

TWENTY-FOURTH YEAR.

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DEAD LETTER SALE.

AUCTION OF UNCLAIMED GOODS FROM THE POSTOFFICE.

It Furnishes Some Amusement to the Curious and Increases the Treasury Balance.

Washington, Dec. 15.—The annual sale of the dead letter office takes place in a few days. It always attracts a curious assemblage of inquisitive people and second-hand dealers. It is always productive of laughable incidents. The articles which are put up for sale are divided into job lots and each lot is numbered and described in a catalogue which the auctioneers issue. But occasionally a "box" or a "package" figures in the list and there is much speculation as to the contents. People have been known to buy second-hand desks and find government bonds in them; and a great many of the people who attend the dead letter sale confess their bias to the mysterious parcels whose contents are unknown. Some of these bidders carry away their purchases without examination, but others open them in the face of the crowd and there is always a loud guffaw when some unexpected article is disclosed. One man purchased a pair of old corsets and some badly worn stockings. So the sale affords some amusement. It has that interest for some people, and for others it has a more serious matter in what an extraordinary variety of matter is entrusted to the mails. Everything from an old shoe to a scorpion goes to the dead letter office—some of it because it is of the class of matter declared to be "unmailable." But the proportion of "unmailable" matter which goes to the dead letter office is very small.

It happens sometimes that things of great value creep into a dead letter sale. The superintendent of the dead letter office carefully weeds out the money in letters and if it is not claimed, it is disposed of to the best advantage and the amount is credited to Uncle Sam. The dead letter office finds as much as \$50,000 in misdirected letters in a single year. Under the rules of the department every effort is made to find the owner of a letter or parcel. If he cannot be found, the property remains unclaimed for two years. It is sold for Uncle Sam's benefit. But the owner does not lose his interest in it. If he can prove his claim at any time in the future, the amount of the money is returned to him. It is in this way that the value of a property will be returned to him. If it was in money or any negotiable form, he will get it all. If it was in merchandise, he will get only what it brought at the auction sale. It seems almost incredible that with a cheap postal note and money order system at their disposal, the mails should lose money that should be mailed to defective addresses in a year. But this has happened more than once. The superintendent of the dead letter office has been able to find the owners of more than \$100,000 in letters and parcels. Uncle Sam was benefitted by the carelessness of the money-senders was more than \$100,000. The superintendent of the dead letter office has been able to find the owners of more than \$100,000 in letters and parcels. The sale of last year realized \$2,807.

These two items represent a very small proportion of the value of the property which passes through the dead letter office every year. Here is the face value of the matter, exclusive of merchandise, which comes into the hands of the office in one year:

Table with 2 columns: Item, Value. Includes 2,064 letters containing money, 2,064 letters containing drafts, 2,064 letters containing orders, etc., totaling \$2,983,083.

In addition to this property worth more than two and a quarter millions on its face the office last year handled 37,735 letters containing photographs, doubtless of some value to their owners; 100,123 containing postage stamps, some of which were undoubtedly intended for sale; and were worth more than their face value; 37,733 containing receipts, cancelled notes and legal papers, and \$2,826 containing merchandise. You might think that the superintendent of the dead letter office was making it to obtain valuable letters, but he is not. He tries just as hard as he can to educate the public through the newspapers and through postmasters to address letters and packages with more care and to see that at least the packages have enough postage on them. Large placards in post-offices warn the public to be careful. The monthly supplement to the guide contains a long list of "Don'ts." But still a careless public misdirects or misreads seven million letters and packages a year. Misdirection, incorrect, illegible and inefficient addresses are the chief causes of the miscarriage of mail matter. Then in free delivery towns there is the failure of the letter-writer to place the house or business address on the envelope, to give the business or in some other way to identify the person for whom the letter is intended. The people who receive letters are not seldom to blame for the postoffice department finds as one chief cause of error the failure of permanent or temporary residents to notify the local postoffice of change of address. The simple little regulation of the postoffice department, the general observance of which would do away with a great many of the dead letter clerks out of a job. If the name of the sender of a letter or package is put on the envelope or wrapper, the department will invariably return it if it is insufficiently addressed or not prepaid. But the practice of the postoffice, though warned of this fact a thousand times, will go right on sending matter through the mails in plain wrappers and taking the chances of its reaching its destination safely. There is one cause of the detention of

