Friendship

By Ralph Waldo Emerson
THE ESSAY ON
FRIENDSHIP

BY

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FRIENDSHIP.

Thou foolish Hafiz! Say, do churls
Know the worth of Oman's pearls?
Give the gem which dims the moon
To the noblest—or to none.
FRIENDSHIP

We have a great deal more kindness than is ever spoken. Maugre all the selfishness that chills like east winds the world, the whole human family is bathed with an element of love like a fine ether. How many persons we meet in houses, whom we scarcely speak to, whom yet we honor, & who honor us! How many we see in the street, or sit with in church, whom, though silently, we warmly rejoice to be with! Read the language of these wandering eye-beams. The heart knoweth.

The effect of the indulgence of this hu-
Friendship

man affection is a certain cordial exhilaration. In poetry, & in common speech, the emotions of benevolence and complacency which are felt towards others, are likened to the material effects of fire; so swift, or much more swift, more active, more cheering are these fine inward irradiations. From the highest degree of passionate love, to the lowest degree of good will, they make the sweetness of life. Our intellectual and active powers increase with our affection. The scholar sits down to write, and all his years of meditation do not furnish him with one good thought or happy expression; but it is necessary to write a letter to a friend,—and forthwith, troops of gentle thoughts invest themselves, on every hand, with chosen words. See in any house where
virtue and self-respect abide, the palpitation which the approach of a strangership causes. A commended stranger is expected and announced, and an uneasiness betwixt pleasure and pain invades all the hearts of a household. His arrival almost brings fear to the good hearts that would welcome him. The house is dusted, all things fly into their places, the old coat is exchanged for the new, and they must get up a dinner if they can. Of a commended stranger, only the good report is told by others, only the good and new is heard by us. He stands to us for humanity. He is what we wish. Having imagined and invested him, we ask how we should stand related in conversation and action with such a man, and are uneasy with fear. The same idea exalts convers-
Friend-sation with him. We talk better than we are wont. We have the nimblest fancy, a richer memory, and our dumb devil has taken leave for the time. For long hours we can continue a series of sincere, graceful, rich communications, drawn from the oldest, secretest experience, so that they who sit by, of our own kinsfolk and acquaintance, shall feel a lively surprise at our unusual powers. But as soon as the stranger begins to intrude his partialities, his definitions, his defects, into the conversation, it is all over. He has heard the first, the last and best, he will ever hear from us. He is no stranger now. Vulgar-ity, ignorance, misapprehension, are old acquaintances. Now, when he comes, he may get the order, the dress, & the dinner,—but the throbbing of the heart,
and the communications of the soul, no F R I E N D -
S H I P

P E A S A N T are these jets of affection which relume a young world for me again. Delicious is a just & firm encounter of two, in a thought, in a feeling. How beautiful, on their approach to this beating heart, the steps and forms of the gifted and the true! The moment we indulge our affections, the earth is metamorphosed: there is no winter, and no night: all tragedies, all ennuis vanish;—all duties even; nothing fills the proceeding eternity but the forms all radiant of beloved persons. Let the soul be assured that somewhere in the universe it should rejoin its friend, and it would be content and cheerful alone for a thou-

