

UC-NRLF

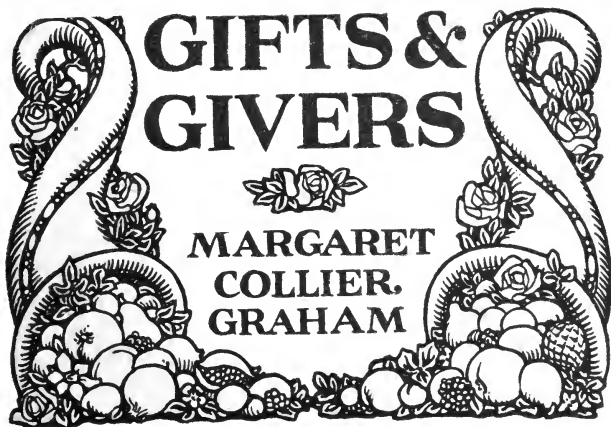


\$B 29 193

984

G741

3



YC 16088

GIFT OF

*Elizabeth Whitney Bates*



EX LIBRIS

984

G741

9









Osgood

from

The Publisher

Morgan Shepard










Margaret Collier Graham

# Gifts and Givers

---

---

A thick, black, decorative border with a complex, interlocking knotwork pattern surrounds the central text. The border is slightly irregular, giving it a hand-drawn or carved appearance.

**T** is an  
excellent  
thing to  
stop now and  
then and size  
things up.

MCCG

# **GIFTS and GIVERS**

*A Sermon for All Seasons*



**Margaret Collier Graham**



**MORGAN SHEPARD COMPANY**  
**NEW YORK · SAN FRANCISCO · 1906**

Library of  
CALIFORNIA

TEXT AND  
DECORATIONS COPYRIGHTED  
BY  
MORGAN SHEPARD CO.  
M C M V I

TO THE  
LIBRARY OF THE  
MORGAN SHEPARD CO.

# Gifts and Givers







## F R I E N D

long since dead used to say to me, "It is an excellent thing to stop now and then and size things up."

The mind of the most logical thinker goes so easily from one point to another that it is not hard to mistake motion for progress. One innocent, even commendable, action in our modern life leads so naturally to another apparently equally innocent or commendable that, before we are aware, we are involved, by what we really believe to be good impulses, in hopeless complexities. These have grown up about all our institu-

 G I F T S 

---

tions, religious and secular. In some cases they have totally obscured the original intent. About no one observance have they multiplied more dangerously than about Christmas. Just why humanity should agree upon a season, or a day, for being kind is past finding out. It is an accretion of the ages. The best we can say of it is that we should like to be as generous all the year; but this is impossible. Will the receiver accept as a symbol of our feelings toward him this token of our heartfelt desire for his perpetual happiness and prosperity? If one never loses sight of this desire, no matter how much or how little he gives, he is sure of a

## G I V E R S

---

merry Christmas. And why not have a merry Christmas? Sickness and death may prevent it, but nothing else should. I for one have no patience with those who allow their own folly to destroy the delight of a festival. The man or woman who says coarse and sordid things about “annual swaps” says them from a coarse and sordid soul, and may heaven protect you and me from his gifts and his thanks; both are of the earth earthy. There is but one lower depth than the saying of such things and that is the thinking of them. Fortunately, many who say them do not think them. Those who give gifts because they are “expected” would do

  **G I F T S**  

---

well to examine themselves rigorously lest they be found cherishing some sordid expectation of their own. The key to most of the evils we notice in our neighbors may be found in ourselves—this thought ought to make us slow to mention his faults if it does nothing more. The mystery attending the gifts of Santa Claus has saved childhood from much that is commercial. Poor people (and by this I mean only those who think less of themselves for having little: the poor in spirit) who destroy the self-respect and dignity of their children by constant reference to worldly belongings are for once denied the privilege of thus belittling them-

