

HILLSFORD'S HERMIT.

Christmas Story Not After the Regulation Pattern.

BY GERTRUDE GARRISON.



HILLSFORD is a pretty little village on a river as pure as truth, in the heart of the Resquisim valley, with mountains walling it in north and south. At the time I write of it had all the requisites of a thriving town, including a population which dripped with self satisfaction.

Hillsford's most remarkable citizen was a hermit, an unkempt and eccentric individual, who lived in a cabin high up on the North mountain, and was known as "Old Weaver." In winter, when the foliage was less abundant, his small dwelling could be seen from the village, a little speck of crude architecture, the smoke from which curled sometimes into the very sky.

But it was difficult to exhibit the man himself. He came down to the village at infrequent intervals and then tarried only long enough to procure some simple necessities and departed without holding speech with any one. The townspeople had tried to break into the privacy of his home without avail. They had been rebuffed with looks and gestures which inspired fear and helped to confirm the opinion that "Old Weaver was crazy and had better be let alone."

And surely no man in his right mind could live the life he lived. His hair and whiskers showed no respect for the prevailing fashion in hirsute trimming, and his clothes were a slap at all decent garments. He rarely spoke at all, but when he did his words were briefness itself.

This caused some to decide that he was "a religious crank," and helped to disseminate the theory that he had committed some terrible crime. Hillsford was full of wonder about the hermit's past life and antecedents, but as there was absolutely no way of finding out it was obliged to remain in cruel ignorance. All it knew about him was that several years before the time I speak of he had arrived in the village, purchased a piece of land on the top of the mountain, cleared a cabin and begun a life of solitude perfectly incomprehensible to the people of the valley.

At last they mostly settled down to the belief that "Old Weaver had been wronged in love." Everybody knew that love, if it did not run smoothly, could upset people completely. This gave him exceptional interest in the eyes of the young and sentimental, although the most imaginative among them could not picture him as having ever been a personage capable of inspiring the divine fancy.

Never were they fully sensible of his value as a romantic figure until after he had been "written up" for a New York journal. A newspaper correspondent, on his summer vacation, wandered into Hillsford, and, of course, soon heard about the hermit, since he was all there was outside of the usual and uninteresting in the place. He at once upon a column and a half of solid nonpareil, mostly speculation, tinged with sentiment, about the curious recluse.

This had a good result. It dignified the old man in the minds of the Hillsfordians. It lifted him from the rank of a crazy old mountaineer to an eccentric hermit, with extraordinary sentimental possibilities behind him.

ole with envy in their hearts, though they cheered the noble philanthropist roundly. The people at the corner drug store were all outside waving their hats and making other demonstrations of good will and interest. The yarn spinners at Simpson's grocery held their tobacco firmly between their teeth and their hands in their trousers pockets as they sled went by. This was their manner of expressing a very warm interest. Women watched from doors, windows and porches, as women always do, and a swarm of enthusiastic small boys hung on to the sled until driven back when half a mile out of town.

The philanthropists reached Weaver's cabin late in the day, after digging their way through great snowdrifts. All this heroic exertion made them feel more dominant in spirit than ever. The very first rap on the hermit's door had the sound of authority in it, delivered as it was by the formidable fist of the town marshal, backed by the approbation of the other prominent citizens who accompanied him.

There was no response. The expression of decision on the marshal's face deepened as he began to beat upon the door with both fists and kick it with the thick soles of his tremendous boots.

Still there was no answer. While they were parleying about whether it was time to use the ax or not the closed shutter of the hermit's single window opened, revealing his haggard face, in which blazed a pair of eyes whose wrathful lightning fairly annihilated the prominent citizens.

"What do you want?" he asked, after a moment of discomfiting silence, as they stood, wordless, under the spell of his unspoken anger.

"We heard you were sick," said the marshal.

"Well?"

"We knew you would need help," said the justice of the peace, "and so came to try to do something for you."

"You have put yourselves to unnecessary trouble. I want nothing."

"But our duty as citizens will not allow us to let a fellow being suffer," said Deacon White.

"Your first duty is to mind your own business," said the hermit.

"Here is Dr. Horsey, who will help you right off, if you will let us in," said Mr. Smollett, also a prominent citizen.