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Friendship and years. I awoke this morning with devout thanksgiving for my friends, the old and the new. Shall I not call God, the Beautiful, who daily showeth himself so to me in his gifts? I chide society, I embrace solitude, and yet I am not so ungrateful, as not to see the wise, the lovely, and the noble-minded, as from time to time they pass my gate. Who hears me, who understands me, becomes mine,—a possession for all time. Nor is nature so poor, but she gives me this joy several times, and thus we weave social threads of our own, a new web of relations; and as many thoughts in succession substantiate themselves, we shall by-and-by stand in a new world of our own creation, and no longer strangers and pilgrims in a traditionary globe. My friends
have come to me unsought. The great Friend-God gave them to me. By oldest right, ship
by the divine affinity of virtue with itself, I find them, or rather, not I, but the Deity in me and in them, both de-
ride and cancel the thick walls of indi-
vidual character, relation, age, sex and circumstance, at which he usually con-
nives, and now makes many one. High
thanks I owe you, excellent lovers, who
carry out the world for me to new and
noble depths, and enlarge the meaning
of all my thoughts. These are not stark
and stiffened persons, but the new-born
poetry of God,—poetry without stop,—
hymn, ode, and epic, poetry still flowing,
and not yet caked in dead books with
annotation and grammar, but Apollo and
the Muses chanting still. Will these, too,
Friend—separate themselves from me again, or some of them? I know not, but I fear it not; for my relation to them is so pure, that we hold by simple affinity, and the Genius of my life being thus social, the same affinity will exert its energy on whomsoever is as noble as these men and women, wherever I may be.

I confess to an extreme tenderness of nature on this point. It is almost dangerous to me to "crush the sweet poison of misused wine" of the affections. A new person is to me always a great event, and hinders me from sleep. I have had such fine fancies lately about two or three persons, as have given me delicious hours; but the joy ends in the day: it yields no fruit. Thought is not born of it; my action is very little modified. I must feel 16
pride in my friend's accomplishments as Friend-if they were mine,—wild, delicate, throbbing property in his virtues. I feel as warmly when he is praised, as the lover when he hears applause of his engaged maiden. We over-estimate the conscience of our friend. His goodness seems better than our goodness, his nature finer, his temptations less. Every thing that is his, his name, his form, his dress, books, and instruments, fancy enhances. Our own thought sounds new and larger from his mouth.

ET the systole & diastole of the heart are not without their analogy in the ebb & flow of love. Friendship, like the immortality of the soul, is too good to be believed. The lover, beholding his maiden, half
Friend- knows that she is not verily that which ship he worships; and in the golden hour of friendship, we are surprised with shades of suspicion and unbelief. We doubt that we bestow on our hero the virtues in which he shines, and afterwards worship the form to which we have ascribed this divine inhabitation. In strictness, the soul does not respect men as it respects itself. In strict science, all persons underlie the same condition of an infinite remoteness. Shall we fear to cool our love by facing the fact, by mining for the metaphysical foundation of this Elysian temple? Shall I not be as real as the things I see? If I am, I shall not fear to know them for what they are. Their essence is not less beautiful than their appearance, though it needs finer organs for its ap-
prehension. The root of the plant is not friend
unsightly to science, though for chaplets ship
and festoons we cut the stem short. And
I must hazard the production of the bald
fact amidst the pleasing reveries, though
it should prove an Egyptian skull at our
banquet. A man who stands united with
his thought, conceives magnificently of
himself. He is conscious of a universal
success, even though bought by uniform
particular failures. No advantages, no
powers, no gold or force can be any
match for him. I cannot choose but rely
on my own poverty, more than on your
wealth. I cannot make your conscious-
ness tantamount to mine. Only the star
dazzles; the planet has a faint, moon-like
ray. I hear what you say of the admir-
able parts and tried temper of the party
Friend— you praise, but I see well that for all his
purple cloaks I shall not like him, unless
he is at last a poor Greek like me. I can-
not deny it, O friend, that the vast shad-
ow of the Phenomenal includes thee, also,
in its pied and painted immensity,—thee,
also, compared with whom all else is shadow. Thou art not Being, as Truth is,
as Justice is,—thou art not my soul, but
a picture and effigy of that. Thou hast
come to me lately, and already thou art
seizing thy hat and cloak. Is it not that
the soul puts forth friends, as the tree
puts forth leaves, and presently, by the
germination of new buds, extrudes the
old leaf? The law of nature is alternation
forevermore. Each electrical state super-
induces the opposite. The soul environs
itself with friends, that it may enter into
a grander self-acquaintance or solitude; Friend—and it goes alone, for a season, that it ship may exalt its conversation or society. This method betrays itself along the whole history of our personal relations. Ever the instinct of affection revives the hope of union with our mates, and ever the returning sense of insulation recalls us from the chase. Thus every man passes his life in the search after friendship, and if he should record his true sentiment, he might write a letter like this, to each new candidate for his love:

