

SHELDON, THE HERMIT.

AN OLD MAN WHO WANTS TO MARRY—HIS SOLITARY LIFE.

DINGMAN'S FERRY, Penn., June 5.—Austin Sheldon, who has occupied a rocky cave in the forests of Lehman Township, Pike County, Penn., seven miles from this place, for more than 30 years, living without a companion of any kind, has become tired of leading a single life, and recently became enamored of a girl yet in her teens, who resides within a few miles of the hermit's abode. The hermit has frequently visited the girl's home, and the last time he was there he asked her parents to consent to their marriage. Of course, they refused, and ordered the old hermit to make a hasty departure, and never trouble them again. Sheldon felt greatly injured, and has since been looking in other directions with a view to matrimony.

Sheldon's life has been a sad and checkered one. He was born in the Village of Bradford, Conn., in 1806, and consequently is 74 years old. In his boyhood he learned the blacksmith's trade, and arriving at man's estate he mysteriously left his home, came to Pike County, and purchased a few acres of wild, uncultivated, worthless land. Upon this land was a cave, in which, with a few alterations, the old hermit has since made his abode. Disappointment in love is said to have been the cause of his leaving his home. His parents were well-to-do farmers, and it was not until a paragraph appeared in *THE TIMES* a few years ago that they knew of Austin's whereabouts. A brother and sister came here and visited their long-lost brother, and after staying with him in his cave over night, used every inducement to have him abandon his lonely and rocky habitation and return with them to the home of his childhood, where he would be well cared for. He refused, stating that he preferred to die, as he had lived, a hermit. They left him some clothing and money and returned home. Sheldon has frequently received letters from his family since then, entreating him to abandon his wretched abode. A short time ago he partially concluded to do so, but becoming acquainted with the young girl above referred to, he gave up the idea altogether. Sheldon's dress and appearance has of late years improved, although he is a wretched-looking object yet.

His cave is only about 12 by 14 feet, with a slab roof. His furniture consists of four blocks of wood for chairs, a box used as a table, a fire-place, over which he does his cooking, and an old rickety rocking-chair in which he sleeps. He has about an acre of land cleared, on which he grows a little corn and garden truck. What he grows and what is given to him by his neighbors keeps him. He is as deaf as an adder, has been so for years, and persons who visit him occasionally, out of curiosity, converse with him by writing upon a slate, which the old hermit keeps for that purpose. He is intelligent, and reads a great deal. The book he most loves is the Bible, which he has read through many times, and most of which he has committed to memory. He has had many hair-breadth escapes. A few years ago his cave was surrounded by the forest fires, and the old man came near being roasted alive. He once fell from the uppermost branches of a huge chestnut tree, breaking several ribs and otherwise crippling him, and he has been frequently found in his cave in a freezing condition. That he will eventually be found dead there is almost certain.

The New York Times

Published: June 7, 1880

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