The doctor stood silent, medicine case in hand, the rigidity of the regular's code preventing his doing any trumpeting on his own account.

"When I am weary of life I shall send for Dr. Horsey. Until then he must excuse me," returned the hermit, with something like merriment dancing in his wild eyes.

The doctor colored under this deadly insult, feeling it the more because the earth was yet fresh over his two last patients. This offensive defiance of their authority was the tacitly understood signal for a concerted rally of the rescuers. Instinctively they drew nearer together, and one said:

"I will kill you like dogs." "Perhaps not," said Mrs. Hart as she began to put on her bonnet and cloak. She was, perhaps, the poorest person of refinement and education in the town and the most benevolent. She was a widow, whose only dower were a boy of 12 and a girl of 9 years. By sewing all night and day she managed to keep the wolf out of sight.

Accompanied by Robby she went over to Hunt's to see the hermit, and at once knew that he was sick unto death. As the sled which was to transport him to Johnstown drew up at the door Mrs. Hart touched the arm of Judge Russell, who seemed to be clothed with more authority just then than any of the other "prominent citizens" who hovered about, and said:

"I will take care of Weaver if you will send him to my house. He is a very sick man, already greatly exhausted by his journey down the mountain. The drive to Johnstown might kill him."

"Really, Mrs. Hart, you're always doing too much for others. Young Dr. Clay was in here a bit ago, and he said the old fellow oughtn't to be moved so far. But you'd better think twice before you take him. He'll be an awful charge."

"I know that," she answered; "but I will take him and do the best I can for him." So the hermit was put upon the sled and delivered at Mr. Hart's like a bale of merchandise. The widow's selfishness kindled a temporary flame of the same nature in other breasts, and for the moment volunteer help was plenty. She took advantage of some of this to get her patient bathed and barbered and put to bed in a comfortable, Christian way.

Then began for her weeks of care, work and anxiety. The sewing machine was silent, with the unpleasant consequence of low finances. Contributions to the comfort of the sick man fell away as time passed and the affair became an old story. Young Dr. Clay alone remained faithful. The donations of others had dwindled down to advice. All in all Mrs. Hart had "a hard pull of it."

At last the hermit became convalescent. Finding himself in a home where refinement and kindness prevailed, he fell into the ways of its inmates as naturally as if he had been accustomed to civilization all his life. He talked glibly and charmingly, and seemed possessed of as much information as any man of the world. Clad in his right mind and conventional clothes, he lost his character of hermit entirely. Many of the signs of age, too, had disappeared under the good offices of the tailor and the barber. He did not look a day over 45.

He was quite well now, but he showed no disposition to return to his semi-savage life, so far as any one outside of Mrs. Hart's home knew.

Christmas was almost at hand. Hillsford was busy buying its presents and getting up festivities. At Mrs. Hart's the preparations were on a scale so simple that they were almost pathetic.

Two days before Christmas the town had something new to talk about. A middle aged gentleman and lady of the upper class, apparently, arrived at the Hillsford hotel and asked for Weaver. While they rested and dined they were regaled with the story of the hermit's queer doings, the ineffectual attempt to send him to the poorhouse, the widow Hart's interference and everything.

Then they were piloted to the Hart door, and for two days afterward, although the town was almost eaten up by curiosity, it could find out nothing at all about them.

It got the whole story on Christmas from The Weekly Chronicle.

"Not in this terrible weather," said Mrs. Hart, looking alarmed.

"Yes; right off. There's no place here for him, they say."

"No place for a poor old sick man in all Hillsford? We are not so bad as that, Robby, I am sure."

"Oh, but I heard Judge Markle and Deacon White and all of them say so. It's settled."

They would "put themselves out to do anything for him again."

Two weeks later, when the weather was bitter cold, Robby Hart, a sturdy 12-year-old, rushed into his mother's sitting room one afternoon, bursting with news. "Old Weaver's in town," he panted.

His mother looked up from her sewing machine with interest. Like everybody else in Hillsford she knew the history of the fruitless siege of the hermit's cabin.

"Yes, he's here; awful sick, too; out of his head, and is lying on the floor in the back part of Hunt's grocery. They're goin' to send him to the poorhouse at Johnstown."