**DEAR FRIEND,**

*If I was sure of thee, sure of thy capacity, sure to match my mood with thine, I should never think again of trifles, in relation to thy comings and*
Yet these uneasy pleasures and fine pains are for curiosity, and not for life. They are not to be indulged. This is to weave cobweb, and not cloth. Our friendships hurry to short and poor conclusions, because we have made them a texture of wine and dreams, instead of the tough fibre of the human heart. The laws of friendship are great, austere, and eternal, of one web with the laws of nature and of morals. But we have aimed at a swift
& petty benefit, to suck a sudden sweet- Friend-ness. We snatch at the slowest fruit in ship the whole garden of God, which many summers and many winters must ripen. We seek our friend not sacredly, but with an adulterate passion which would appropriate him to ourselves. In vain. We are armed all over with subtle antagonisms, which, as soon as we meet, begin to play, and translate all poetry into stale prose. Almost all people descend to meet. All association must be a compromise, & what is worst, the very flower & aroma of the flower of each of the beautiful natures disappears as they approach each other. What a perpetual disappointment is actual society, even of the virtuous and gifted! After interviews have been compassed with long foresight, we must
Friendship be tormented presently by baffled blows
by sudden, unseasonable apathies, by epilepsies of wit and of animal spirits, in
the hey-day of friendship and thought. Our faculties do not play us true, and
both parties are relieved by solitude.

ought to be equal to every relation. It makes no difference
how many friends I have, and what content I can find in con-
versing with each, if there be one to whom I am not equal. If I have shrunk
unequal from one contest, instantly the joy I find in all the rest becomes mean
and cowardly. I should hate myself, if then I made my other friends my asylum.

The valiant warrior famoused for fight,
After a hundred victories, once foiled,
Is from the book of honor razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toiled.
Our impatience is thus sharply rebuked. Friend-Bashfulness and apathy are a tough husk ship in which a delicate organization is protected from premature ripening. It would be lost if it knew itself before any of the best souls were yet ripe enough to know and own it. Respect the "natur-langsamkeit" which hardens the ruby in a million years, and works in duration, in which Alps and Andes come and go as rainbows. The good spirit of our life has no heaven which is the price of rashness. Love, which is the essence of God, is not for levity, but for the total worth of man. Let us not have this childish luxury in our regards; but the austerest worth; let us approach our friend with an audacious trust in the truth of his heart, in the breadth, impossible to be
Friend-ship overturned, of his foundations. The attractions of this subject are not to be resisted, and I leave, for the time, all account of subordinate social benefit, to speak of that select and sacred relation which is a kind of absolute, and which even leaves the language of love suspicious and common, so much is this purer, and nothing is so much divine.

I do not wish to treat friendships daintily, but with roughest courage. When they are real, they are not glass threads of frost-work, but the solidest thing we know. For now, after so many ages of experience, what do we know of nature, or of ourselves? Not one step has man taken toward the solution of the problem of his destiny. In one condemnation of folly stand the whole universe of men.
But the sweet sincerity of joy and peace, Friend—which I draw from this alliance with my ship brother’s soul, is the nut itself whereof all nature & all thought is but the husk and shell. Happy is the house that shelters a friend! It might well be built, like a festal bower or arch, to entertain him a single day. Happier, if we know the solemnity of that relation, and honor its law! It is no idle band, no holiday engagement. He who offers himself a candidate for that covenant, comes up, like an Olympian, to the great games, where the first-born of the world are the competitors. He proposes himself for contests where Time, Want, Danger are in the lists, and he alone is victor who has truth enough in his constitution to preserve the delicacy of his beauty from the wear and
Friendship of all these. The gifts of fortune may be present or absent, but all the speed in that contest depends on intrinsic nobleness, and the contempt of trifles. There are two elements that go to the composition of friendship, each so sovereign that I can detect no superiority in either, no reason why either should be first named. One is Truth. A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him, I may think aloud. I am arrived at last in the presence of a man so real and equal, that I may drop even those undermost garments of dissimulation, courtesy and second thought, which men never put off, and may deal with him with the simplicity and wholeness, with which one chemical atom meets another. Sincerity is the luxury allowed, like diadems and
authority, only to the highest rank, *that* Friend-being permitted to speak truth, as having ship none above it to court or conform unto. Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person, hypocrisy begins. We parry and fend the approach of our fellow man by compliments, by gossip, by amusements, by affairs. We cover up our thought from him under a hundred folds.