## G I V E R S

---

selves. They cannot say of Santa Claus, who is not reported by Dun, "Times are very dull this year, my dears, and you must not expect much. Poor papa has to work hard to buy your shoes and stockings and school books, and you must not complain if your doll and wagon are not as nice as the children's next door. Their father is rich and does not have to work as papa does," thus, under cover of pious exhortation, instilling into the white souls committed to them their first lesson in worldliness. Santa Claus has no commercial standing. Like Providence, he bestows his gifts with reckless disregard of circumstances, at least to the childish

 G I F T S 

---

imagination. And should we not thank what gods may be for this unconscious faith of childhood in the good intent of the world? There are not many things to send us to our knees in adoration, but, among the few, are not the small boy hugging his ten-cent tin horse and the tiny maid her cheap doll, without question concerning their value, never wondering for an instant why Santa Claus should bring the cheap toys to their cottage and the expensive ones to the big house next door? He gives from the fullness of his heart and they accept from the fullness of theirs. And when you and I cease to give and accept in this way we have lost our hold on

  **G I V E R S**  

---

Christmas forever. You have lost it, you say. Then let it go. Do not travesty it, but, in the name of humanity, do not interfere with the happiness of better and simpler folk. Do not lay the blame on others which belongs only to yourself. “Christmas has become so worldly,” you say, “so entirely commercial that it were better abolished. I am tired to death, and nothing accomplished.” If you have made that a grievous burden which should have been a delight, the fault is yours. If you have worn yourself out in a joyless effort, blame yourself, not the Day. Of course you are tired, but if you have given pleasure it is that weariness in

 G I F T S 

---

well-doing which is no more like pain than the heartache of sympathy is like heart disease. "But," you say, "I had too much to do. I had to embroider that nightgown-case for Belinda because I knew she would expect something." If Belinda expected something, was not that an excellent reason for disappointing her? No one has a right to expect anything at Christmas. It should be a day of unexpected and unlooked-for blessings, which drop as the gentle dew from heaven. A young woman told me not long ago that all her childish life she had wanted a doll-carriage, which by some strange family oversight she had never received. Every Christ-



## G I V E R S

---

mas she hoped; but the doll-carriage always went to other children, and at night she shed a few tears on her little pillow and bravely looked forward to next Christmas. As she talked I could not but feel that she was better and sweeter, not perhaps because of this early disappointment so much as because of her dignity in bearing it without a murmur when she knew so well that a very faint murmur would have brought the realization of her wish. She wanted it, but not if she must ask for it. Which raises the question whether prayer is not after all rather undignified, a covert insult to the wisdom of the Almighty.

I knew a woman who counted it

 G I F T S 

---

among her holiday pleasures to go over the list of her acquaintances and select some one who could not by any possibility “expect” a gift from her, and send her some trifling expression of good feeling. She never repeated herself, and the notes of surprise and pleasure she received were a source of unmixed delight. If the writers had the bad taste to send her a gift the following year she wrote a note of thanks and the episode ended. Never under any circumstances send a present merely in exchange for one. This rule carefully followed would rob Christmas of its commercial aspect and restore it to its rightful place at once. Allow your

## G I V E R S

---

neighbor the cheerful experience of sending you a gift without humiliating her by thought of return. Presumably, she wanted to make you happy and in so doing found her own delight. Do her the honor of thinking so at least.

