

Of Followers And Friends

COSTLY followers are not to be liked; lest while a man maketh his train longer, he make his wings shorter. I reckon to be costly, not them alone which charge the purse, but which are wearisome, and importune in suits. Ordinary followers ought to challenge no higher conditions, than countenance, recommendation, and protection from wrongs. Factionous followers are worse to be liked, which follow not upon affection to him, with whom they range themselves, but upon discontentment conceived against some other; whereupon commonly ensueth that ill intelligence, that we many times see between great personages. Likewise glorious followers, who make themselves as trumpets of the commendation of those they follow, are full of inconvenience; for they taint business through want of secrecy; and they export honor from a man, and make him a return in envy. There is a kind of followers likewise, which are dangerous, being indeed espials; which inquire the secrets of the house, and bear tales of them, to others. Yet such men, many times, are in great favor; for they are officious, and commonly exchange tales. The following by certain estates of men, answerable to that, which a great person himself professeth (as of soldiers, to him that hath been employed in the wars, and the like), hath ever been a thing civil, and well taken, even in monarchies; so it be without too much pomp or popularity. But the most honorable kind of following, is to be followed as one, that apprehendeth to advance virtue, and desert, in all sorts of persons. And yet, where there is no eminent odds in sufficiency, it is better to take with the more passable, than with the more able. And besides, to speak truth, in base times, active men are of more use than virtuous. It is true that in government, it is good to use men of one rank equally: for to countenance some extraordinarily, is to make them insolent, and the rest discontent; because they may claim a due. But contrariwise, in favor, to use men with much difference and election is good; for it maketh the persons preferred more thankful, and the rest more officious: because all is of favor. It is good discretion, not to make too much of any man at the first; because one cannot hold out that proportion. To be governed (as we call it) by one is not safe; for it shows softness, and gives a freedom, to scandal and disreputation; for those, that would not censure or speak ill of a man immediately, will talk more boldly of those that are so great with them, and thereby wound their honor. Yet to be distracted with many is worse; for it makes men to be of the last impression, and full of change. To take advice of some few friends, is ever honorable; for lookers-on many times see more than gamesters; and the vale best discovereth the hill. There is little friendship in the world, and least of all between equals, which was wont to be magnified. That that is, is between superior and inferior, whose fortunes may comprehend the one the other.

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