foreign mail matter which few people not intimately acquainted with the postoffice regulations can know. That is the peculiar customs laws which prohibit the mailing of certain matter to foreign countries. Whenever the postoffice department finds prohibited matter of this class in a package it notifies the sender and offers to forward the package to its destination by express, the amount of the express charges is sent, or to return the package.

People who have lost magazines in the mails may have the satisfaction of knowing that they have probably gone to a good service. The magazines and illustrated papers and picture cards which are left unclaimed in the dead letter office are not sent to auction. You can buy most of the standard magazines at second-hand for 5 to 10 cents each, and the amount that would be realized on matter of this kind is so inconsiderable that the postmaster general has ordered that all of it shall be sent to the hospitals in the District of Columbia. Accordingly the institutions received last year from unclaimed matter nearly 15,000 papers, cards, etc. They opened nearly six million letters and packages in the dead letter office last year in an attempt to find the identity of their owners, and the entire number more than four and a quarter million which contained nothing of value were destroyed. There were 100,000 letters containing postage stamps destroyed. The stamps were destroyed because they were found loose in the mails or received for matter which had been "held for postage."

It is a fact which develops in a study of the dead letter office is that even the most secure class of mail matter is not entirely safe. The mails are guarded by registered mail which is held for identification and if it is eventually destroyed while the money which accompanies it is turned into the treasury, the merchant is sent to the auctioneer to be disposed of for the benefit of Uncle Sam.

TRUTH ABOUT SALAMANDERS.

An Expert in Reptiles Pook-Pook the Idea of Being Fire-proof.

"Nobody knows how the superstition regarding the supposed fireproof quality of the salamander has its origin," said Dr. Stejneger, the reptilian expert of the Smithsonian Institution. "However, I can give what I think is a pretty good guess at it. To explain I shall have to tell you a story. Once upon a time I was camping out with a party, hunting and fishing. We had lighted a big fire, using for fuel several old logs. While we were sitting around watching the progress of some cooking in which we were engaged, a young lady at my side gave a little scream and pointed into the flames. I looked, and there was a small lizard crawling right out from among the glowing embers. It walked away unhurt apparently, through the grass and made its escape. Now, that salamander had crawled a hole in one of the logs used for fuel. Several of its kind live in old tree trunks. Doubtless this one found that it was getting uncomfortably hot and crawled out. Being moist and slimy, its body was protected from injury by the fire long enough to enable it to escape through the embers. But the sight of the animal deliberately making its appearance from the midst of the fire was certainly very surprising. Any ignorant person might easily have been led to imagine that the creature was fireproof. It seems to me quite probable that the superstition took its rise from just such occurrences. "There are also many species of salamanders that a description of them all would fill a book. They are to be found all over the world, except in very cold regions. In a popular sense the name 'salamander' is applied to all batrachians with tails. That is rather a loose definition. A tadpole is a batrachian with a tail, but is not a salamander. The great majority of salamanders are small, such as the newts, found in springs. The biggest species in this country is the so-called 'mud-pile' salamander, which has only two feet, just behind the head, and has external gills, when fully developed, which is an exception to the rule among salamanders. "The biggest salamander in the world is found in Japan. It attains a length of two feet and is related to the 'hellbender.' Most salamanders live on insects, but the very large kinds eat pretty nearly everything as a rule. For instance, the Japanese species is omnivorous. So far as an aware, none of the salamanders is considered good to eat, by civilized men at all events. Two years ago I obtained a specimen of the only known species of blind salamander from a cave in Missouri. A so-called blind salamander, called in German 'Austria,' but it is not a true salamander, though it would come under the popular definition, being a batrachian with a tail. One peculiar thing about salamanders is that they are not as large when full grown as

