

THE AUTHOR OF «A VISIT FROM ST. NICHOLAS.»

BY CLARENCE COOK.

'T WAS the night before Christmas, when all through
the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. NICHOLAS soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;
And Mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap;
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow,
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny rein-deer,
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by
name;

«Now, *Dasher!* now, *Dancer!* now, *Prancer* and *Vixen!*
On, Comet! on, *Cupid!* on, *Donder* and *Blitzen!*
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!»
As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky;
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,

With the sleigh full of Toys, and St. Nicholas too.
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof—
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof—
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.
He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of Toys he had flung on his back,
And he look'd like a pedlar just opening his pack.
His eyes—how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook when he laughed, like a bowlfull of jelly.
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And fill'd all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
«*Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!*»¹



HAPPY the man who can add
even a single leaf to the ever-
green garland of the poetry
of home—the verse that chil-
dren love, and that wakens
even in older hearts cheerful
memories of childhood! Such,

at least, if no higher, has been the lot of the
late Dr. Clement C. Moore, the author of «A
Visit from St. Nicholas,» which has now been
a household friend of American children for
nearly seventy-five years, and promises to be
dear to them for many and many a year to
come.

Dr. Moore belongs to the group of minor
singers whose right to be remembered rests
on a very small amount of verse achieved.
There are poets who hold their place, and
will long hold it, in every anthology by right
of two or three poems; others who are known
but by one; and others, again, who live but
by a single line, or at most by a couplet, in
some poem all the rest of which is forgotten.
In the case of Dr. Moore, nothing he has
written is likely to survive except the «Visit
from St. Nicholas»; and this lives, not by
right of poetry, but by its innocent realism
and its direct appeal to the matter-of-fact

imagination of childhood. For children—and
this is as true of girls as it is of boys—rarely
love poetry, and they tolerate verse only when
it pleases their infant ears with jingle, or
when, grown older, its rhymes and «ordered
lines» dress up some narrative that has at
least the look of being «true.» Even then
they are apt to wonder why the story could
not have been as well told in plain prose.

Mr. William S. Pelletreau, in the interest-
ing account of Dr. Moore's life which he has
just published, tells us that the «Visit from
St. Nicholas» was written in 1822 as a Christ-
mas present for his children; and that a young
lady visiting the family copied it into her
album, and sent it, unknown to Dr. Moore, to
the editor of the Troy «Sentinel,» who printed
it, without the author's name, in the issue of
that journal for December 23, 1823. From
the newspaper it found its way to the school
readers, and speedily became a great favor-
ite with children all over the country.

Mr. Pelletreau tells us that Dr. Moore was at
first annoyed by the appearance of the poem
in print, as he had not intended it for the
public, and thought it a mere trifle with but
slight literary merit. No doubt it was with
some misgivings that, twenty years later, he
gave it a place in the volume of his collected
poems. With the proverbial blindness of

¹ «Poems by Clement C. Moore, LL.D.» New York:
Bartlett & Welford, 1844.

writers, he probably thought this playful sally, written to please his youngsters at their Christmas merrymaking, far inferior to its all-forgotten companions, of which he says in his preface: «Some of them have cost me much time and thought, and I have composed them all as carefully and correctly as I could.»

But, alas! for the self-esteem of poets, immortalities and oblivions are not distributed on their own terms. They take much pains to please their peers among the learned and the cultivated, who «scarce allow them half an eye»; while some flower chance-dropped from their hands is picked up by a child in passing, and, to their surprise,—sometimes, it may be, to their disdain,—they find that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings their praise has been ordained. The bright-eyed procession of children—most beautiful, most precious of all the beautiful and precious things in our world—has kept Dr. Moore's unconsidered trifle alive for all these years; and it has earned its right to live by the clearness of its conception and the directness with which the story is told. It is a true piece of Dutch painting in verse, and it is not surprising that it should have been translated into painting so many times. For nothing is left to the copyist's fancy; he has but to trace the poet's lines with his pencil. And, trifle as it is, it has a fair claim to originality as a conception. Dr. Moore's St. Nicholas has become the accepted personification of this kindly purveyor of toys and playthings; and this particular avatar is one in which, so far as we know, the benevolent saint never appeared before. His German prototype is, by comparison, a somewhat stolid and formal personage, who goes through his task of distributing gifts somewhat in the spirit of an expressman delivering his parcels, or of a schoolmaster giving out prizes at commencement. Dr. Moore's St. Nicholas, on the other hand, has animal spirits in plenty, and a most contagious love of fun; and the children are in love with him as soon as they set eyes on him. Many a child must have wondered how the saint contrived to get round to so many houses in a single night; but no story-teller before Dr. Moore ever let him into the secret. That he should have come in a sleigh was likely enough, but a sleigh drawn by reindeer is a fancy as unexpected as it is pretty. The invention of most story-tellers would have got no further than horses. An added touch of reality is the «ashes and soot» on the fur coat of St. Nicholas. The conventional German saint is always miraculously clean when, to the

