

# The Lebanon Express

## HOLIDAY SUPPLEMENT.



### CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS is here; Winds whistle shrill, Ice and chill, Little care we; Little we fear Weather with- out, Sheltered about The mahogany tree. —Thackeray.

"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. 'Tis a little bit of feller—I remember still— 'Tis to almost cry for Christmas, like a youngster will.

Fourth o' July's nothin' to it!—New Year's ain't a smell!— 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" shootin' round the roof, all wrapped in fur and fuzz— Long afore I knowed who "Santy Claus" wuz!

Set to wait, and set up later a week or two ahead; Couldn't hardly keep awake, nor wouldn't go to bed; Kittle meenin' on the fire, and Mother sittin' near Darwin's socks and rockin' in the skreeky rocking cheer; Pap gim' and wonder where it wuz the money went, And "quarry" with his frosted heels, and spill his lament; And we dreamin' sleigh bells when the clock 'ud whir and buzz— Long afore I knowed who "Santa Claus" wuz!

Want that yarn wuz true about him as it 'peared to be— Truth made out o' lies like that—'n's good enough for me; Wink I wuz so confidin' I could jes' go wild Over hangin' up my stockin's like the little child Climbin' in my bed—'n' beggin' me to tell 'Bout them red-headed, and "Old Santy" that she loves so well; I'm half sorry for this little-girl-swoonin' of his— Long afore She knows who "Santy Claus" is!

### Xmas Greetings.

G mayd see sweete, A byrd see neate, And plenty of holypday echeere. Ode friends we'll meete, And with hand clasp greete, For Xmas now is here.

### HILLSFORD'S HERMIT.

A CHRISTMAS STORY, NOT AFTER THE REGULATION PATTERN.



HILLSFORD is a pretty little village on a river as pure as truth, in the heart of the Inquisissus 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. This very comfortable commodity was so dense and universal that it fairly covered the place like a fog.

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. It was pointed out to visitors, who were told, without loss of time, of the hermit, his civilization defying habits and unspeakable appearance.

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 repulsed 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.

In summer they who went near his cabin sometimes found him sitting outside reading the Bible, an occupation from which they could not easily divert him. This caused some to decide that he was "a religious crank," and helped to dissipate 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, reared 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 crossed 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 lunacy.

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 scribbled a column and a half of solid nonpareil, mostly speculation, tinged with sentiment, about the curious recluse.

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It was often said that Weaver would be found starved or frozen to death some time. So every winter there was talk of "looking after him," by those in authority, but it ended in talk, as he was not exactly the kind of man to dictate to.

In the remotest of Simpson's grocery, he was a hard one to tackle. At the beginning of the hermit's last winter on the mountain some hunters, driven by cold to his cabin, entered and found him moaning on his rude couch. They spread the news in Hillsford, and "the authorities" conferred together and decided that it was time to act. But what should they do with him? Nobody could go up to his lodge on the mountain to take care of him; his wretched dwelling contained no comforts. And nobody wanted to take him into his home. There was the county house, where all paupers were sent, but that was near the county seat, seven miles away.

They who were most outspoken in the matter of having him "looked after" and who owned the largest and most comfortable houses, "bemoaned and howled" when it came to a question of taking him in. Some one, in a moment of humane feeling, suggested that the seven miles' journey to the poorhouse might prove dangerous to the sick man, and might even throw serious blame on those who became responsible for it.

However, after much thought and more talk had been put upon the subject, the poorhouse faction prevailed, and the flat went forth that Old Weaver must be taken charge of by the county, willing or unwilling.

The expedition set forth the next morning. It was principally composed of "the authorities," otherwise hard headed and dictatorial personages, with that degree of heartlessness peculiar to the class known as "prominent citizens." A heavy snow lay upon the ground, and the mountain roads were unbroken. A big sled, generously supplied with straw and lurch baskets, was made ready.

The departure of this hermit capturing expedition was an event. The postoffice coffers gaped upon the imposing spectacle with envy in their hearts, though they cheered the noble philanthropists roundly. The people at the coffee 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 looked upon the imposing spectacle as the 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.

So there was no answer.

While they were parleying about whether it was time to use the axer not the closed shutter of the hermit's single window opened, revealing his eager 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. Horsely, 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. Horsely. 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 sowing almost 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

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, hm: 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?"

"Yes."

"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 see why you're so afraid to go, 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 frame of mind, all agreeing that the hermit might die a dozen times over before 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 going to send him to the poorhouse at Johnstown."

"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."

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"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 unselfishness 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. Horsely, who 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 his 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 lost 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 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.

"Well, I know that."

"And I now see you a ruined man!"

"Hold hard, Matilda," interrupted Studden; "not ruined—pushed for the moment—on my knees, but not staked. I've been unlucky on the races this last year—unlucky at play. Why, last night I lost a pot at loo, and then that girl behaved to me!"

Mr. Studden said the banker, closing his eyes; "I cannot listen to a catalogue of your crimes—impudences. I am the father of a family, and—"

"Cut that, governor!" broke in the amiable Mr. Studden. "What I want is money, and not preaching—no preachin' and floggin' too. This is the state of the odds. I've overdrew my account, good; will you let me have some more? tin, I mean. If you will, I am sure to retrieve myself. I've some splendid things on, but must have the ready—tid—tid—tid—"

"Mr. Studden," said Mr. Dawbarn, "I do not understand your jargon, nor is such language the sort of thing I am accustomed to hear. You have lost the fortune left you by your father in gambling, horse racing, and—"

"—and the like. For the last seven years I have seen your face reddened, as you had a long minority, and no friends to advise you, I have tried to help you, but I regret to say, your complete ruin is inevitable—inevitable."

