

GIFTS AND PRESENTATIONS.



N all ages it has been the practice to bestow gifts and offer that which should be a testimony to the esteem in which the recipient was held. Sometimes such testimonials have expressed a sense of obligation for service rendered or benefit conferred. The custom shows no sign of decadence; and there is no need to sneer at it as a vanity, for there are right and wrong accompaniments to testimonials.

A watch, a timepiece, a quadrant, a thermometer, a few volumes, a portfolio, an epergne, a sewing-machine, a silver salver, a tea and coffee service, a purse of sovereigns, a picture, or a portrait, have been among the articles usually selected for presentation. At times a banquet is given in honour of an official, and the honour of being asked to meet and speak to a number of others is the testimonial. We have known in other cases a cheque to be given for a large amount. In such an instance, it has often been understood as a graceful way of recouping some willing and able defender of certain principles for great outlay in their advancement. This is only right. Noble men who have been crushed by financial difficulties—not of their own seeking—have thus been relieved from the strain by the generous help of numbers.

But, like all other good practices, this presentation business is open to abuse. The most flagrant and disgraceful form of abuse is when presentations are promoted by those who are to be the recipients. A parish official was, on certain accounts, relinquishing unwillingly a post he had held for many years. No one cared enough about him to get up a testimonial. He mentioned to a friend that he wondered his merits were so overlooked. The friend sympathised with him, and said he was ready to do his share. "Then why don't you take it up and work it for me? I ought to have not less than two hundred pounds." The friend used his best endeavours, raised about eighty, came back to the official, told him of his regret that he could not obtain more, and asked what he was to do. The official was not to be disappointed, but himself filled up a cheque for a hundred and twenty; it was entered as "from anonymous friends." The presentation was made, and a flaring account appeared in the public press. This was despicable.

Hardly less to be condemned is a dishonest presentation. Sometimes the object aimed at is one directly opposite to that professed. For instance, there was a minister of an influential church in a large Midland town who in some way or other had allowed the work to slacken. The numbers attending the church very much decreased; a change of ministry was greatly desired. Hints were given, but were unheeded; subscriptions were withheld, but it was useless. The Rev. I. Stand-my-ground was proof for a

time, but at length gave some token of leaving, and intimated that he thought he should have to resign. He even went so far as to tender an informal resignation, but fixed no date for its taking effect. To bring it to a point, the deacons promoted a testimonial, to be presented on his leaving. They raised—considering the weakened state of the church—a considerable



"AT TIMES A BANQUET IS GIVEN."

amount. An evening was fixed upon for the presentation. It was expected that the minister would then state definitely the time of his intended departure. The people gathered. A public tea was provided. Many who loved the place, although caring little for the preacher, and who had left for a time, rallied to the meeting. They intended thus to remove from the mind of the Rev. I. Stand-my-ground any soreness he might have felt at their removal to another ministry. The faithful adherents were all prepared to give the friendly farewell grasp. The chairman and deacons made speeches of an appreciative character. The gentleman who made the presentation of the purse of two hundred sovereigns spoke in high terms of the character of the rev. gentleman who was so soon to leave them.

At last the minister rose to thank them. He said—"For the last two or three years I have been much troubled at the chilliness of the church and the evident lack of interest in my ministry. I have several times contemplated retirement, wishing that abler hands might guide the church. I knew that it only needed that minister and people should be perfectly united and earnestly desirous of working together to initiate a new style of things. We really have to-night that union and warmth I have so long desired. The display of kindness on your part has been to me over-

powering. On every hand there has been expression of such warm interest in me that it has put new life into me. I had no idea you cared so much for me. It would be wrong on my part to sever a connection so pleasurable to myself and profitable to you. I am glad that my resignation was very informal, and that I have not pained you by fixing a date for its taking effect. I will therefore at once most readily withdraw even the informal resignation, and continue with you for your furtherance in faith and patience. Let us sing 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow.'" The great assembly, completely taken by surprise, found it for once very difficult to join in that doxology. The dishonesty in the promoted testimonial received a manifest rebuke.

Some testimonials are not worth the parade and publicity given to them. If a book, a pencil-case, a pair of spectacles, a butter-knife, a pulpit cushion, a hymn-book, or writing-case, is presented to a minister, a superintendent, or a teacher, surely it is not worth while to send a paragraph to the local paper, and to advertise so small an affair far and wide.

It is astonishing how facile some men are in promoting a presentation to themselves. We knew of one who, after a meeting at which only six or seven people were present—a meeting at which an expression of thanks for a service rendered was passed—contrived to have that expression engrossed and illuminated, and signed even by the one who drew it up, and then put in a large gilt frame, to be hung up to attract the attention of any visitor to his home. The memory of the way in which it had been obtained would probably be the constant fly in the ointment as the recipient faced it day after day.

The way in which a testimonial is raised and given has much to do with its value in the sight of the recipient. Few would care to have a "token of regard" given in the way in which one was given to a gentleman who had "passed the chair" in one of the

great secret societies. This individual had not commended himself to the approval of his fellow-members, and they did not care to honour him as he retired. It was, however, the custom in that lodge to give publicly a medal of considerable value to the one who had passed the chair, at the same time expressing gratitude for the faithful way in which duties had been discharged. From the individual who had gained the dislike of the brethren the customary presentation could not by rule be withheld, but he had to take it. Said one of the last members to leave that night, "You will find a medal on the mantelpiece, and you can take it if you like." He took it! It must have been sorely tarnished, however, in his eyes by words of such deserved sarcasm and acts of silent stinging rebuke.