amazement of the children, he comes walking out of the chimney. «Comes,» do we say? How can he long continue to come out of the chimney in houses where gas-logs, asbestos rag-bags, steam-radiators, and furnace-registers have usurped the life-giving hearth, the center of the home life, the heart of hospitality?

Dr. Clement C. Moore was the only child of the Right Rev. Benjamin Moore, a distinguished prelate of the Episcopal Church, and a conspicuous citizen of New York in the time of the Revolution. After his return from England, where he had been ordained at Lambeth in 1774, he was made assistant minister of Trinity Church, and held that place until the resignation of Bishop Provoost in 1800, when he was installed as rector. In 1800 he succeeded Provoost as bishop, having for some time been his coadjutor, and in the same year was chosen president of Columbia College. His duties in this position being chiefly ceremonial, as he was expressly made exempt from all regular instruction and from the details of college discipline, he continued to serve as president while performing all the arduous duties belonging to the bishopric, until a stroke of paralysis, in 1811, unfitted him for further work. He died in 1816. It may be interesting to note, in passing, that Bishop Moore administered the communion to Alexander Hamilton after the duel with Aaron Burr, and that he was one of the assistants at the inauguration of General Washington as President. He was, according to all testimony, a man of beautifully rounded character; and his earnest devotion to his duties as churchman and as public-spirited citizen made a distinct impression on his time. Bishop Moore had married Charity, the daughter of Major Thomas Clarke, a retired officer of the British army, who had bought a tract of land extending from the present Nineteenth street to Twenty-fourth street, and from what is now the Eighth Avenue to the Hudson River. Here he built what was, for the times, a handsome house, and, according to Mr. Pelletreau, named it «Chelsea,» after the well-known hospital near London. It was build of wood, like nearly all those «old mansions» in describing the «grandeur» of which so much republican ink has been pathetically expended. The house was burned down in the last illness of the owner, who came near perishing in the flames. After his death his widow rebuilt it, and she bequeathed the house and a large portion of the land to her daughter Charity, the wife of Bishop Moore. While the Widow

Clarke occupied «Chelsea Farm» her house was seized by the British on the stormy uprising of the «rebels»; and, like every other householder, she was obliged to accept whatever military guard might be quartered upon her. Many of these householders left their dwellings to the tender mercies of the enemy, and fled; but Mrs. Clarke was advised to remain, and she was fortunate in her enforced guest, who proved to be a gallant officer and a courteous gentleman, who spared her goods, and treated her and her daughters with consideration.