when they are partly developed. That seems a funny paradox, does it not? You see, salamanders go through a metamorphosis during their lifetime, as frogs do, though the change is not so marked. They have a larval period, as the tadpole is the larva of the frog. On becoming adult they shrink up considerably. During the larval period they have gills like a fish, which usually become rudimentary later on. An odd exception to this rule is the 'axolotl' of Mexico, which does not undergo any such metamorphosis and never becomes adult in a scientific sense. In other words, it never reaches what is the final stage with other salamanders, but always remains a larva. Axolotls of different species are found in various parts of the United States, but they do undergo the change and become adult. However, if you keep one of them in water and prevent it from escaping it will remain a larva always and will undergo no metamorphosis. In order to change it has to get out of dry land. Having become a land animal, its external gills disappear, being no longer required for breathing in water. The Mexican axolotl never grows on land—at any rate, not for a longer time than its gills will remain wet."—Washington Star.

INSTINCT AND REASON.

Prof. Mehan Relates a Striking Observation with Some Busy Bees.

A few years ago the person who might give utterance to the idea that any but human beings possessed reasoning powers would have been considered guilty of rank heresy. But with advanced enlightenment there are thousands who have been driven to the belief that the "divine light" upon man is not as bright as it once was. Insects coming in for a share of that force which is a grade higher than instinct.

Close observers are continually making public examples which show that that class of animal life which has been designated as "the lower orders" when compared with human kind accomplish results the working out of which can scarcely be ascribed to instinct alone. This reasoning faculty is especially noticeable among dogs, while many other animals show a power of thought, of ability to reason, really remarkable. In a communication to the Academy of Natural Sciences some time ago, Prof. Mehan related an instance that came under his own observation, which, while not conclusive evidence of reasoning power in insects, yet is strongly indicative of it. During a light spring shower the professor took shelter under a large linden tree in full bloom.

While there he noticed an unusual number of bees busily at work among the flowers of the linden, while a tree of another species close at hand, also in bloom, had no bees about it. The reason was quickly apparent to him. The deserted tree was light foliage, and the rain poured through freely, while the linden had heavy foliage and in such abundance that the rain was shed almost as perfectly as from an umbrella. The bees were evidently aware of this, for they came and went directly to and from the linden, ignoring the other tree entirely. He assumed, and seemingly correctly, that this could not be purely instinct, but was the result of reasoning of a lower order, perhaps, but still a line above that of the ordinary animal. He assumed, and seemingly correctly, that this could not be purely instinct, but was the result of reasoning of a lower order, perhaps, but still a line above that of the ordinary animal.

Germany's Success at the Fair.

Germany is rejoicing over the outcome of its exhibition at the World's Fair. It proudly is displaying the 1,246 prizes received for its exhibits and boasting it has carried off the lion's share of the success by developing their trade with this country and sending over here skilled commercial experts to represent upon industrial conditions. The English are beginning to notice the turn of events are taking in this direction, and the London Times notifies its readers in a sort of pathetic way that "while British industry still continues to be crippled by the severest labor struggle on record, the Germans, who are now our keenest competitors in the markets of the world, are busy preparing to reap the harvest of the splendid success they have achieved at Chicago."—Chicago Tribune.

She Tried to Help.

He (devoted but bashful)—There's been an awful lot in the papers lately about collisions between automobiles and such things. She (determined to help him out)—Yes, I've noticed. Do women ever get mixed up with them? He—Certainly not. Why do you ask that? She (with a "now will you tumble?" emphasis)—Because I feel as if I would like to test into a ring of some kind myself. No presents.—Buffalo Courier.

The professional photographer and the amateur hold entirely different views of the same thing.—Poker's Statesman.

The Last Chance To Get

Bargains in Holiday Goods. SEE OUR SHOW WINDOWS. SEE OUR SHOW WINDOWS. Toys! Toys! Toys! Handkerchiefs and Art Goods. Dolls and Chinaware.