KNEW a man who, under a certain religious frenzy, cast off this drapery, and omitting all compliment and commonplace, spoke to the conscience of every person he encountered, and that with great insight and beauty. At first he was resisted, and all men agreed he was mad. But persisting, as indeed he could not help do-
Friendship, for some time in this course, he attained to the advantage of bringing every man of his acquaintance into true relations with him. No man would think of speaking falsely with him, or of putting him off with any chat of markets or reading-rooms. But every man was constrained by so much sincerity to face him, and what love of nature, what poetry, what symbol of truth he had, he did certainly show him. But to most of us society shows not its face and eye, but its side and back. To stand in true relations with men in a false age, is worth a fit of insanity, is it not? We can seldom go erect. Almost every man we meet requires some civility, requires to be humored;—he has some fame, some talent, some whim of religion or philanthropy
in his head that is not to be questioned, Friend-
and spoils all conversation with him. But a friend is a sane man who exercises not
my ingenuity but me. My friend gives me entertainment without requiring me
to stoop, or to lisp, or to mask myself.
A friend, therefore, is a sort of paradox in nature. I who alone am, I who see
nothing in nature whose existence I can affirm with equal evidence to my own,
behold now the semblance of my being in all its height, variety and curiosity, re-
iterated in a foreign form; so that a friend may well be reckoned the master-
piece of nature.
The other element of friendship is Tenderness. We are holden to men by every
sort of tie, by blood, by pride, by fear, by hope, by lucre, by lust, by hate, by
Friendship, admiration, by every circumstance and badge and trifle, but we can scarce believe that so much character can subsist in another as to draw us by love. Can another be so blessed, and we so pure, that we can offer him tenderness? When a man becomes dear to me, I have touched the goal of fortune. I find very little written directly to the heart of this matter in books. And yet I have one text which I cannot choose but remember. My author says, "I offer myself faintly & bluntly to those whose I effectually am, and tender myself least to him to whom I am the most devoted." I wish that friendship should have feet, as well as eyes and eloquence. It must plant itself on the ground, before it vaults over the moon. I wish it to be a little of a citizen, before it is
quite a cherub. We chide the citizen Friend—because he makes love a commodity. It ship is an exchange of gifts, of useful loans; it is good neighborhood; it watches with the sick; it holds the pall at the funeral; and quite loses sight of the delicacies and nobility of the relation. But though we cannot find the god under this disguise of a sutler, yet, on the other hand, we cannot forgive the poet if he spins his thread too fine, and does not substantiate his romance by the municipal virtues of justice, punctuality, fidelity and pity. HATE the prostitution of the name of friendship to signify modish and worldly alliances. I much prefer the company of plough-boys and tin-pedlars, to the silken and perfumed amity which only cel-
Friendship celebrates its days of encounter by a frivolous display, by rides in a curricle, and dinners at the best taverns. The end of friendship is a commerce the most strict and homely that can be joined; more strict than any of which we have experience. It is for aid and comfort through all the relations and passages of life and death. It is fit for serene days, & graceful gifts, and country rambles, but also for rough roads and hard fare, shipwreck, poverty and persecution. It keeps company with the sallies of the wit and the trances of religion. We are to dignify to each other the daily needs and offices of man's life, and embellish it by courage, wisdom and unity. It should never fall into something usual and settled, but should be alert and inventive, and add
rhyme and reason to what was drudgery. **Friend-**