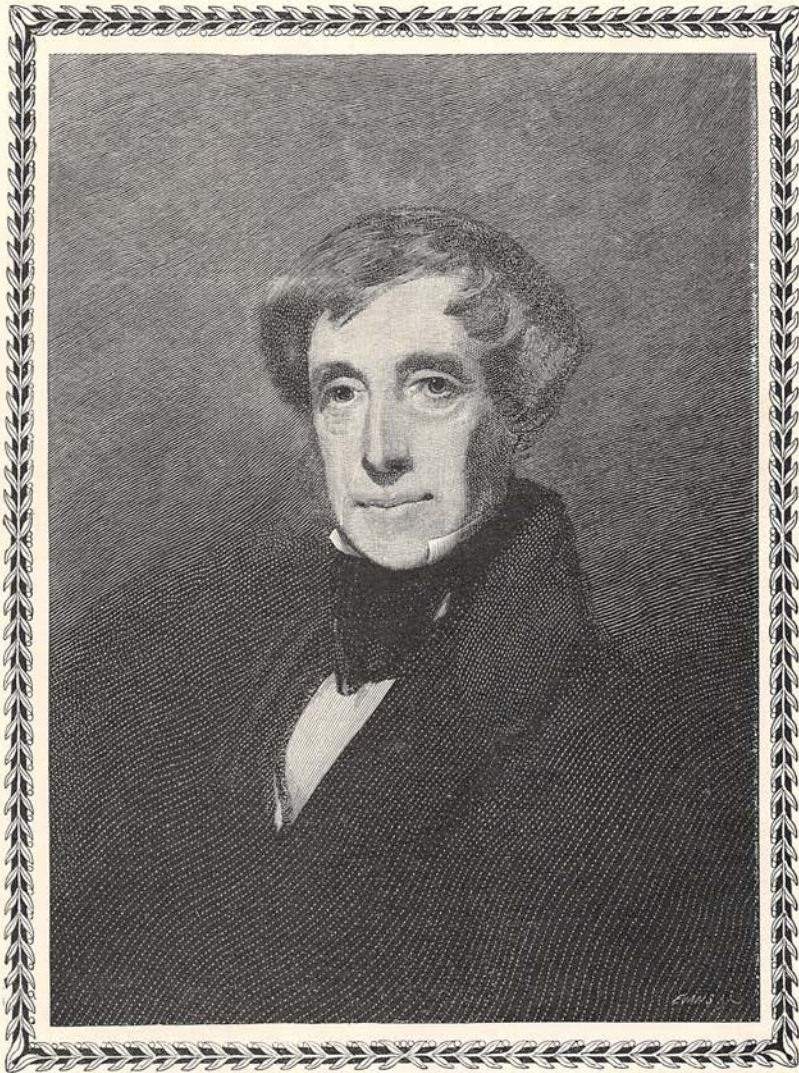
It was in this house that Bishop Moore's only child was born—a son, who was named after his mother's only brother, Clement Clarke. He was born on July 15, 1781. After receiving the elements of his education from his father, he entered Columbia College, and was graduated in 1798. He was fitted for the ministry, but he never took orders; and continuing to live in his father's house, he devoted himself to Oriental and classical studies, and employed his leisure in writing verse, not for profit or publication, but to lighten his severer labors and amuse his children and his friends. His first printed venture was made in 1806, as the anonymous contributor to the book of a friend, which also appeared anonymously—a dingy little volume «on gray paper with blunt type,» printed for E. Sargeant, at No. 39 Wall street, opposite the United States Bank—«A New Translation, with Notes, of the Third Satire of Juvenal, to which are added Miscellaneous Poems, Original and Translated.» It would seem as if the authors were a little afraid of the sound of their own voices; for in the only copy we have been able to find of this book, the names of the translator and his friend are written with ink on the title-page by some one in the secret, but have been obstinately erased, and are to be read only by those who have learned from R. W. Griswold's «Poets of America» what the names must be. By applying this X-ray to the inky blot, the names are clearly to be read of John Duer and Clement C. Moore.

The introduction written by Moore for his friend's translation is apropos of nothing in that translation, but simply serves as a hook on which to hang certain animadversions, as severe as the constitutional good nature of the writer would permit, on a group of lackadaisical poets and poetasters of the town, who, as Mr. Moore and his friend thought, were having too much their own way. The verse they criticized was certainly worthless alike in

form and matter; but it must be said that neither the new translator of Juvenal, nor the author of the poems that accompanied it (who was acknowledged, in a note, to be the writer of the introduction), was by right entitled to be too severe on the disciples of Laura Matilda and the Della Cruscans.

