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THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP

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The Gift of Friendship by Various.

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JOSEPH ADDISON

'*Nos duo turba sumus.*'—Ovid.

We two are a multitude.

ONE would think that the larger the company is in which we are engaged, the greater variety of thoughts and subjects would be started in discourse; but, instead of this, we find that conversation is never so much straitened and confined as in numerous assemblies. When a multitude meet together on any subject of discourse, their debates are taken up chiefly with forms and general positions; nay, if we come into a more contracted assembly of men and women, the talk generally runs upon the weather, fashions, news, and the like public topics. In proportion as conversation gets into clubs and knots of friends, it descends into particulars, and friends grows more free and communicative: but the most open, instructive, and unreserved discourse, is that which passes between two persons who are familiar and intimate friends. On these occasions, a man gives a loose to every passion and every thought that is uppermost, discovers his most retired opinions of persons and things, tries the beauty and strength of his sentiments, and exposes his whole soul to the examination of his friend.

Tully was the first who observed that friendship improves happiness and abates misery, by the doubling of our joy and dividing of our grief; a thought in which he hath been followed by all the essayers upon friendship that have written since his time. Sir Francis Bacon has finely described other advantages, or, as he calls them, fruits of friendship; and, indeed, there is no subject of morality which has been better handled and more exhausted than this. Among the several fine things which have been spoken of it, I shall beg leave to quote some out of a very ancient author,¹ whose book would be regarded by our modern wits as one of the most shining tracts of morality that is extant, if it appeared under the name of a Confucius, or of any celebrated Grecian philosopher: I mean the little apocryphal treatise, entitled *The Wisdom of the Son of Sirach*. How finely has he described the art of making friends by an obliging and affable behaviour! And laid down that precept, which a late excellent author has delivered as his own, that we should have many well-wishers, but few friends. 'Sweet language will multiply friends; and a fair-speaking tongue will increase kind greetings. Be in peace with many, nevertheless have but one councillor of a thousand.' With what prudence does he caution us in the choice of our friends! And with what strokes of nature (I could almost say of humour) has he described the behaviour of a treacherous and self-interested friend! 'If thou wouldst get a friend, prove him first, and be not hasty to credit him: for some man is a friend for his own occasion, and will not abide in the day of thy trouble. And there is a friend who being turned to enmity and strife, will discover thy reproach.' Again, 'Some friend is a companion at the table, and will not continue in the day of thy affliction; but, in thy prosperity he will be as thyself, and will be bold over thy servants. If thou be brought low he will be against thee, and hide himself from thy face.' What can be more strong and pointed than the following verse? 'Separate thyself from thine

¹ The quotations made are from Ecclesiasticus.—Ed.