"But you fifteen to one it isn't!" said Mr. Studden.

"What you owe me," continued the banker, not noticing the interruption—"what you owe me I shall never trouble you for."

"Bless you!" said the treverent Studden.

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"Don't wait it, thank you."

"Good advice, parental advice; but it will be of no use, I can see."

"Not a bit."

"I shall leave you therefore to the pursuit of your career of profligacy, and may it may it"—Mr. Dawbarn stammered, for he felt that he was proposing a toast at a public meeting—"may it prove to you that—that—that—"

"Out with it, governor," said the insolent young sporting man.

"No, sir, I will not out with it," said the banker, majestically. "I will not say what I was going to say."

"Are you quite clear what you were going to say?" inquired the young man, who respected neither age nor wealth.

Mr. Dawbarn covered his defeat grandly. "I will not detain you any longer, Mr. Studden. He rang the bell. "I wish you good day, sir; my servant will show you out."

"Very good, governor," said Mr. Studden, dismounting from his chair, or saddle. "You threw me over—very good; and just at the moment when I could make a colossal fortune. If I had your capital, or you had my talent and speculated—like foczillam!—what might not be made with the tips I have! I know the way out, Chawles"—this Mr. Studden addressed to the servant—"you needn't show me, Mr. Dawbarn, I have the honor to be, sir, yours truly, ever to command, etc. etc. etc.—"

Mr. Studden departed with a flourish, leaving the banker in a state of the most wretched indignation. Mr. Dawbarn was a great man in Bramlington and accustomed to be treated with respect and deference and servility, and though so excellent a person, Mr. Dawbarn was something of a humbug, and the young man's manners had convinced him that he knew it, and it is very annoying to men of 50 years of age to be found out by their juniors. Mr. Robert Studden, or, as he was called, Mr. Bob Studden, or Mr. Rip Studden, swaggered past the cashier and clerks with the ease of a jockey and the grace of a groom. A dozen steps from the door of the bank he met a clerk whom he stopped.

"Halloo!" he cried, with graceful badinage, "fancy, how goes it?"

"How do you do, Mr. Studden?" inquired the clerk.

"Don't be in such a hurry. Well, how is the, eh?"

"Mr. Studden—"

"Don't be afraid, my boy, I'm not the man to spoil sport. Why not bolt with best bulk and land you my last dollar to help you. I saw you the other morning. Remembered, didn't I?"

Beautiful and right it is that gifts and good wishes should fill the air like snow flakes at Christmas tide. And beautiful is the year in its coming and in its going—most beautiful and blessed because it is always the Year of Our Lord.

### MR. DAWBARN.

BY T. W. ROBERTSON, AUTHOR OF "SOCIETY," "SCHOOL," ETC.

#### CHAPTER I.

"Would you have the kindness to step this way, sir, into Mr. Dawbarn's room?"

These words were addressed by a banker's clerk to a young man whose dress and manners were a vulgar compound of groom, betting man, and pugilist. The sporting gentleman swaggered by the desks and the clerks, looking infinite disparagement at the whole concern, and was ushered through the double doors into presence of Mr. Dawbarn.

Mr. Dawbarn was the principal banker in Bramlington, and Bramlington was the county town of the little county of Mufford. It consisted of one long, straggling street, beautified by five old churches, each a splendid specimen of architecture, which contrasted strongly with the Town Hall, the Corn Exchange, and the Market Place, which were modern buildings, and unpleasant to look at.

"Mr. Studden," said Mr. Dawbarn to the young gentleman of sporting appearance, "I have to talk to you, sir, very seriously; sit down, if you please."

Mr. Studden sat in a chair as if it were a saddle, shut one eye knowingly, and examined the thong of his whip with the other.

"Mr. Studden," continued the banker solemnly, "I have been informed that you have overdrew your account to the amount of—"

"Yes; I know all about that, governor," broke in Mr. Studden. "I've been told so twice."

"I therefore gave directions that the next time you presented a check, you should be shown to here to me," said the banker.

"That is—a check of my own drawing."

"Quite so."

"Well, now I am here," said Mr. Studden, gazing the side of his imaginary horse with his left leg; "respectful compe, and should like to know your little game. What's to be done?"

"Mr. Ideo, I have known you from a boy."

"Well, I know that."

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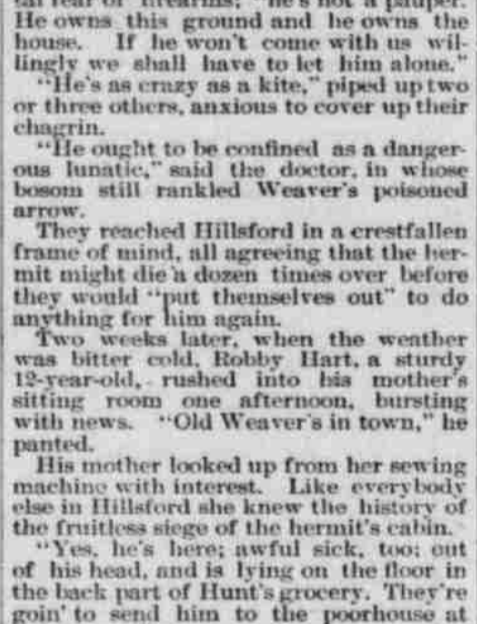
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THEIR CHRISTMAS GIFT.



MOANING ON HIS RUDE COUCH.