Thirty-eight years later, in 1844, Messrs. Bartlett and Welford—how much pleasure is associated with those names in the mind of once young book-loving New-Yorkers!—published «Poems by Clement C. Moore, LL.D.»; and in this volume were found, among others, all the verses signed «L.» that had appeared in Mr. Duer's book. Here was «A Visit from St. Nicholas,» in the company of verses so perfunctory, written in a style so different, so artificial and tame, so empty of matter, that it would be difficult to believe them written by the same hand, were it not that in «A Trip to Saratoga,» with which the volume opens, there is a distinctly natural tone in the narrative style, and the same is found in the «Lines to Southey,» with which the volume closes. But the «Trip to Saratoga» has little to recommend it beyond proving that Dr. Moore could tell a plain tale in plain words when he was so inclined, or when he was really moved to write. The «Lines to Southey» were written, but never sent, after reading the dedication by that poet of «A Tale of Paraguay» to his daughter, Edith May Southey. In Moore's poem he laments the loss of his wife and two of his children; and his grief has a note that makes its way to the heart in spite of the formal versification that hinders its free motions.

The wonder would have been, perhaps, if anybody in New York at that time had written poetry worth preserving. Certainly the city must have been a pleasant place to live in, half town, half country as it was—a large village fringed with smaller villages or hamlets, with green fields, fruitful farms, and well-kept estates stretching along the once beautiful waters that bounded it on each side. But if it had all the charms of this semi-rural life, it had all the disadvantages of such a condition. We have only to skim the pages of Mr. Philip Hone's diary—Mr. Hone, socially one of the most prominent men of his time, and a warm friend of Dr. Moore—to discover what a Little Peddlington the smaller New York must have been in those years. The two great passions that divided the public mind were politics and trade; and as these were strictly interdependent, it is no wonder that, almost homogeneous as the public was in race, and but little separated in its



FROM THE PORTRAIT FROM LIFE PAINTED FOR HIS CHILDREN.

CLEMENT C. MOORE.

ENGRAVED BY J. W. EVANS.

interests, it took things with a seriousness that kept the social pot forever boiling over.

But in the midst of all this social turmoil and hubbub, the life of Dr. Moore flowed tranquilly on in his home at Chelsea Farm, among his books, with his music and his flowers, like one of the many small streams that in his day pursued their quiet way through the fields of Greenwich and the streets of the bustling city. His more laborious hours were passed in his work as instructor in the Oriental languages and in Hebrew. In 1809 he published a Hebrew lexicon, in two volumes,—the first that had appeared in America,—and thus became the pioneer in that study here.

In 1818 Dr. Moore presented to the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church,

as a free gift, the entire block bounded by Ninth Avenue, Twentieth and Twenty-first streets, and extending to the Hudson River. In 1821 he became professor of the Oriental and Hebrew languages in the seminary, and continued his work in that field during the rest of his life. He died at his summer home in Newport, Rhode Island, July 10, 1863.

His Hebrew lexicon has long been superseded; his poems are forgotten: but the noble foundation of the Theological Seminary—a gift such as would hardly be possible for even a multi-millionaire to imitate in our crowded city to-day—this gift to the world of scholars, and the «Visit from St. Nicholas,» a gift to our children, will long keep green the memory of this learned, modest scholar and friend of his kind.

the bright, affectionate smile, the steady, inspiring light of the eyes—than the mouth or eyes themselves that I perceived. At this time I used also to feel and see my mother's soft, firm hand grasping mine, as I lay longing for the end of painful days and nights. And, strange to say, the face and hand comforted me, though I never for a moment doubted that both were wholly imaginary. So real were vision and touch that if I had been superstitious I could hardly have failed to believe them. Fortunately, faith is less easy than dissent for me on most subjects. Once I heard my father ask me a question, and, turning, saw him standing at the door, and began to reply, before I discovered that I was entirely alone. He was at the time in the lower story of the house.

Sometimes, day after day, the traditional ghost stalked after me when I ascended the stairs. I felt his bony hand clutching my arm, and saw him plainly if I glanced over my shoulder. Often I have seen myself floating overhead, or the air has been filled with apparitions of my bedstead, though not more than fifteen inches long, and in each lay a tiny image of myself. Or at the same instant a dwarf and giant double of myself, or perhaps a crowd of them, leaned over me.

