

# GENERAL TELEGRAPH NEWS

## PIKE COUNTY'S HERMIT DEAD.

STORY OF A MAN WHO TURNED HIS BACK  
ON CIVILIZATION.

PORT JERVIS, Jan. 20.—The celebrated hermit of the Pike County mountains, Austin Sheldon, who lived for over 40 years in a wretched hut, died on Monday last, aged about 83 years. Sheldon had lived for 30 years in the hut before anything of his history was known in the county. In all that time he had seldom left the vicinity of his cave, which was about 9 feet square and so low that a full-grown person could barely stand erect in it. He admitted that he never washed, combed, shaved, nor removed his clothing because of his religious belief. He spent most of his time reading his Bible. He professed great dislike to visitors, and frequently refused to allow them admittance to his hut. He slept on a rude chair of his own make. His clothing was held together by twine and withes, and the addition of whatever was most convenient to repair a wornout portion of a garment gave them a nondescript appearance. On a little plot of ground that he had cleared Sheldon raised vegetables sufficient for his wants, and captured rabbits and birds by means of ingenious snares.

The singular circumstance of a human being voluntarily living alone and like a wild beast in the wilderness for so many years, and keeping his life's story so firmly a secret, led a local paper in 1873 to publish the fact. This item was copied into papers about the country. Some weeks after it had first appeared a middle-aged lady and gentleman, evidently prosperous and refined, came to Milford. They said they were from Connecticut, and had read the account of the Hermit of Lehman, which had been copied into their local paper. In the name of the hermit they recognized that of a brother of the lady who had mysteriously disappeared in 1833, and of whom nothing had ever been heard since. The strangers were guided to Sheldon's hut. He acknowledged that he was the long-missing brother of the lady, but he emphatically declined to accept her urgent invitation to go back home with her where, she said, every comfort and even luxury awaited him. From the relatives of the hermit it was learned that he was a member of one of the best families of Stony Brook, Conn. He had been a prosperous blacksmith in that place, and early in 1832 had married a most estimable young woman to whom he was warmly attached. She died soon after the marriage, and a short time after her death Austin had disappeared. He had been in the Pike County cave at the time of the visit of his sister about 30 years. It was subsequently learned that he had spent five years in a similar manner in the mountains of Wayne County, and the rest of the time before that he had wandered about in the woods of Central New-York.

For 10 years after the visit of his sister Sheldon spent his life as he had the 30 years previously. In 1883 he made an attempt to obtain a wife in one of the settlements, much to everybody's surprise. Failing in this, he left his hut and declared that he was going back to Connecticut. He did so, walking the entire distance. He remained there some months, and then returned to his miserable hut in the Pike County wilderness. He said he could not obey God's will by remaining among scenes of civilization. A few weeks ago he was induced to stay at the house of a citizen of Lehman Township, where he died. During his long and lonely life in the mountain cave he several times narrowly escaped death by freezing and by forest fires. His remains will be buried in Connecticut.

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