For perfect friendship it may be said to ship require natures so rare and costly, so well tempered each, & so happily adapted, and withal so circumstanced, (for even in that particular, a poet says, love demands that the parties be altogether paired,) that very seldom can its satisfaction be realized. It cannot subsist in its perfection, say some of those who are learned in this warm lore of the heart, betwixt more than two. I am not quite so strict in my terms, perhaps because I have never known so high a fellowship as others. I please my imagination more with a circle of godlike men and women variously related to each other, and between whom subsists a lofty intelligence. But I find this law of **one to one**, per-
Friend-emptory for conversation, which is the practice and consummation of friendship. Do not mix waters too much. The best mix as ill as good and bad. You shall have every useful and cheering discourse at several times with two several men, but let all three of you come together, and you shall not have one new & hearty word. Two may talk and one may hear, but three cannot take part in a conversation of the most sincere and searching sort. In good company there is never such discourse between two, across the table, as takes place when you leave them alone. In good company, the individuals at once merge their egotism into a social soul exactly co-extensive with the several consciousnesses there present. No partialities of friend to friend,
no fondness of brother to sister, of wife Friend-
to husband, are there pertinent, but quite ship
otherwise. Only he may then speak who
can sail on the common thought of the
party, and not poorly limited to his own.
Now this convention, which good sense
demands, destroys the high freedom of
great conversation, which requires an ab-
solute running of two souls into one.

No TWO men but being left alone
with each other, enter into sim-
pler relations. Yet it is affinity
that determines which two shall
converse. Unrelated men give little joy
to each other; will never suspect the la-
tent powers of each. We talk sometimes
of a great talent for conversation, as if
it were a permanent property in some
individuals. Conversation is an evanescent
Friendship—no more. A man is reputed to have thought and eloquence; he cannot, for all that, say a word to his cousin or his uncle. They accuse his silence with as much reason as they would blame the insignificance of a dial in the shade. In the sun it will mark the hour. Among those who enjoy his thought, he will regain his tongue. Friendship requires that rare mean betwixt likeness & unlikeness, that piques each with the presence of power and of consent in the other party. Let me be alone to the end of the world, rather than that my friend should overstep by a word or a look his real sympathy. I am equally balked by antagonism and by compliance. Let him not cease an instant to be himself. The only joy I have in his
being mine, is that the not mine is mine. Friend - It turns the stomach, it blots the day-ship light; where I looked for a manly furtherance, or at least a manly resistance, to find a mush of concession. Better be a nettle in the side of your friend than his echo. The condition which high friendship demands, is, ability to do without it. To be capable of that high office requires great and sublime parts. There must be very two, before there can be very one. Let it be an alliance of two large formidable natures, mutually beheld, mutually feared, before yet they recognize the deep identity which beneath these disparities unites them. He only is fit for this society who is magnanimous. He must be so, to know its law. He must be one who is sure that
Friendship—greatness and goodness are always economy. He must be one who is not swift to intermeddle with his fortunes. Let him not dare to intermeddle with this. Leave to the diamond its ages to grow, nor expect to accelerate the births of the eternal. Friendship demands a religious treatment. We must not be wilful, we must not provide. We talk of choosing our friends, but friends are self-elected. Reverence is a great part of it. Treat your friend as a spectacle. Of course, if he be a man, he has merits that are not yours, and that you cannot honor, if you must needs hold him close to your person. Stand aside. Give these merits room. Let them mount & expand. Be not so much his friend that you can never know his peculiar energies, like fond mammas who
shut up their boy in the house until he Friend is almost grown a girl. Are you the friendship of your friend's buttons, or of his thought? To a great heart he will still be a stranger in a thousand particulars, that he may come near in the holiest ground. Leave it to girls and boys to regard a friend as property, and to suck a short and all-confounding pleasure instead of the pure nectar of God.

