

## The Fireside.

### A MERCHANT'S DREAM.

It was a brisk clear evening in the latter part of December, when Mr. Absum returned from his counting-house to the comforts of a bright coal fire and warm arm-chair in his parlor at home. He changed his heavy boots for slippers, drew around him the folds of his evening gown, and then lounging back in his chair looked up to the ceiling and about with an air of satisfaction. Still there was a cloud on his brow. What could be the matter with Mr. Absum? To tell the truth, he had that afternoon received in his counting-room the agent of one of the principal benevolent societies of the day, and had been warmly urged to double his last year's subscription, and the urging had been pressed by statements and arguments to which he did not well know how to reply.

"People think," soliloquized he, "that I am made of money, I believe. This is the fourth object this year for which I have been requested to double my subscription, and this year has been one of heavy family expenses—building and fitting up this house—carpets, curtains, no end of new things to be bought—I really do not see how I am to give a cent more to charity. Then there are bills for the girls and boys; they all say they must have twice as much as before we came to this new house. Wonder if I did right in building it?"

And Mr. Absum glanced up and down the ceiling and around on the costly furniture and looked into the fire in silence. He was tired, harassed and drowsy; his head began to swim, and his eyes closed—he was asleep. In his sleep he heard a tap at the door; he opened it, and there stood a plain, poor-looking man, who, in a voice singularly low and sweet, asked for a few moments' conversation with him. Mr. Absum asked him into the parlor, and drew a chair near the fire. The stranger looked attentively around, and then turning to Mr. Absum presented him with a paper.

"It is your last year's subscription to missions," said he; "you know all the wants of that cause that can be told. I called to see if you had anything more to add to it."

This was said in the same low and quiet voice of before, but for some reason unaccountable to himself, Mr. Absum was more embarrassed by the plain, poor, unpretending man than he had been in the presence of anyone before. He was for some minutes silent before he could reply at all; and then, in a hurried and embarrassed manner, he began the excuse which appeared so satisfactory to him the afternoon before—the hardness of the times, the difficulties of collecting money, family expenses, etc.

The stranger quietly surveyed the spacious apartment, with its many elegancies and luxuries, and without any comment took from the merchant the paper he had given, but immediately presented him with another.

"This is your subscription to the Bible Society. Have you anything to add to it? You know how much it has been doing, and how much more it now desires to do, if Christians would only furnish means. Do you not feel called upon to add something to it?"

Mr. Absum was very uneasy under this appeal; but there was something in

the mild manner of the stranger that restrained him, and he answered that, although he regretted it exceedingly, his circumstances were such that he could not, this year, conveniently add to any of the charities.

The stranger received back the paper without reply, but immediately presented in its place the subscription to the Bible Society, and in a few clear and forcible words reminded him of his well-known claims, and again requested him to add something to his donation. Mr. Absum became impatient.

"Have I not said," he replied, "that I can do nothing more for any charity than I did last year? There seems to be no end to the calls upon us these days. At first there were only three or four objects presented and sums required were moderate. Now the objects increase every day; all call upon us for money; and all, after we have given once, want us to double and treble our subscriptions. There is no end to the thing; we may as well stop in one place as in another."

The stranger took back the paper, rose, and, fixing his eyes upon his companion, said in a voice that thrilled his soul:

"One year ago to-night you thought your daughter lay dying. You could not sleep for agony. Upon whom did you call all that night?"

The merchant started and looked up. There seemed a change to have passed over the whole form of his visitor, whose eyes were fixed upon him with a calm, intense, penetrating expression that awed and subdued him. He drew back, covered his face, and made no reply.

"Five years ago," said the stranger, "when you lay at the brink of the grave, and thought that if you died then you would leave a family of helpless children entirely unprovided for, do you remember how you prayed? Who saved you then?" The stranger paused for an answer, but there was a dead silence. The merchant bent forward as one entirely overcome, and rested his head on the seat before him.

The stranger drew yet nearer, and said in a still lower and more impressive tone:

"Do you remember, fifteen years since, that time when you felt yourself so lost, so helpless, so hopeless? When you spent days and nights in prayer? When you thought that you would give the world for one hour's assurance that your sins were forgiven you? Who listened to you then?"

"It was my God and Saviour," said the merchant, with a sudden burst of remorseful feeling. "Oh, yes, it was he."

"And has he ever complained of ever being called upon too often?" inquired the stranger in a tone of reproachful sweetness. "Say," he added, "are you willing to begin this night and ask no more of him, if he from this night will ask no more from you?"