If Christmas is commercial, women are largely to blame. Men and children are guiltless. There is an unsullied simplicity in men in this respect which goes to my heart. I do not suppose there is a man in our midst who is "expecting" a cravat-case, or a shaving-pad, or an ivory-backed hand-mirror, next December, and his surprise and joy on receipt of these useful articles will be one of the prettiest things in life. And

 G I F T S 

---

then the artless way in which he buys gifts! The sudden, even spasmodic rush into a store on Christmas Eve and the reckless purchase of something red for his wife, who is in mourning; a pea-green hat for his sallow daughter; a manicure set in a pink plush case for grandmother. And the boys—"oh, hang the boys—give them each a five dollar gold piece, and take them to the ball game." God bless the men! They try their very best to develop a sense of humor in us, but we insist in weeping over their sins, which are legion, when we might be laughing over their virtues. There is a particular flavor about unwise gifts, and, while I dare

## G I V E R S

---

not advocate them because their flavor is lost when analyzed, I feel very charitably toward them. I remember a wealthy friend who was trying to think of a gift for a poor bed-ridden paralytic—a young girl not suffering for the necessities of life, but robbed of most of its joys. “I believe I will give her a ring with a nice jewel,” she said; “I’m sure if I had to lie in bed all day it would please me to have a ring with a pretty stone in it to look at.” Of course, it is your duty and mine to give wisely—flannel petticoats to the poor; coarse things to those who never have anything fine in all their commonplace, stunted lives, and

 G I F T S 

---

fine things to those who are surfeited with fineness. Of course, there is a common-sense side to it. Certainly it is foolish to cast pearls before swine, to give to the unappreciative. But, never losing sight of the fact that the object of giving is to make others happy, it is well to have a care lest we emphasize by our gift the hard part of life, instead of allaying it. What do you really think of those virtuous people who say "We have talked the matter of Christmas over this year in the family, and all agreed not to have any. The expense of Harry's sickness from over-taxing himself in athletics, and Emily's prostration from devotion to physical

  G I V E R S  

---

culture lessons, and papa's accident with the automobile, and my reception, which I really had to give—I was indebted to everybody—have been so great that we have all agreed," etc. No doubt you think as I do that this is very sensible and very obnoxious. Generally, any effort to suppress Christmas springs either from selfishness or laziness. There is always somebody to be made more cheerful and there is nearly always a way of doing it. The effort of finding the way is not always easy, but the best things in life are never the easiest.

There has grown up among us too much of the philanthropic idea in connection with the holiday festival.

  G I F T S  

---

People need joy quite as much as clothing. Some of them need it far more. Indeed, I often think those who have the greatest supply of things have the least joy. And yet we go on adding to their responsibilities, giving them more bric-a-brac to dust and care for, when what they really need is a lighter heart to make the dusting and caring for what they already have more endurable. Perhaps the additional bric-a-brac, given in the proper spirit, lightens the heart of the recipient. Let us hope that it does. I once asked a man of exquisite taste what he did with the hopelessly bad things that were given him by children and others? "I have



  G I V E R S  

---

a closed cabinet for them," he said, "and I like to go and look at them; their very ugliness is pathetic and salutary. It is a great mistake to imagine we must display things because they were given to us. The careless observer sees only the bad taste. We alone know all the kindness, the love and self-sacrifice that went into the effort to give us pleasure. Such gifts are sacred, and I keep them in my holy of holies." We might properly take as a rule for Christmas giving William Morris's directions for house-furnishing, "Never place anything in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful." Try



# G I F T S



---

not to contribute to next year's bon-fire. Originality is always delightful. Some one gave me one Christmas a dozen scratch-books and a package of good soft lead pencils. The memory of that gift lingers yet. It has been a source of endless joy to me and of sorrow to others. I am writing this sermon in one of those scratch-books. But all these instructions and admonitions concerning giving are superfluous. Most of us think too much of how to bestow gracefully and too little of the grace of acceptance. The manner of receiving a gift certainly tells as nothing else can the real nature of the recipient. There is a subtle selfishness in refusing to be

## G I V E R S

---

made glad by the efforts of others—in wishing to monopolize the blessedness of giving. Assuredly it is more blessed than receiving, but someone must receive else none may give. “Politeness,” it has been said, “is imagination enough to put yourself in another’s place and sense enough to know how you would like to be treated.” Embarrassment on receipt of a gift too often arises from a covert self-esteem, which protest against “being under obligation,” as we say. But a gift properly given engenders no obligation but gratitude. It is given to make us happy, and if we wish to make proper return, we must make it by being