Let us buy our entrance to this guild by a long probation. Why should we desecrate noble and beautiful souls by intruding on them? Why insist on rash personal relations with your friend? Why go to his house, & know his mother and brother and sisters? Why be visited by him at your own? Are these things material to our covenant? Leave this touch-
Friend- ing and clawing. Let him be to me a ship spirit. A message, a thought, a sincerity, a glance from him, I want, but not news, nor pottage. I can get politics, & chat, and neighborly conveniences, from cheaper companions.

SHOULD not the society of my friend be to me poetic, pure, universal, and great as nature itself? Ought I to feel that our tie is profane in comparison with yonder bar of cloud that sleeps on the horizon, or clump of waving grass that divides the brook? Let us not vilify but raise it to that standard. That great defying eye, that scornful beauty of his mien and action, do not pique yourself on reducing, but rather fortify and enhance. Worship his superiorities. Wish him not less by a
thought, but hoard and tell them all. **Friend**- Guard him as thy great counterpart; **ship** have a princedom to thy friend. Let him be to thee forever a sort of beautiful enemy, untamable, devoutly revered, & not a trivial conveniency to be soon outgrown and cast aside. The hues of the opal, the light of the diamond, are not to be seen, if the eye is too near. To my friend I write a letter, and from him I receive a letter. That seems to you a little. Me it suffices. It is a spiritual gift worthy of him to give and of me to receive. It profanes nobody. In these warm lines the heart will trust itself, as it will not to the tongue, and pour out the prophecy of a godlier existence than all the annals of heroism have yet made good.
Friendship—Respect so far the holy laws of this fellowship as not to prejudice its perfect flower by your impatience for its opening. We must be our own, before we can be another's. There is at least this satisfaction in crime, according to the Latin proverb; you can speak to your accomplice on even terms. *Crimen quos inquinat, æquat.* To those whom we admire and love, at first we cannot. Yet the least defect of self-possession vitiates, in my judgment, the entire relation. There can never be deep peace between two spirits, never mutual respect until, in their dialogue, each stands for the whole world.

What is so great as friendship, let us carry with what grandeur of spirit we can. Let us be silent,—so we may hear
the whisper of the gods. Let us not interfere. Who set you to cast about what ship you should say to the select souls, or to say any thing to such? No matter how ingenious, no matter how graceful and bland. There are innumerable degrees of folly and wisdom, and for you to say aught is to be frivolous. Wait, and thy soul shall speak. Wait until the necessary and everlasting overpowers you, until day and night avail themselves of your lips. The only money of God is God. He pays never with any thing less or any thing else. The only reward of virtue, is virtue: the only way to have a friend, is to be one. Vain to hope to come nearer a man by getting into his house. If unlike, his soul only flees the faster from you, and you shall catch
Friend—never a true glance of his eye. We see the noble afar off, and they repel us; why should we intrude? Late—very late—we perceive that no arrangements, no introductions, no consuetudes, or habits of society, would be of any avail to establish us in such relations with them as we desire,—but solely the uprise of nature in us to the same degree it is in them: then shall we meet as water with water: and if we should not meet them then, we shall not want them, for we are already they. In the last analysis, love is only the reflection of a man's own worthiness from other men. Men have sometimes exchanged names with their friends, as if they would signify that in their friend each loved his own soul. The higher the style we demand of
friendship, of course the less easy to establish it with flesh and blood. We walk alone in the world. Friends, such as we desire, are dreams and fables.

