

The Petrified Hermit.

By IONE L. JONES

"Prize Story" in Tid-bits, New York.

The old adage "the way the twig is bent the tree's inclined," is something we have all heard from our childhood up. Never was the truth of the saying more forcibly illustrated than in the person of John Solus, a brown, knotty little man, resembling in appearance a stunted apple tree. For his personal ugliness he was not to blame. As for his disposition, he had a peevish one to begin with, and when he was a child his parents' indulgence tended to bend the little twig more than ever from the straight line. John was an only child and no restrictions were ever placed upon his will.

The sorrowful appeal of a mother-bird, as he made off with her nest of beautiful eggs, never touched his heart with pity. Cats and dogs fled in terror when they saw him coming, and little ones younger than himself dreaded his approach. The boy was always in trouble. He not only received ample blame for his own mischief, but like all other reprobates, was obliged to father the sins that did not belong to him. After John's school days were ended he followed the calling of his father and became a stone cutter. At twenty one the young man married a home-loving girl of nineteen, rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed and healthy. The young wife seemed to get on very well with her sombre-faced husband, for a time, though conversation generally lagged in the Solus Homestead.

Time passed on. The rosy honeymoon was a thing of the past. It was not a very happy life all in all for Janet, but when a little child's sweet, innocent face appeared, things brightened wonderfully for the little mother. Janet's love for baby Madge seemed to aggravate her husband, and she many times felt obliged to restrain her affection for it when he was present. Yes, John Solus was jealous of his own child. His wife's love was divided, and the innocent babe brought with it the first real seed of discord in the monotonous household. Other children were added to the Solus family, and, with the advent of each, John grew more grumpy and exacting. The passing years found Janet a hard-working woman with five children—five growing twigs to bend in the right direction.

John's heart seemed to be turning to stone. He never played with his children, but found fault with them incessantly, until they learned to dread his approaching footsteps. No young arms were flung about his neck, no fresh, sweet kisses were lavished upon his lips; but a hush fell upon all the merry makers when he entered the door. After a time John commenced wan-

dering off by himself, leaving no word with his patient wife as to where he was going, or when he would return. These absences were the children's holidays, though poor Janet sorrowed deeply over the father's queer ways. John declared Janet set his children against him, and he grew so suspicious of his two sons that he really seemed to hate them. The boys were now their mother's main dependence, and they and their father could not agree.

One day in a fit of jealous anger John raised his fist to strike his wife, and the boys, in their righteous indignation, caught and held him fast. The frantic man, after cursing Janet and the whole family, rushed from the house, paying no heed to the gray-haired widowed mother who called piteously to him to return. On he rushed, stamping upon the ground in his passionate rage, more like a fierce untamed animal than like a human being. Farther and farther he travelled until he left many weary miles behind him. Tired and exhausted at last, he crawled into a lonely cave in the midst of a deep wood, and fell asleep.

John Solus did not return to his family. He worked here and there in the neighboring quarries at times and necessity prompted, and slept in the lonely cave at night, until he became known throughout the region as "the hermit of Meadowville."

"Pretty Madge Solus was married this morning. How time flies! It seems but yesterday that she was a wee lassie." John Solus started at these words of a fellow-laborer fell upon his ear. His tools fell to the ground—he could work no more that day. Quietly leaving the quarry he walked a long distance lost in deep thought.

Possessed by a feeling of wild unrest, he commenced climbing a narrow, overgrown path that led up the side of a high mountain. Taking to himself and breathing hard, up higher and higher he went, until nearly exhausted he stopped to rest. He bent both elbows back into a crevice in the rocks, and leaned back tired and at war with the world. Far below him lay the quiet meadows dotted here and there with peaceful trees. A beautiful grove of pines looked like mere specks in the distance. Soft fleecy clouds sailed over his head, and the broad smile of the sun lay like a golden benediction on the valley below. What a contrast to the beautiful scene before him was his own swelling, anger-laden heart, that his wife had thought was turning to stone.

Now and then, as an ugly thought came to his mind, he kicked the earth on which he stood, sending the loose stones rattling over the precipice in front of him. Suddenly he heard a queer grating noise behind him, and felt the earth tremble under his feet. Then he gave one fierce, blood-curdling yell of pain, and his whole body writhed and tossed in convulsions of agony, while his eyes rolled in his head and seemed starting from their sockets. The opening in the rocks behind him had let down the huge mass above it, and the terrible weight had closed like a vise over his elbows, and now held him firmly pinned.

After the loose earth and rocks had ceased rattling down, and all was quiet again, with the ex-

ception of the deep groaning of the arid struggling man, and his slowly diminishing calls for help, he felt a drop of the coolest water upon his heated forehead, then another rolled down. One by one they came, thicker and faster, until his head was numb with their coldness. And now, with a rush enveloping his whole body, a beautiful waterfall gushed foaming and sparkling. Over the precipice it dashed, and hid entirely within its vapory folds the body of the man who now hung dead and cold from the clinched rocks, and the crystal spring, borne far away among the flat rocks and baptized with a copious charge of silica, now rejoined in untroubled liberty. Those who viewed its wondrous beauty from below, and felt its cool breath as it dashed to the earth in a cloud of pearly spray and went laughing through the green meadows, little dreamed of the dreadful secret it held in its embrace.

The old cave had long been tenantless. Janet and her family still lived in Meadowville. The children were married and settled down, and the beloved mother was well taken care of. John's mother had long lain in her grave, and the villagers had ceased to wonder what had become of her wayward son.

The mountains back of Meadowville were said to be rich in minerals. A party of geologists with their hammers and chisels were enthusiastically searching for specimens. The beautiful spring was running dry, and a queer shaped rock divided its slender stream into several tiny runs. Much curiosity was evinced regarding the queer shape of the stone. After much wondering and hard climbing the spot was reached, the hard black body of a human being discovered suspended from the elbows.

The rock, after much labor, was cut away, and the body removed intact from its long resting-place.

When the geologists drove through the village with their curious burden a crowd of eager people followed the wagon until it halted at the end of the principal street. Janet, with her little granddaughter Madge, came out of a door. "So there!" hisped the little one. Janet took no long look at the contents of the wagon, and then turned away with a great wonder in her heart.

In the Museum at — now rests the body of the petrified hermit.

The people in a Westchester town have refused to give food to a tramp, and now he threatens to have them arrested for boycotting him and interfering with his legitimate business.

Two Welshmen recently fought a duel with swords. Finally goaded to desperation, one of them dropped his weapon, and drew out his knife to its full and terrific length and smote the other to the earth.

The Methodist Missionary Committee has appropriated thousands of dollars for missionary work in various parts of the globe where it is needed, but somehow it seems to have overlooked Chicago entirely.

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