Sometimes those for whom a testimonial is intended do not receive in full that which should rightly be given to them. The writer knew of an instance where an amount subscribed of a hundred and thirty pounds was filtered through the hands of others, so that part only reached the man who deserved the whole. A great mail steamer broke down in mid-ocean. The smash of part of the machinery was great. It seemed impossible to repair it. The chief engineer said that it could not be repaired. The captain looked most gloomy; passengers were hopeless. A larger steamer that tried to tow the leviathan had to give up the task from stress of weather. Five hundred souls were at the mercy of wind and waves. Meanwhile, a plucky sub-engineer, believing that the fracture could be repaired, obtained leave to try his plan, and he worked most energetically, in the most constrained posture, for forty-eight hours to accomplish his purpose. He succeeded. The fires were after seven days again lighted. Steam was got up, and soon the machinery was in motion, and the vessel slowly but surely proceeded on her way. Great was the satisfaction of all on board. They showed it by raising the amount previously mentioned. Those who gave the money chiefly wished that the sub-engineer should receive a reward for his pluck, ingenuity, and energy; but many were sorely grieved to find that it was expected that great part of the amount raised should be given to the chief engineer. As intimations were given to the passengers that it would not be pleasing to the captain that the sub-engineer should have the amount, it was somehow arranged that the whole should be left in the hands of the captain to apportion as he liked, and the deserving young man mentioned was thus mulcted of much that was really intended for him alone.

There is often great waste connected with presentation. For instance, in laying foundation-stones of a new church or schools, how much is often spent uselessly for a trowel to be presented to the one who performs the ceremony. Some gentlemen who have had much of this sort of work have "barrow-loads of trowels." They would doubtless readily lend an ornate trowel or mallet for use a second time, if only applied to. Thus the expense might be saved, and the amount otherwise squandered put to the credit of the building fund. This would be a greater satisfaction to the gentlemen who perform such services. They don't want to reduce



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their contributions by levying a tax to pay for a present to themselves.

If a man by some means has obtained from one of the three hundred colleges in America, professing to confer degrees, a diploma of some kind, is it well to bruit the fact abroad? We knew of one—a man who was an influential official—who caused the announcement of his elevation to the rank of D.D. to be made in a leading periodical. The editor, who must have been a bit of a wag, added these words:—"We congratulate the Rev. J. P—— on his new dignity, and can guarantee to the public the respectability of the college which has conferred the degree."

On the other side of the Atlantic it is the custom at times to make presentations at "surprise parties." The way in which such affairs are arranged is often very considerate. The writer was once present at a gathering of the kind. It was on the occasion of the departure from a Canadian city of a gentleman and his wife who had been very useful in the choir. A few friends soon obtained sufficient subscriptions to make a handsome present. It was ascertained, incidentally, by one of the number subscribing, on what night the couple would be at home. At eight o'clock—laden with the testimonial, and with baskets containing all kinds of confectionery, ices, and fruit, together with plates, knives, spoons, and table-cloths—all those who had desired to take part in the presentation went down to the house of the young couple. They entered one by one, crowding the largest room and hall. Then one was spokesman for the rest. He first "surprised" the couple with the gift, and then asked leave to spread the supper on the tables, and to eat together ere parting. It was a very well-arranged affair.

I have been told by ministers in America who have had such "surprise parties" that the outcome, which had been supposed sufficient to make up for a deficient salary, had oftentimes been a greater loss than profit. The amount of cake and fruit consumed by those who came in large numbers and contributed little caused the loss. Sometimes poor pastors in the backwoods fare like the German rabbi whose congregation determined to fill up his wine-butt. When the rabbi went to draw from the vinous gift he found that his butt was full of water. Each one, carrying a bottle, had emptied only water into the butt, and had supposed that his meanness would be hidden under the generosity of the rest.

Where testimonials are given to a clergyman or a minister on leaving a sphere of work, it is supposed that the sign of appreciation on the part of the church he is leaving will help somewhat towards his success in his new sphere. There is no doubt that this is



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both a kindly and useful practice, yet it can be run to seed.

A man can be over-testimonialised. One came several years ago to the writer with such a bundle of testimonials to his character that strong suspicions of trustworthiness were only fostered. Alas! the suspicions turned out to be too well founded.

Sometimes testimonials are promoted by partisans for political purposes. They may be the outcome of genuine admiration for the men to whom presentations are made. The bearing of these things on political projects is well understood, and wire-pulling is an easy process. Not every statesman is so independent as was that noble earl who, when an Eastern potentate presented him with his cabinet portrait in a frame richly ornate with gold and diamonds, took the portrait quietly from behind the glass and gracefully handed back the valuable frame. He said that "it would not become one of the Ministers of Her Majesty the Queen of England to take that which in any sense might be interpreted as a reward for duty performed." It was sufficient for the earl to know that his services and attention had been appreciated.

After all, the approval of conscience is the best testimonial.

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