But a sublime hope cheers ever the faithful heart, that elsewhere, in other regions of the universal power, souls are now acting, enduring, and daring, which can love us, and which we can love. We may congratulate ourselves that the period of nonage, of follies, of blunders, and of shame, is passed in solitude, & when we are finished men, we shall grasp heroic hands in heroic hands. Only be admonished by what you already see, not to strike leagues of friendship with cheap persons, where no friendship can be. Our impatience betrays us into rash & foolish
Friend-alliances which no God attends. By per-
sisting in your path, though you forfeit
the little, you gain the great. You be-
come pronounced. You demonstrate
yourself, so as to put yourself out of the
reach of false relations, and you draw to
you the first born of the world,—those
rare pilgrims whereof only one or two
wander in nature at once, and before
whom the vulgar great show as spectres
and shadows merely.
It is foolish to be afraid of making our
ties too spiritual, as if so we could lose
any genuine love. Whatever correction
of our popular views we make from in-
sight, nature will be sure to bear us out
in, and though it seem to rob us of some
joy, will repay us with a greater. Let us
feel, if we will, the absolute insinuation
of man. We are sure that we have all in Friend-
us. We go to Europe, or we pursue per-
sons, or we read books, in the instinct-
ive faith that these will call it out and
reveal us to ourselves. Beggars all. The
persons are such as we; the Europe, an
old faded garment of dead persons; the
books, their ghosts. Let us drop this idol-
atrie. Let us give over this mendicancy.
Let us even bid our dearest friends fare-
well, and defy them, saying, ‘Who are
you? Unhand me: I will be dependent
no more.’ Ah! seest thou not, O brother,
that thus we part only to meet again on
a higher platform, & only be more each
other’s, because we are more our own?
A friend is Janus-faced: he looks to the
past and the future. He is the child of
all my foregoing hours, the prophet of
Friend—those to come. He is the harbinger of a greater friend. It is the property of the divine to be reproductive.

I do then with my friend as I do with my books. I would have them where I can find them, but I seldom use them. We must have society on our own terms, and admit or exclude it on the slightest cause. I cannot afford to speak much with my friend. If he is great, he makes me so great that I cannot descend to converse. In the great days, presentiments hover before me, far before me in the firmament. I ought then to dedicate myself to them. I go in that I may seize them, I go out that I may seize them. I fear only that I may lose them receding into the sky in which now they are only a patch of brighter light. Then,
though I prize my friends, I cannot afford to talk with them and study their visions, lest I lose my own.

T would indeed give me a certain household joy to quit this lofty seeking, this spiritual astronomy, or search of stars, and come down to warm sympathies with you; but then I know well I shall mourn always the vanishing of my mighty gods. It is true, next week I shall have languid times, when I can well afford to occupy myself with foreign objects; then I shall regret the lost literature of your mind, and wish you were by my side again. But if you come, perhaps you will fill my mind only with new visions, not with yourself but with your lustres, and I shall not be able any more than
FRIEND—now to converse with you. So I will owe
ship to my friends this evanescent intercourse.
I will receive from them not what they
have but what they are. They shall give
me that which properly they cannot give
me, but which radiates from them. But
they shall not hold me by any relations
less subtle and pure. We will meet as
though we met not, and part as though
we parted not.
It has seemed to me lately more possible
than I knew, to carry a friendship great-
ly, on one side, without due correspond-
ence on the other. Why should I cumber
myself with the poor fact that the
receiver is not capacious? It never troubles
the sun that some of his rays fall
wide and vain into ungrateful space, and
only a small part on the reflecting plan-
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et. Let your greatness educate the crude Friend-ship and cold companion. If he is unequal, he will presently pass away, but thou art enlarged by thy own shining; and no longer a mate for frogs and worms, dost soar and burn with the gods of the empyrean. It is thought a disgrace to love unrequited. But the great will see that true love cannot be unrequited. True love transcends instantly the unworthy object, and dwells and broods on the eternal, and when the poor, interposed mask crumbles, it is not sad, but feels rid of so much earth, and feels its independence the surer. The essence of friendship is entireness, a total magnanimity & trust. It must not surmise or provide for infirmity. It treats its object as a god, that it may deify both.
So here endeth the Essay on Friendship, by Ralph Waldo Emerson, as done into a printed book by the Roycrofters at the Roycroft Shop, East Aurora, Erie County, New York, and completed July the Tenth, Anno Christi MDCCXCIX.