

## FORTY-FIVE YEARS IN A CAVE.

DEATH OF AUSTIN SHELDON, THE HERMIT OF THE MOOSIC MOUNTAINS—VOLUNTARY SECLUSION WITH HIS BIBLE—TEN YEARS WITHOUT SEEING A HUMAN FACE—BURIED IN A SNOW DRIFT AND FROZEN TO DEATH.

*From a Special Correspondent.*

DINGMAN'S FERRY, Penn., April 2, 1877.

Austin Sheldon, who has lived for 41 years the life of a hermit in a cave in a lonely place in the mountains nine miles south-east of this village, was found frozen to death in a deep snow-drift near the entrance of his cave on Friday evening last. A terrible storm of snow and wind had prevailed in the mountains for two days, and Tuesday evening, contrary to his custom, Sheldon had visited the cabin of some hoop-pole cutters, about a mile from his abode, to buy something to eat, he having been without food for two or three days. The cutters invited the hermit to remain with them all night, and not attempt to brave the fury of the storm by returning to his cave. He had not spent a night from his cave since he inhabited it, and he refused to stay at the cabin. The snow piled in such drifts before the storm was over that no communication with the settlements outside could be obtained until Friday. The cutters themselves were nearly frozen to death. The hermit, although nearly 72 years old, managed to reach to within a few feet of his cave, when he was overcome and buried 10 feet deep by the snow. His features were fearfully distorted, and his knees were drawn up to his chin.

It does not seem credible that this man, who buried himself in the wilderness for over half his life, and who at last met so terrible a death, might have lived in ease and luxury, and died surrounded by friends in the best society. He was born near Stony Creek, Conn., in 1806, and when he was 26 years old married a lady named Tuthill, the daughter of a wealthy gentleman living near the City of Hartford. Sheldon's family was the leading one in the town of Bradford, where he has a brother and sister still living. His wife died 10 years after their marriage, and Sheldon soon afterward disappeared. He had always been an enthusiast in religion, and had often expressed a wish to go to heathen countries as a missionary. His friends believed that he had gone to some such country, and never hearing from him thought he had died there.

Forty-five years ago the country in the north-eastern part of Pennsylvania was still in great part a primitive wilderness. Lumbermen had commenced invading the forests, however. In 1838 a party of prospecting lumbering men made a camp on the northern slope of the Moosic Mountains, in Wayne County, Penn., and one day discovered a cave occupied by a man, miles from any human habitation. He said he had lived there a year, and had been roaming the forests of Connecticut, Vermont, and New-York looking for such a place as his cave for five years. He gave his name as Austin Sheldon, but told nothing of his past. The lumbermen growing more plenty, he left his cave and was heard of no more by them.

In 1843 two hunters discovered a man living in the cave near which the hermit was found dead on Friday. This was Austin Sheldon. He told them he had not seen a human being for 10 years. He continued to live there, but nothing was known about him until last Summer, when a paragraph appeared in THE NEW-YORK TIMES, mentioning the fact that a man named Austin Sheldon was living as a hermit in a cave in the wilderness of Pike County, Penn., his past being a mystery. This item was seen by Sheldon's relatives in Connecticut, and a brother and sister visited his cave. They offered him everything that wealth could bestow if he would leave his cave and go home with them, but he refused. From these relatives the facts as to Sheldon's early life were learned.

Sheldon seldom left his cave, and then only to obtain fish, game, roots, or berries for his food. At the time of his death he was bent and wrinkled, with long, matted gray locks, and a beard reaching almost to his waist. The clothes he wore he had not taken off his body for 22 years. They were tattered and ragged, and held together by hickory withes. The hermit never washed, and his face and hands were encrusted with dirt. His cave was about eight feet square, dark, damp, and loathsome. He slept in a rude chair, surrounded with bones, filth, and rubbish of all kinds. He was very taciturn, speaking willingly only on the subject of religion. It was his boast that he had read his Bible through nearly 100 times, and that he communed personally with God and the ancient prophets. When he walked he used a long staff, and his old, well-worn Bible was fastened to his leathern girdle. Forest fires frequently swept over the mountains about the hermit's cave, and many times it was surrounded on all sides by fire. The hermit, saying that he was in the hands of God, never voluntarily sought safety when thus imperiled, and courageous natives often saved his life at the risk of their own. He was often saved from death by freezing in the same manner. His only explanation of his living in the wilderness alone was that he wanted nothing to take his thoughts from God. As he had considerable money, according to his relatives, at the time he left Connecticut, many believe that he buried it about his cave.

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