

THOSE WHO ARE enamoured of the pleasures of life, and glaucoured by the sweetness thereof, who prefer fleeting and paltry objects to those which are future and stable, are like a certain man who had three friends. On the first two of these he was extravagantly lavish of his honours, and clave passionately to their love, fighting to the death and deliberately hazarding his life for their sakes. But to the third he bore himself right arrogantly, never once granting him the honour nor the love that was his due, but only making show of some slight and inconsiderable regard for him. Now one day he was apprehended by certain dread and strange soldiers, that made speed to hale him to the king, there to render account for a debt of ten thousand talents. Being in a great strait, this debtor sought for a helper, able to take his part in this terrible reckoning with the king. So he ran to his first and truest friend of all, and said, "Thou wottest, friend, that I ever jeopardied my life for thy sake. Now to-day I require help in a necessity that presseth me sore. In how many talents wilt thou undertake to assist me now? What is the hope that I may count upon at thy hands, O my dearest friend?" The other answered and said unto him, "Man, I am not thy friend: I know not who thou art. Other friends I have, with whom I must needs make merry to-day, and so win their friendship for the time to come. But, see, I present thee with two ragged garments, that thou mayest have them on the way whereon thou goest, though they will do thee no manner of good. Further help from me thou mayest expect none."

The other, hearing this, despaired of the succour whereon he had reckoned, and went to his second friend, saying, "Friend, thou rememberest how much honour and kindness thou hast enjoyed at my hands. To-day I have fallen into tribulation and sorrow, and need a helping hand. To what extent then canst thou share my labour? Tell me at once." Said he, "I have no leisure today to share thy troubles. I too have fallen among cares and perils, and am myself in tribulation. Howbeit, I will go a little way with thee, even if I shall fail to be of service to thee. Then will I turn quickly homeward, and busy myself with mine own anxieties." So the man returned from him too empty-handed and balked at every turn; and he cried misery on himself for his vain hope in those ungrateful friends, and the unavailing hardships that he had endured through love of them. At the last he went away to the third friend, whom he had never courted, nor invited to share his happiness. With countenance ashamed and downcast, he said unto him, "I can scarce open my lips to speak with thee, knowing full well that I have never done thee service, or shown thee any kindness that thou mightest now remember. But seeing that a heavy misfortune hath overtaken me, and

that I have found nowhere among my friends any hope of deliverance, I address myself to thee, praying thee, if it lie in thy power, to afford me some little aid. Bear no grudge for my past unkindness, and refuse me not." The other with a smiling and gracious countenance answered, "Assuredly I own thee my very true friend. I have not forgotten those slight services of thine: and I will repay them to-day with interest. Fear not therefore, neither be afraid. I will go before thee and entreat the king for thee, and will by no means deliver thee into the hands of thine enemies. Wherefore be of good courage, dear friend, and fret not thyself." Then, pricked at heart, the other said with tears, "Woe is me! Which shall I first lament, or which first deplore? Condemn my vain preference for my forgetful, thankless and false friends, or blame the mad ingratitude that I have shown to thee, the sincere and true?"

Joasaph heard this tale also with amazement and asked the interpretation thereof. Then said Barlaam, "The first friend is the abundance of riches, and love of money, by reason of which a man falleth into the midst of ten thousand perils, and endureth many miseries: but when at last the appointed day of death is come, of all these things he carrieth away nothing but the useless burial cloths. By the second friend is signified our wife and children and the remnant of kinsfolk and acquaintance, to whom we are passionately attached, and from whom with difficulty we tear ourselves away, neglecting our very soul and body for the love of them. But no help did man ever derive from these in the hour of death, save only that they will accompany and follow him to the sepulchre, and then straightway turning them homeward again they are occupied with their own cares and matters, and bury his memory in oblivion as they have buried his body in the grave. But the third friend, that was altogether neglected and held cheap, whom the man never approached, but rather shunned and fled in horror, is the company of good deeds,—faith, hope, charity, alms, kindness, and the whole band of virtues, that can go before us, when we quit the body, and may plead with the Lord on our behalf, and deliver us from our enemies and dread creditors, who urge that strict rendering of account in the air, and try bitterly to get the mastery of us. This is the grateful and true friend, who beareth in mind those small kindnesses that we have shown him and repayeth the whole with interest.'

SS Barlaam and Joasaph, by St. John of Damascus,

tr. Woodward & Mattingly,

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