

## GIFTS.

Now that Christmas and New Year are at a safe distance, and one can speak without suspicion of personality, I have a word to say of gifts. It is said, that the world is in a state of bankruptcy, that the world owes the world more than the world can pay, and ought to go into chancery, and be sold. I do not think this general insolvency which involves in some sort all the population, the reason of the difficulty annually or oftener experienced in bestowing gifts; since it is always so pleasant to be generous, but very vexatious to pay debts. But the obstacle lies in the difficulty of choosing; if at any time it comes to me with force that a present is due from me to somebody, I am puzzled what to give, until the opportunity is gone. Flowers and fruits are always fit presents; flowers, because they are a proud assertion that a ray of beauty outvalues all the utilities of the world; and fruits, because they are the flower of commodities, and at once admit of fantastic values being attached to them. If a man should send to me to come a hundred miles to visit him, and should set before me a basket of fine summer fruit, I should think there was some proportion between the labor and the reward. For common gifts, necessity makes pertinences and beauty every day, and one is thankful when an imperative leaves him no option, since if the man at the door have no shoes, you have not to think whether you could procure him a paint-box. And as it is always pleasing to see a man eat bread or drink water in the house or out of doors, so it is always a great satisfaction to supply these first wants. Necessity does everything well. Also I have heard a friend say, that the rule for a gift was, to convey to some person that which properly belonged to their character, and was easily associated with them in thought. But our tokens of compliment and love are for the most part barbarous. Rings and jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me. Therefore the poet brings his poem; the shepherd his lamb; the farmer, corn; the miner, a stone; the painter, his picture; the girl, a handkerchief of her own sewing. This is right, and we feel a profound pleasure, for it re-

stores society in so far to its primary basis, when a man's biography is conveyed in his gift, and every man's wealth is an index of his merit. But it is a cold, lifeless business when you go to the shops to buy me something, which does not represent your life and talent to me, but a goldsmith's. This is fit for kings, and rich men who represent kings, and a false state of property, to make presents of gold and silver stuffs, as a kind of symbolical sin-offering and payment of tribute.

But this matter of gifts is delicate, and requires careful sailing, or rude boats. It is not the office of a man to receive gifts. How dare you give them? We ask to be self-sustained, nothing less; we hate to receive a gift. We hate the hand that feeds us; we can receive anything from love, for that is a way of receiving it from ourselves, but not from any one who assumes to bestow. We hate the animal food which we eat, because there seems something of degrading dependence in living by it.

“Brother, if Jove to thee a present make,  
Take heed that from his hands thou nothing take.”

We ask all; nothing less than all will content us. We quarrel with society, and rightfully, as we think, if it do not give us love also, love and reverence and troops of friends.

Who is up so high as to receive a gift well? We are either glad or sorry at a gift, and both emotions are unbecoming. Some violence I think is done, some degradation borne, when I receive or grieve at a gift. I am sorry when my independence is invaded, or when a gift comes from such as do not know my spirit, and so the act is not supported; and if the gift pleases me overmuch, then I should be ashamed that the donor should read my heart, and see that I love his commodity and not him. The gift to be true must be the flowing of the giver unto me, correspondent to my flowing unto him. When the waters are at level, then my goods pass to him, and his to me. All his are mine, all mine his. I say to him, How can you give me this pot of oil, or this flagon of wine, when all your oil and wine is mine, which belief of mine this gift of yours seems to deny? Hence the fitness of beautiful, not useful things for gifts. This giving is flat usurpation, and there-

fore when the beneficiary is ungrateful, as all beneficiaries hate all Timons, not at all considering the value of the gift, but looking back to the greater store it was taken from, I rather sympathize with the beneficiary than with the anger of my Lord Timon. For the expectation of gratitude is mean, and is continually punished by total insensibility. And truly considered, it is a great happiness to get off without injury and heart-burning from one who has had the ill luck to be served by you. It is very onerous business, this of being served, and the debtor naturally wishes to give you a slap. A golden text for these gentlemen is that which I so admire in the Buddhist, who never thanks, and who says, “Do not flatter your benefactors.”

But the reason of these discords I take to be that there is no commensurability between a man and any gift. You cannot give any thing to a magnanimous person. After you have served him, he at once puts you in debt by his magnanimity. The service a man renders his friend is trivial and selfish, compared with the service he knows his friend stood in readiness to yield him, alike before he had begun to serve his friend and now also. Compared with that great good-will I bear my friend, the benefit it is in my power to render him seems small. Besides, our action on each other, good as well as evil, is so random and remote. We can seldom hear the acknowledgements of any person who would thank us for a benefit, without some shame and humiliation, for we feel that it was not direct, but incidental. We can seldom strike a direct stroke, but must be content with an oblique one; I mean, we seldom have the satisfaction of yielding a direct benefit, which is directly received. But rectitude scatters favor all around without knowing it, and receives with wonder the thanks of people.

I like to see that we cannot be bought and sold. The best of hospitality and of generosity is also not in the will, but in fate. I find that I am not much to you, you do not need me; you do not feel me; then am I thrust out of doors, though you proffer me house and lands. No services are of any value, but likeness only. When I have attempted to join myself to others by services, it proved an intellectual trick, no more. They eat your service like apples, and leave you out. But love them, and they feel you, and delight in you all the time.