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learn that Mrs. Caroline Hart was married eight before last to Mr. Vincent H. Weaver, of New York. The ceremony took place at the bride's home at 8 o'clock. The groom's sister, Mrs. C. P. Stevenson, and her husband, also of New York, and two or three of the bride's closest friends were the only guests.

Mrs. Hart, now Mrs. Weaver, as everybody knows is one of the most highly respected ladies of Hillsford. Although far from rich, she has been philanthropic to an extraordinary degree. Every one knows how Weaver, the hermit, fell sick one day early in the winter when he came into town to buy some supplies, and Mrs. Hart had him removed to her cottage to prevent his being taken to the county house at Johnstown. But not until recently did any one know that Herman Weaver the hermit, and Vincent H. Weaver the celebrated author were one and the same.

It has been generally believed that our hermit had been the victim of some cruelty at Cupid's hands, and for this reason had deserted the society of his fellow men. We learn from good authority that this diagnosis was incorrect. He lived in his mountain cabin because he could there devote himself to the work of writing his books without the risk of being lured away by any of the thousand diversions which tempt him from his cell in the city. His character of semi-savage was assumed to protect him from intruders.

Mr. Weaver really did not live in his mountain lodge half the time he was supposed to. Often, for months together, he would be absent, mixing with the wits and literateurs of the metropolis. He has even been several times to Europe, while the people of Hillsford supposed him to be within his solitary cabin.

Eccentric he is, to be sure. For instance, we have been told that before he spoke of marriage to Mrs. Hart he put \$50,000 in her name in a substantial New York bank and settled a handsome sum upon each of her two children. He wished to make her independent before the question of marriage was discussed, and he considered her entitled to all he could do for her for having taken him to her home, thereby saving his life when he was at death's door.

This is a true love match, without doubt. Their Christmas gift is the very best in Santa Claus' pack. It is labeled "Love," and comprehends the better part of earth and a portion of heaven. Mr. Weaver made a final trip to his cabin on the mountain the other day, and wrote across its door in big letters, "It is not good for man to be alone." Mr. and Mrs. Weaver will build a splendid house here for their summer home, but will spend their winters in New York. They left yesterday to finish the season there. We wish them every happiness under the sun.

This startling piece of news caused many an eye to protrude when it was read. "I always thought that Mrs. Hart was a designing thing. Sly, oh, so sly. I'll warrant she knew that Weaver was a rich man or she never would have taken him in," said a woman who, only a month before, had expressed the fear that the widow "would have old Weaver on her hands for life."

"LONG AFORE I KNEWED."

BY JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.

This delicious gem of the Hoosier poet is here presented, with due apologies to Judge, which first printed it:

Just a little bit of folly—I remember still— 'Tis almost cry for Christmas, like a youngster will.

Fourth o' July's nothin' to it—New Year's ain't a smel— Easter Sunday—Circus day—jes' all dead in the shell.

Lordy, though! at night, you know, to set around and hear The old folks work the story off about the sledge and deer, And "Santy" skootin' round the roof, all wrapped in fur and fuz— Long afore

I knowed who "Santy Claus" wuz! Ut to wait, and set up later a week or two ahead; Couln't hardly keep awake, ner wouldn't go to bed.

Kittle steevin' on the fire, and Mother settin' near Darin's socks and rookin' in the skeekey rocking cheer: Pap gap, and wander where it wuz the money wuz, And quar' with his frosted heels, and spill his liniment: And we a-dreamin' sleigh bells when the clook 'ud whir and buzz— Long afore

I knowed who "Santy Claus" wuz! Size the frolics, and figger how "Old Santy" could Manage to come down the chimney, like they said he would:

Wish that I could hide and see him—wondered what he'd say: Ef he ketches a feller layin' fer him thataway? But I bet on him, and liked him, same as ef he had Turned to pat me on the back and say, "Look a here, my lad: Here's my pack—jes' he's yours!" like all good boys does!" Long afore

I knowed who "Santy Claus" wuz. Wish that yarn wuz true about him as it 'peared to be: Truth made out o' lies like that—un's good enough fer me.

