

Ministry in Metaphor

JF any of my people inquire where I am, tell them that the old pedlar is moving about, all weathers, from house to house, and from one meeting to another; frequently offering his goods at public sale. And although he had a very small pack when he left home, it was so unaccountably heavy that he could not walk straight under it; but thus far, as he has continued faithful, he has parted with a great quantity of goods, and also it must appear admirable [strange] that he cannot perceive his pack is in the least diminished, but considerably more goods in it, so that he judges he has as good an assortment of goods as almost any in his occupation, and although not so flashy, yet proved to wear as well.

Whether it is the profit from the sale of his goods or whether he has grown stronger he must leave. However, his pack being much larger and fuller of goods, he says he can carry it along with ease and walk straight up without groaning or being in the least weary. And as the old pedlar does know most certainly that the goods are not his own, but a living profit is allowed him in the sale thereof, he is anxious to make what he can to himself.

But the poor pedlar is much disappointed in the sale of his goods, for his Master will not suffer him to carry the key of his pack. When he comes to the market among his customers, he must there wait in stillness until his Master gives him the key, and He sometimes stays long and sometimes comes not at all. The poor pedlar is then low, seeing his customers out of patience, laying all the disappointment upon him, and saying, "Why did he call us here to buy and not offer his goods for sale?" Truly, from the reasonings of man it is provoking—truly the poor pedlar cannot help it, he is so little, so unlearned, and so ignorant that it is not worth his while to attempt to make a temporary key that he might open his pack when he pleased.

From a letter from Abel Thomas (c. 1737-1816), from Providence, R.I., in 1813, printed in Comly, *Misc.* iv. 285.