

CHRISTMAS PRESENTS.

The art of giving and receiving presents is not an intuition. People may make great failure of it, even with a purse full of money. And yet there are few more charming sensations than that of buying a present and of receiving one, especially when it is bought in that royal spirit which has no other idea than that of spending every cent we can spare, and received in that spirit of conspicuous enjoyment which marks a frank and liberal nature.

Everybody with a few dollars to spare gives a present at Christmas. As a method of expressing the good-will which the season represents, it is more in consonance with the refinement of our age than the boisterous effusion of earlier epochs. But it is so hard to know what things are suitable to give, and this is particularly the case where the recipient is to be a father, brother, or lover.

Gentlemen do not care for the petty trifles and decorations that delight ladies; and as for real necessities, they are very apt to go and buy anything that is a convenience just as soon as it is discovered. Knickknacks, articles of china, etc., are generally useless to them; they do not know where to put them or what to do with them. We saw a gentleman last Christmas receive from his niece an inkstand in the shape of a dog's head. To use it at all was to lift off the half of the head, and make a monstrosity of it. Even if a person could persuade himself to sit and write before such an object, it held so little ink as to be practically a great trouble, and he would gladly have exchanged the thing for the commonest common-sense inkstand. Another lady gave her brother a carved hunter whose quiver held a few wax matches. Of course, a box of ordinary lucifers would have been far

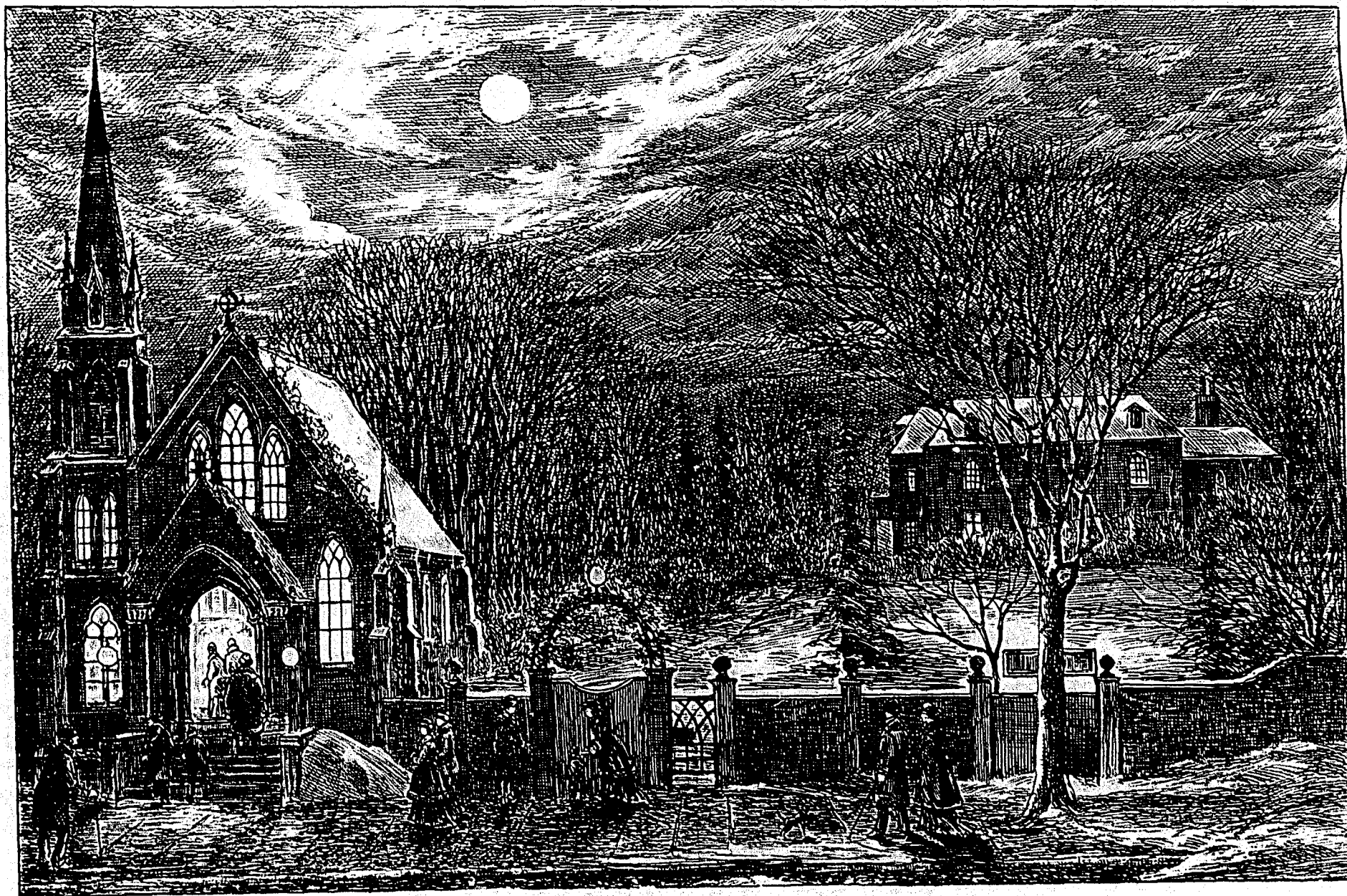
more convenient. Books are the most unexceptionable of holiday gifts; but there is always the danger, in choosing standard works, that the recipient may have them already, in his favorite binding, in his own library. It should be borne in mind, moreover, that men prefer books substantially bound in sober morocco or calf to the dainty, fanciful volumes which tarnish in the first reading. Then, again, a lady can not give a gentleman a gift of great value, because he would certainly feel bound to return one still more valuable, and thus her gift would lose all its grace, and retain only a selfish, commercial aspect.

What, then, shall she give? Here is a woman's advantage: she has her hands, while men must transact all their present-giving in hard cash. She must give something that represents her own life, and breathes of the qualities and tastes of the giver. She can hem him some fine handkerchiefs—gentlemen always want handkerchiefs—and in order to give them intrinsic value, if their relationship warrants such a favor, she can embroider the name or monogram with her own hair. If the hair is dark, it has a very pretty, graceful effect, and the design may be shaded by mingling the different hair of a family. We know a gentleman who for years lost every handkerchief he took to his office; at length his wife marked them with her own hair, and he never lost another. Such gifts are made precious by love, time, and talent.

The bare fact of rarity can raise an object, commercially valueless, to an æsthetic value. Souvenirs from famous places or of famous people, a bouquet of wild thyme from Mount Hymettus, an autographic note of some great personage, an ancient Jewish shekel or



GATHERING FAGOTS FOR THE CHRISTMAS HEARTH.



CHRISTMAS SERVICE AT MIDNIGHT.