  G I F T S  

---

happy—there is no other way. But all gifts are not properly given, you tell me. Very well; let us imagine that they are and thus put an end to the traffic. Yours and mine are, at least, and any suspicion of others is beneath us. Perhaps nothing measures more accurately the height and depth of a human soul, anyway, than the willingness to be “under obligation.” He who thinks himself able to stand alone is of all men most arrogant. We are all held in place by the pressure of the crowd around us. We must all lean upon others. Let us see that we lean gracefully and freely acknowledge their support. Of course one can be too frank, even in the expres-

## G I V E R S

---

sion of gratitude. I remember a good old negro woman who said upon receipt of a trifling gift from her employer, "It's mighty kind of you, Mrs. K——, and I'm sho' I don't see why you has the reputation of bein' such a powerful close lady. You's always been very kind to me." We are all eager to simplify our lives and, as usual, we all begin at the wrong end. To many simplicity means crudeness, which is a grievous blunder. There is all the difference in the world between the blunt frankness of the undisciplined child and the simple sincerity of the scholar. One is the absence of all that makes the other beautiful and yet both are in their way delightful.

  G I F T S  

---

The world cannot return to its childhood. We really do not desire it. There is no harm in many of the complexities with which the progress of civilization has surrounded us; the harm is in not preserving a simple heart toward them, a willingness to please and be pleased. Simplicity is not an external matter. I know a "society woman" who has preserved through all the frivolity of her life a heart as limpid as a child's. She is sweet, healthy and wholesome in her foolishness. She enjoys her tinkling cymbal quite as sincerely as you enjoy your sounding brass, and may heaven smile upon her as she smiles upon her family and her friends. . It

## G I V E R S

---

is a great thing, much greater than we realize, this love of life. “Gentleness and cheerfulness, these come before all morality; they are the perfect duties,” says the man whose fame rests more largely upon those virtues than upon any work he has done. Indeed, the doing of things great or small never yet endeared a human soul to other human souls. Duty, conscience, self-sacrifice, these are all good and all hard task-masters; they bring respect often but never affection. We may not greatly love or enjoy life ourselves but we love the man or woman who loves it; we enjoy the man or woman who enjoys it. Perhaps this shows that at bottom we

 G I F T S 

---

do love it—this yearning toward those who get joy out of it. On them rests the burden of life. To them go all those who are weary and heavy laden. They are the springs from which the thirsty world drinks, and the pessimist who hugs himself for his pessimism, who boasts of all his indifferences, is all the time drawing his very life from the well of their good cheer. If they were at any time to turn upon life, which often wounds them cruelly; if they were for one moment to lose heart, the blackness of darkness would settle upon the world. It is they who keep alive the simple joys, who make our Christmases and other festivals, and we who are not for





## G I V E R S



them are against them. It is not they who have steeped the holiday season in worldliness and commercialism, but those of us who refuse to be pleased; who croak and criticise and think evil—and it is high time we set about reforming not the institution but ourselves. Some things we can all give: a little gladness to this sorry scheme of things (which is after all just what we made it and the best scheme we know, notwithstanding our constant efforts to vilify it); a few cakes and a little ale in spite of our virtue; one day's willingness to be made happy by trifles; one day's sacrifice of our superior wisdom and sense of justice; one day's respite



# G I F T S

---

from reforming the world, which is no doubt in a very bad way but will not suffer irremediably from twenty-four hours' cessation of our efforts; one day's attempt to make ourselves and our neighbors happy instead of good; one day to love mercy since we have all the rest of the year to do justice and walk humbly with our God. These things we can all give, and may there be someone to say of each of us, "She did not show me how to succeed, but she gave me courage to meet failure with a light heart."





















YC 16088

411468

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY



