

Kindness

"Perhaps there must be restraint in kindness," thought the Man, once the child of a farmer in whose house at least twenty - strangers and travellers sitting side by side with members of the household - dined at each meal. The farmer was dead and buried in the village, and his child had been a city-dweller the thirty years since. Meditating over this thought in the City Garden, this City Man sat down on a rock below which the thick green creepers spread out on the ground like a net. And in one of its meshes the Man spied a Snail, trapped and unable to move.

The City Man observed the Snail as it struggled in vain to try and move out of the square mesh in which it was trapped, and then he gently lifted the Snail and placed it away from the creepers. The Snail did not acknowledge the City Man's kindness and went on in its way.

"In a Snail this is only to be expected. What is strange is that people too - City People, the People of Great Cities - behave this way. They receive the kindness, like it was their right, and move on. They move on, it seems, with no memory of the kindness done them. City People behave like this Snail.

"Perhaps it is that the City People do not receive the kindness. Perhaps the kindness is only in the mind

of the giver; the receiver does not see it as kindness. Indeed, perhaps the receiver sees it as a threat to his independence, since he has the means and the resources in the midst of the comforts and plenitude of the City. Perhaps the observer, when he thought the other needed to receive, reacted too hastily; he should have paused and waited. The receiver would simply have got up and moved on, knowing how to get on without the giver. The giver is just a busybody, a pest - the kindness an inconvenience. Perhaps the receiver believes kindness is a remnant of ancient village customs that some slow-changing people hold on to and impose on unwilling and silent-suffering receivers. Most have realised its futility and it will die where it has survived in the few ignorant hearts if one ignores its manifestations. If one greets it with coldness and aloofness. If one just walked away like a snail that does not acknowledge the kindness bestowed on it.

“Or, perhaps, it is that the receiver suspects the motive of the giver. What does the giver expect in return? What does the giver intend? What lies behind this kindness? What is the real face of the masked bearer of gifts? Perhaps in their lives there had been no genuine givers? Perhaps all that the receivers had known was giving that was in reality taking? Perhaps.

“Or, perhaps, it is that the receiver had not known what it is to give and, therefore, know not what it is to

receive. For the gifts of the earth he had not seen directly, and to the earth he gave nothing. For the receiver had worked on papers and buttons that moved things; he had worked, seated on chairs, and used his fingers and not his hands and, therefore, never gave. What he made was money and he exchanged that for things. He never gave that he may reap the other man's love; there was only exchange and transaction - no giving or receiving. Therefore, perhaps, he knows only discomfort and flees when the Pest gives him kindness.

“Or, perhaps, it is simply that the receiver never received nor ever gave. Perhaps there is safety in restraint: he who gives much or receives much is unrestrained and, therefore, dangerous. For the unrestrained are uninitiated. And the uninitiated are outsiders and therefore suspect. So, perhaps, there must be restraint in kindness. Then as slowly as the snail moves away, unnoticed, imperceptibly, one becomes as one of them.

Neither receiver. Neither giver.

Neither a receiver nor a giver be.

“Perhaps that is when the City People become comfortable with other people. Then, like the snails, we can all creep along, each in his happiness, minding his own business in a perfect world of amity and harmony in the Great City.”