"Oh, never! never!" said the merchant, throwing himself at the stranger's feet; but as he spoke these words the figure of his visitor seemed to vanish, and he awoke with his whole soul stirred within him.

"Oh, my Saviour, what have I been saying?" he exclaimed. "Take all—take everything! What is all I have to what thou hast done for me?"—*The Michigan Christian Herald.*

### Letter-Carrying Under Difficulties.

Twenty-seven native postmen were killed and eaten by tigers and other wild beasts in India last year, while no fewer than one hundred and thirty-five met their deaths through being bitten by poisonous snakes. But then, says *Pearson's Weekly*, India is a large country, and the ordinary rural carrier will not take precautions.

He insists on going barefooted and barelegged in regions known to be infested with venomous reptiles, and he will calmly lie down for a nap in a tiger-haunted jungle. Nor can he be induced to arm himself properly. All his forefathers carried, when on similar errands, was a small spiked stick, and that is all the true native postman will consent to carry to-day.

There are several post-offices in Switzerland at a height of seven thousand or more feet; and a letter-box on the very summit of the Languard, from which four collections are made daily, is nearly ten thousand feet above the sea level. Near here, some few years ago, three letter-carriers were crushed to death by an avalanche. In an adjacent canton, in the summer of 1863, a postman fell into a crevasse while crossing a glacier, his two full bags on his back. All efforts to recover either the body or the mails were fruitless; but thirty-four years afterward, in 1897, the glacier cast forth its prey many miles lower down the valley, and the long-lost letters were delivered to as many of the addresses as could be traced.

Not infrequently, too, these Alps postmen are attacked by the huge, fierce eagles that soar hungrily above the least-frequented passes. Usually the men are able to beat off their feathered assailants, but not always.

In July, 1899, a postman who carried the mails on foot between the villages of Sospello and Puget Theniers was fatally mauled by three such birds. Of two men who attempted to avenge his death, one was killed outright, and another injured so severely that his life was for a long time in danger.

The camel postmen of the Sahara *Hinterland* is another letter-carrier who has need of plenty of pluck. The wild tribesmen of the desert look upon him as their natural prey, so that he never knows, when he sets out in the morning, whether he will reach his destination at night. But he trots his eighty miles a day, and regards a stray shot from a lurking "sniper" or an ambush of spearmen as part of the ordinary routine incidental to his business.

In Japan the rural post-runner still swings his basket across his shoulders precisely as his ancestors did centuries ago. In Formosa also the mails are carried to this day by a man on foot, who jogs along with a paper lantern and an umbrella.

Siberia, except along the line of the new railway, has to rely on post-sledges; and there are towns, and fair-sized towns, too, where more than two deliveries a year would be exceptional.

The postmen of the Landes, in southwestern France, stride across the waste on gigantic stilts, their feet a fathom or more above the ground.

In the interior of China, except in a few districts, there is no regular letter delivery, and consequently no postmen. But many of the mandarins and taotais maintain semi-public services of their own, and keep their runners up to the mark by the simple expedient of beheading laggards.—*Youth's Companion.*

There was somebody who borrowed a book and kept it for months. Was it you?



### SPURGEON ON THEATRE-GOING.

Are there not many persons who find in the theatre precisely that kind of recreation and rest which is most useful for the discharge of their daily work?

"It may be," said Mr. Spurgeon, "but I don't know any of them. You see, I live in a world apart from all these things, and so do my people. We argue this way: Granting it perfectly safe and profitable for myself to go to the theatre; if I go a great number of those will go to whom it will do positive harm. I will not be responsible for alluring by my example into temptation which but for my self-indulgence they would entirely escape.

"I will give you an instance of how this works out. When I go to Monaco, the grounds of the gambling-hell there are the most beautiful in the world. I never go near them, and why? Not because there is any danger of my passing through the gardens to the gambling tables. No; but a friend of mine once related the following incident to me: 'One day Mr. Blanc met me, and asked me how it was I never entered his grounds.' 'Well, you see,' I said, 'I never play, and as I make no returns whatever to you, I hardly feel justified in availing myself of the advantage of your grounds.' 'You make a great mistake,' said Mr. Blanc. 'If it was not for you and other respectable persons like yourself who come to my grounds, I should lose many of the customers who attend my gambling-salcens. Do not imagine that because you do not play yourself, you do not by your presence in my grounds contribute materially to my revenue. Numbers of persons who would not have thought of entering my establishment feel themselves perfectly safe in following you into my gardens, and thence to the gambling-table; the transition is easy.'

"After I heard that," continued Mr. Spurgeon, "I never went into the gardens. And the same argument applies to the theatres."

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