Wish I still wuz so confidin'! I could jes' go wild Over hangin' up my stockin's like the little child "Climber" in my lap to-night, and beggin' me to tell 'Bout them reindeers, and "Old Santy" that she loves so well; I'm half sorry for this little-girl-sweetheart of his— Long afore

She knows who "Santy Claus" is!

The Launch of the Future.

The first of a fleet of electrically propelled boats has been launched in the Thames, in London. It will carry eighty passengers at a rate of six miles an hour, and its machinery has nothing in common with the mechanism that has driven vessels since the time of Watt and Fulton. No boiler, no steam, no coal, no smoke, no heat, no soot or cinders, no ashes; simply a store of the electric fluid, ready to be converted into power at the pressure of the hand—the ideal motive power for water craft. The near future must witness the adoption of this force for the propelling of small vessels over short routes, and subsequent improvements in the storage of electricity must render its services available for pleasure boats over long routes. Nothing except the endless carpet of the Arabian Nights could be more desirable than a launch, fitted with an electric motor capable of keeping it going throughout a summer day's continuance. There are little fellows cutting their first teeth today who will own such a launch, and read with pitying surprise of the clumsy craft their fathers termed pleasure boats, in which an iron kettle full of hot water and a fire box full of smoky, sooty coal occupied half the available space.—Pittsburg Bulletin.

Willow and Willow Wares.

The willow ware industry has been slowly increasing in our eastern states of late years, but is as yet in its infancy. The immense unutilized areas of land along our many rivers, portions of the sea coast, and of some uplands and prairies not suitable for any other agricultural pursuit, invite capital and energy to invest in the production of osier, chiefly for the manufacture of basket ware. According to the census of 1880, there were in the country 904 willow ware establishments, with a capital of \$1,822,917, engaging 3,119 hands, paying annually the sum of \$607,408 for wages, and producing \$1,962,881. The value of materials consumed was \$807,031, of which, however, but a portion was produced here. The importation of both raw and manufactured material will be greatly reduced, and the demand for willow ware materially increased, if the profit to be derived from a systematic production of osier becomes once generally understood.—Insect Life.



MOANING ON HIS RUDE COUCH.

"Come, come, Weaver, this is no way to do. We are here in the friendliest spirit, and are sincerely anxious to have you taken care of. You are a sick man. You ought not to be alone as you are."

"Well, what do you propose to do with me?"

"Why, why—take you where you will be properly cared for, of course," answered Justice McCracken.

"Now, that is kind, I admit," said the hermit, and he looked at them with a strange, amused expression in his eyes. Believing that they were gaining ground, they grew bolder.

"Yes, we wish to be kind. We can't let you perish up here, you know."

"Well, where do you propose to take me?"

"Hem, h'm; why, you see, Weaver—you see Hillsford has no hospital—and—"

"But you have fixed upon some place for me, I presume?" questioned the hermit, in the tone of one about to surrender.

"Y-e-s," spoke up another. "We thought we would take you to Johnstown."

"Ah, that's the county seat, isn't it?"

"And the county house is near there, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's a good enough place for any one who wants to go there. I don't. Now it is time for you to leave, and he shut the window.

The besiegers conferred together and again began to beat upon the door. Feeling more courageous when Weaver's wild eyes were not on them they called to him that he must consent to go with them, or they would take him by force.

The window opened once more and revealed the gaunt form of the hermit grasping a shotgun. Instinctively the attacking party fell back a few paces.

The hermit spoke: "I will blow the head off any man who again lays a hand upon my door. I am in my own house, on my own ground, and there is not law enough in the republic to permit you to enter and lay a hand on a man who is neither criminal nor pauper. Had you come here proffering private charity I should have resented it, but I should have respected you. As it is I will kill you like dogs if you trouble me a moment more." And he pointed the gun at them in a way that was convincing.

Grumblingly they moved away. "He's right," said the justice, who had a mortal fear of firearms; "he's not a pauper. He owns this ground and he owns the house. If he won't come with us willingly we shall have to let him alone."

"He's as crazy as a kite," piped up two or three others, anxious to cover up their chagrin.

"He ought to be confined as a dangerous lunatic," said the doctor, in whose bosom still rankled Weaver's poisoned arrow.

They reached Hillsford in a crestfallen mood of mind, agreeing that the hermit might die a dozen times over before



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