Frequently the creations of poets and artists have appeared at my side as though clothed in flesh. More than once I have (the ego nevertheless all the while preserving its identity) seemed to myself to be *Lady Macbeth* vainly rubbing her hands; or Ruggieri, in Dante, with the teeth of Ugolino fastened in the nape of his neck. And the mental and physical suffering I endured as these characters seemed apart from, and additional to, the pain I felt from disease in my own person. Many nights during one winter in my early youth, as soon as I lay down, I saw the insane wife of Rochester in «Jane Eyre» enter the open door of an adjoining room, and approach my bed to set it afire. And when she bent over me, holding a shovelful of live coals, I could hardly resist the impulse to scream. I shut the door in her face, and she never came again! The sense of double consciousness, the contradiction between me and myself, which accompanied these apparitions was one of their most disagreeable features.

One summer, two or three afternoons in the week, I would see Monadnock towering above me, rosy from base to summit, as I had seen it once at Keene. Once my room became a forest of burning firs. The blazing trees stood out in bold relief against a dull-purple sky, like a cameo cut in amethyst.

For a long while a specter eagle perched between my shoulders. I felt its hard beak pressing against the back of the brain, and the weight of its warm, yielding body on my spine, and saw it if I turned my head, and yet knew that it was a false creation of the mind. Several times I have been unable to eat a meal, because everything before me assumed an untrue appearance, taking form and life. Eating with closed eyes or being fed did not take away the creatures of the brain. The hungry stomach cried out for food, but the disorderly nervous system gave a repulsive *shape* to the most appetizing viands, though the sense of *taste* was not in a visionary state.

Monkeys and squirrels and horrid snakes often made their appearance on the mantelpiece or the foot-board

of the bed. Bells rang, or pistols exploded, or I was suffocated by an odor of sulphur as strong as though a large quantity of matches were on fire. The smell of brimstone invariably preceded a summer storm. One day the thunder pealed, the wind blew, and the sudden rain dashed in torrents against the rattling window-glass; yet the sun shone brightly all the while from a cloudless sky, and the trees were motionless. But this storm, which I knew to be an illusion, startled me as much as a real one would have done.

One takes all things as a matter of course when in this visionary state. For instance, my body seemed suddenly to become longer than the bed, and without the slightest feeling of surprise I accommodated myself to circumstances, and allowed my feet to pass through the foot-board as if it were nothing but air or water. Meanwhile I philosophized silently about this hallucination, and laughed at the absurdity of fluid wood, for the foot-board *looked* all right. I have often had a very vivid but consciously false impression that my head and four limbs were separated from the trunk and lay upon the bed about an inch from my body, but in their relative positions. Or I have seemed instantaneously and violently to fly into innumerable pieces and reunite. And the catastrophe, while recognized by one of my selves as a mere prank of the nervous system, seemed so real that had an atom fallen off the bed, no doubt, forgetting that I was all to pieces, I would have sprung up to recover it!

The Portrait of Clement C. Moore.¹

It is stated under the picture of Clement C. Moore, in this number of THE CENTURY, that the original was painted for his children. In the volume of verse from which we have copied «A Visit from St. Nicholas» this portrait is referred to in a poem entitled, «To My Children, After Having My Portrait Taken for Them.» The verses have none of the vividness of the well-known «night before Christmas» lines, but they have a sad and touching sincerity. It was from the same good heart that came the rollicking verses that have delighted generation after generation of children and this outpouring of fatherly affection. We quote a few of the stanzas:

This semblance of your parent's time-worn face
Is but a sad bequest, my children dear!
Its youth and freshness gone, and in their place
The lines of care, the track of many a tear!

Amid life's wreck, we struggle to secure
Some floating fragment from oblivion's wave:
We pant for somewhat that may still endure,
And snatch at least a shadow from the grave.

Oh! that the artist's pencil could portray
A father's inward bosom to your eyes;
What hopes, and fears, and doubts perplex his way,
What aspirations for your welfare rise.

Then might this unsubstantial image prove,
When I am gone, a guardian of your youth,
A friend forever urging you to move
In paths of honor, holiness, and truth.

The Repulse of the Confederate Ironclads near Dutch Gap.

GENERAL PORTER'S recent account of the descent of the Confederate ironclads to the vicinity of Dutch Gap, in

¹ See page 201.