



ABEL BONNARD

*of the French Academy*

*The  
Art of  
Friendship*



TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY PERLIE P. FALLON

*mcmxxiii*

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THE ART OF  
FRIENDSHIP

## *Dedication*

I dedicate this translation to the memory of my mother, Lucy Fallon, who lived at Groton, Massachusetts

**P. P. F.**



FOREWORD

*by Abbé*

*Ernest Dimmet*

*Who is M. Abel Bonnard?* . . . A member of the French Academy. . . . *Very well known, then?* . . . No, not so very well known. . . . *Why is he in the French Academy?* . . . Because he is an exquisite artist. . . . *Why isn't he better known, then?* . . . Because he is so exquisite. If he were only a sophisticate there would be a crowd of snobs around him, but he is not a sophisticate, he is an exquisite.

M. Abel Bonnard is a person who was born with a taste for the supreme in everything: men and women, landscapes or works of art, enjoyments, moods or words. Nothing but the very best can ever satisfy him. It is not surprising, therefore, if all he writes infallibly strikes us by its perfection. Every ten or twelve days the *Journal des Débats* publishes a miniature essay from his pen. These little masterpieces never proceed from a formula, they are all inspired, and all somehow affect you as if they were poetry. Yet at first sight they all show a characteristic which might put us on our guard against them: almost every sentence in them could be quoted.

## FOREWORD

But one is never tempted to call them epigrams: they are aphorisms, and it is not their terseness, it is their originality that engraves them on our memory. Strange to say, each one individually scrutinized could be a maxim, the result of a mental flash photographed on a memorandum, yet fifty of them can follow one another discursively and make up a chapter of a book.

But the reader need only open this book on *Friendship*, to see how wonderfully M. Abel Bonnard can weave his gems into a rich fabric of thought. If he is a little surprised to find in it a tendency to transmute sentiment into comprehension, let him not doubt his own judgment. Full of sensibility as he is, M. Abel Bonnard is even fuller of intelligence.

ERNEST DIMNET





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THE FIRST PART:  
*Concerning the Founda-  
tions of Friendship*





I.

**I**T MAY be said of friendship as of all the great sentiments that the name alone is common. That which is usually so called rests only in habit or in interest. Most men are satisfied with love; but they greatly fear solitude, and even if they no longer dread such peril, it is of little consequence to them to know definitely what preserves them from it. The accomplished egoist has need of companions, he absorbs them in his egoism and believes that is friendship; but to classify these sentiments it is sufficient to note how they manifest themselves.

That man accustomed to pass the autumn with one of his friends, and disappointed if he may not, would not make this visit in August which he so impatiently seeks in October, because he is at the moment occupied in another fashion. The same is true of the chagrin which old men show at the death of one who was a part of their lives. They are distressed by the interference with their habits. They do not weep for the death of a person, they see the void in their time. It is

thus also that the friends of childhood are always so agreeable and welcome. Of all associations we may form, there are none where habit plays more part and choice less. We welcome these companions with so much satisfaction because they call back our own lives; they are as books where we read our own history. We make them carry the thread of our memories.

The greater number of friendships among men are indicative not of choice, but of indolence; the most diverse circumstances may create them. One who would not otherwise be noticed begins to show esteem and thereby asserts rights in us. It requires more strength and independence than we may suspect to avoid choosing the one who has in fact chosen us and to treat as of no importance a man who undertakes to notice us. As time passes all these casual friendships are strengthened and consolidated and in the end we ourselves no longer know that chance has presided at their birth.

But men are brought together by interest as well as habit. Engaged in a career, struggling with obstacles and seeing others in the same difficulties, they stand ready to aid those who aid them. They keep a secret but exact account of helps received and rendered and stand ready to sever such relationships when no longer useful. They are concerned with what is justly called

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP

commerce. Nothing is more amusing than to watch those meetings and those maneuvers where two men scent and examine each other, understanding each other's very whisper and each calculating what use may be made of the other. The bargain made in shadow, they display it in the light under the guise of friendship. It would be more honest, doubtlessly, when the arrangements are made to call them by their true names. But cynicism is not available to all the world; it requires a hard heart and a clear mind. Most people deceive themselves in good faith regarding the nature of the sentiments they feel, not only because their vanity leads to errors, but because their minds are not keen enough to analyze them. Their sentiments are very often sufficiently confused to be deceiving and it is indeed true that the satisfaction of not being alone, the vanity of relations which flatter, and the hope of profit make up for them something they, in all sincerity, take for friendship.

Very often people even seek to prove they are good friends by showing they are trustworthy allies. Let an attack be made upon a person with whom they claim friendship and they rush to his help; they defend without reserve and with a kind of ostentation. But if we look closely it may be seen that far from losing thereby, they hope to gain; they give so much emphasis to



their conduct in order that it may come to the attention of the person defended and with the idea that he will be grateful. It increases the right they have to call upon him. Besides, by their zeal they impress the indifferent with the wish to have such faithful associates and thus increase, by their alliances, their chances of succeeding in the enterprises in which ambition has engaged them. Thus these partisans at the very moment in which they seek to demonstrate that they excel in friendship prove they do not know its meaning. In so far as human relations are tainted by traffic and mutual profit they are not moved by the generosity of friendship.

True friendship is indeed above utility. Not that friends should not be always ready to aid each other, but it is not that which unites them. Let one spend his fortune to aid the other in an embarrassment, let him expose his very life to save him, not only must he forget immediately what he has done, but the perfection of friendship demands that the beneficiary of the services shall forget them not less quickly. To be conscious of them would be to commit a fault which is the most grave in the superior affections, namely, a fault of taste, because even gratitude itself may not appear without some inequality in the joyous freedom with which friends give themselves to each other. Companions, having