendship. "If thou wouldst get a friend, prove him first and be not hasty to credit him!" There are those who are friends for their own occasion, who will not abide the day of trouble. These are our fair-weather friends, our prosperity friends, our companions at the table. They are the scavengers of friendship. They are camp followers.

Real friendship is only possible when there exists between two people a concurrence of driving ideals, a genuine capacity for loyalty, for trust, for generosity, and the real baring of one soul to another. This is the fertile soil of friendship.

Tell me not of a man's history, only let me know the ideals to which he subscribes, the institutions he supports, the companions he make, and I can tell you what kind of a man he is.

My greatest joy on earth shall be, To find at the turning of every road, The strong hand of a comrade kind To help me onward with my load. But since I have no gold to give And only love can make amends, My daily prayer shall be, "God make me worthy of my friends."