- Boys' Round Shod Sled with handles at \$1.20. Checker-boards, 10c. Checkers, 10c. Dominoes, 15c. Authors and Cards, 10c. Boys' Toy Watches, 5c to 15c. Boys' Toy Drums, 25c, 40c, 50c, 75c and 95c. HANKERCHIEFS. Children's Colored Border, 1c, 2c, and 5c. Ladies' Colored Border, 5c, 10c, 15c, 20c, 25c, 30c, 35c, 40c, 45c, 50c, 55c, 60c, 65c, 70c, 75c, 80c, 85c, 90c, 95c, 1.00, 1.10, 1.20, 1.30, 1.40, 1.50, 1.60, 1.70, 1.80, 1.90, 2.00. Ladies' White Hemstitch, 5c to 10c. Ladies' White Hemstitch and all Linens, 15c to 25c. Ladies' White Embroidered and scalloped edge, 20c and 25c. Ladies' Scalloped very fine, 30c, 35c, 40c, 45c, 50c, 55c, 60c, 65c, 70c, 75c, 80c, 85c, 90c, 95c, 1.00, 1.10, 1.20, 1.30, 1.40, 1.50, 1.60, 1.70, 1.80, 1.90, 2.00. Ladies' Japanese Embroidered Silk Handkerchiefs 12c to 50c. Ladies' Fine White Japanese Hemstitched, 38c, 45c, 60c, and 75c. Ladies' All Silk Mittens, 50c, 65c, and \$1.00.

Men's Shoes and Rubbers. Ladies' Shoes and Rubbers. Children's Shoes and Rubbers.

- 36 pairs Mens' Leather and Velvet Carpet Slippers, 75c to 85c. Mens' Wool Lined Ankle, 90c. Overshoes, \$1.25. Mens' Rubber Overs, \$1.50, \$1.75. Ladies' White Embroidered and scalloped edge, 20c and 25c. Ladies' Scalloped very fine, 30c, 35c, 40c, 45c, 50c, 55c, 60c, 65c, 70c, 75c, 80c, 85c, 90c, 95c, 1.00, 1.10, 1.20, 1.30, 1.40, 1.50, 1.60, 1.70, 1.80, 1.90, 2.00. Ladies' Japanese Embroidered Silk Handkerchiefs 12c to 50c. Ladies' Fine White Japanese Hemstitched, 38c, 45c, 60c, and 75c. Ladies' All Silk Mittens, 50c, 65c, and \$1.00. 40 pairs fine hand turned Kid Shoes, fine finish, at \$2.25. Ladies' Rubbers, 30c, and 40c. Storm Rubbers, 45c. Ladies' Buckle Overshoes, 90c. Ladies' Felt Slippers, 40c. Ladies' Wool Lined Alaska \$1.00. 40 pairs Dongola Shoes, baby's at 25c. 25 pairs Dongola Shoes, baby's at 25c. 40 pairs fine Dongola Shoes, baby's at 45c. 50 pairs Baby's Fine Kid Shoe Spring and Tip, 45c and 75c. 50 pairs Children's Dry Grain School Shoe, 5 to 12, 85c. 50 pairs Children's Dry Grain School Shoe, 12 to 2, \$1.00. The above are all solid and seamless back.

FOR THIS WEEK HERE IS A SNAP IN GENTS' SILK NECKWEAR. 20 dozen Gents' Silk and Satin Lined and New Shape Neck ties, sold elsewhere at 35c to 50c, THIS WEEK AT 25c. 10 dozen Gents' Silk and Satin Lined and very fine Ties, for gifts, one in fancy box, sold everywhere at \$1.00. THIS WEEK AT 75c.

Special Sale of Gents' Hats, Ladies' and Children's Underwear and Hosiery. Don't Fail to Get a Bargain in Our Millinery. NEW YORK CASH STORE. DON'T FORGET OPPOSITE POST OFFICE.

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