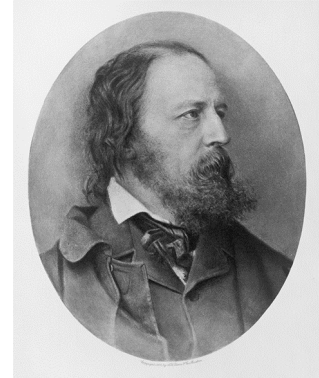


### Better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all

adapted from an article by **David Waters**

- 1 In his extraordinary work *In Memoriam*, about the loss of his closest friend, Arthur Hallam, the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809 – 1892) writes the unforgettable lines 'Better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all'. These words have become a cliché of romantic fiction: they're powerful and true, but it's important to remember that they were inspired by intense friendship rather than erotic love.
- 2 Today, when a friendship ends, we'll nonchalantly click the 'unfriend' button on Facebook or, perhaps, ignore this person's emails like so much spam. We do not write a 2,000-line elegy expressing our torment at friendships lost anymore. Nowadays we are careful not to risk revealing our feelings of envy, anger or hurt to the person we once cared about so much.
- 3 According to the American author René Brown, it's when we disengage from our friends that we suck all the oxygen from the relationship. The breaking of trust and even the telling of lies are more acceptable to us than being ignored, he says. Disengagement hurts us so profoundly because when we were born, a close connection with our parents was essential to our survival. We need to be seen, acknowledged and responded to by others in order to thrive. Being ignored, as every bully knows, is one of the most powerfully destructive weapons.
- 4 A combination of social media, our busy lives and our unwillingness to think about what friendship really means is turning our social connections into so many things to be managed, sorted, selected and collected. Friends have become a special kind of social currency that we use to demonstrate our popularity. As parents, we wish to be our teenage children's best friends; corporations pitch themselves as communities, insisting that colleagues are 'frolleagues' (friends and colleagues), and even our enemies need to be kept close under the banner 'frenemies'. Yet, by attempting to turn almost everyone we meet into a mate, we're becoming increasingly baffled about who our true companions are and what we can expect from them.
- 5 The philosopher Aristotle said there are three kinds of friendship: those defined by utility, those about pleasure and the most important kind of all, soul mates. The first two are categorized by an external shared interest, such as working together or having the same hobby, which is a prerequisite for the friendship to grow. These are the kinds of friends who



may drift apart when a common interest wanes or when they change jobs. The third category is a special and unique type of friendship, whereby two people take pleasure in each other's company for 15. This is the sort of companionship to which we all aspire, even if we don't realize it.

6 Aristotle said that it is when people place each other under the wrong friendship label that they risk being hurt. Who hasn't suggested a night out with someone at work, not for the office gossip or to trade insults about the boss, but because we want to road-test becoming their true friend? We are bound to be disappointed if our colleague has different motives. If we also see them as a utilitarian friend, neither of us is likely to go home upset.

7 This confusion may explain why 62 percent of us say friends are the biggest cause of stress in our lives and a quarter of us say we can't cope with making new friends. 18 it is through real engagement, through candid conversations when we say things we never even knew we thought, that we experience one of the best things in life. People from Victorian times already knew this. Friendship is worth risking everything for, even if the price is its untimely loss.

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