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Clement Clarke Moore
- poems -

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Clement Clarke Moore(15 July 1779 – 10 July 1863)

Clement Clarke Moore was an American professor of Oriental and Greek literature at Columbia College, now Columbia University. He donated land from his family estate for the foundation of the General Theological Seminary, where he was a professor of Biblical learning and compiled a two-volume Hebrew dictionary. He is generally considered to be the author of the yuletide poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas", which later became famous as "T'was the Night Before Christmas".

Life and career

He was born on July 15, 1779, to Benjamin Moore and Charity Clarke and grew up in the family residence in Elmhurst, Queens. Clement Clarke Moore was a graduate of Columbia College (1798), where he earned both his B.A. and his M.A..

In 1820, Moore helped Trinity Church organize a new parish church, St. Lukes in the Fields, on Hudson Street, and the following year he was made professor of Biblical learning at the General Theological Seminary in New York, a post that he held until 1850. The ground on which the seminary now stands was his gift.

From 1840 to 1850, he was a board member of the New York Institution for the Blind at 34th Street and Ninth Avenue, which is now the New York Institute for Special Education. He compiled a Hebrew and English Lexicon (1809), and published a collection of poems (1844). Upon his death in 1863 at his summer residence in Newport, Rhode Island, his funeral was held in Trinity Church, Newport, where he had owned a pew. Then his body was interred in the cemetery at St. Luke in the Fields. On November 29, 1899, his body was reinterred in Trinity Church Cemetery in New York.

Moore opposed the abolition of slavery, and owned several slaves during his lifetime.

Chelsea

Moore's estate, Chelsea, was on the west side of Manhattan island above Houston Street, where the developed city ended at the time, and was mostly open countryside. It was once the property of Maj. Thomas Clarke, Clement's maternal grandfather and a retired British veteran of the French and Indian War. Clarke named his house for a hospital in London that served war veterans. The estate was later inherited by Thomas Clarke's daughter, Charity Clarke Moore,

and ultimately by grandson Clement and his family.

When New York City laid down the street grid called for in the Commissioner's Plan of 1811, the new Ninth Avenue went through the middle of the estate, causing Moore to write and publish a pamphlet which called on other "Proprietors of Real Estate" to fight the continued development of the city, which he saw as a conspiracy designed to increase political patronage and appease the city's working class. He also decried having to pay taxes for public works such as creating new streets, which he called "a tyranny no monarch in Europe would dare to exercise."

Despite his protests against urban development, eventually Moore began to develop Chelsea, dividing it up into lots along Ninth Avenue and selling them to well-heeled New Yorkers. He also donated to the Episcopal diocese an apple orchard consisting of 66 tracts for use as a seminary, construction on which began in 1827. This became the General Theological Seminary, where Moore served as the first professor of Oriental Languages, and which still survives on the same site, taking up most of the block between 20th and 21st Streets and Ninth and Tenth Avenues. Ten years later, Moore also gave land on Ninth and 20th Street, east of the avenue, for St. Peter's Episcopal Church.

Family

As a girl, Moore's mother, Charity Clarke, wrote letters to her English cousins that are preserved at Columbia University and show her disdain for the policies of the English Monarchy and her growing sense of patriotism in pre-revolutionary days.

Clement Clarke Moore's wife, Catharine Elizabeth Taylor, was of English and Dutch descent being a direct descendant of the Van Cortlandt family, once the major landholders in the lower Hudson Valley of New York.

The Moore children have several living descendants including members of the Ogden family. In 1855, one of Clement's daughters, Mary C. Moore Ogden, painted "illuminations" to go with her father's celebrated verse.

A Visit from St. Nicholas

The poem, "arguably the best-known verses ever written by an American", was first published anonymously in the Troy, New York, Sentinel on December 23, 1823, and was reprinted frequently thereafter with no name attached. Moore later acknowledged authorship and the poem was included in an 1844 anthology

of his works at the insistence of his children, for whom he wrote it.

A Visit from St. Nicholas is largely responsible for the conception of Santa Claus from the mid-nineteenth century to today, including his physical appearance, the night of his visit, his mode of transportation, the number and names of his reindeer, and the tradition that he brings toys to children. Prior to the poem, American ideas about St. Nicholas and other Christmastide visitors varied considerably. The poem has influenced ideas about St. Nicholas and Santa Claus beyond the United States to the rest of the English-speaking world and beyond.

Moore's connection with the poem has been questioned by Professor Donald Foster, an expert on textual content analysis, who used external and internal evidence to argue that Moore could not have been the author. Major Henry Livingston, Jr., a New Yorker with Dutch and Scottish roots, is considered the chief candidate for authorship, if Moore did not write it. Livingston was distantly related to Moore's wife.

Clement Clarke Moore Park

Clement Clarke Moore Park, located at 10th Avenue and 22nd Street, is named after Moore. The playground there opened November 22, 1968, and it was named in memory of Clement Clarke Moore by local law the following year. The 1995 renovations to Clement Clarke Moore Park included a new perimeter fence, modular play equipment, safety surfacing, pavements and transplanted trees. This park is a well-liked and in-demand playground area used daily by local residents, who also gather there on the last Sunday of Advent for a reading of Twas the Night Before Christmas

A Visit From St. Nicholas

'Twas 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 reindeer,
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 looked like a pedler 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 bowlful 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 filled 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.”

Clement Clarke Moore

Account Of A Visit From St. Nicholas

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Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
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Clement Clarke Moore

Old Santeclaus

But where I found the children naughty,
In manners rude, in temper haughty,
Thankless to parents, liars, swearers,
Boxers, or cheats, or base tale-bearers,

I left a long, black, birchen rod,
Such as the dread command of God
Directs a Parent's hand to use
When virtue's path his sons refuse.

Clement Clarke Moore

The Pig And The Rooster

On a warm sunny day, in the midst of July,
A lazy young pig lay stretched out in his sty,
Like some of his betters, most solemnly thinking
That the best things on earth are good eating and drinking.
At length, to get rid of the gnats and the flies,
He resolv'd, from his sweet meditations to rise;
And, to keep is skin pleasant, and pliant, and cool,
He plung'd him, forthwith, in the next muddy pool.

When, at last, he thought fit to arouse from his bath,
A conceited young rooster came just in his path:
A precious smart prig, full in vanity drest,
Who thought, of all creatures, himself far the best.
'Hey day! little grunter, why where in the world
Are you going so perfum'd, pomatum'd, and curl'd?
Such delicate odors my senses assail,
And I see such a sly looking twist in your tail,
That you, sure are intent on some elegant sporting;
Hurra! I believe, on my life, you are courting;
And that figure which moves with such exquisite grace,
Combin'd with the charms of that soft-smiling face,
In one who's so neat and adorn'd with such art,
Cannot fail to secure the most obdurate heart.
And much joy do I wish you, both you and your wife,
For the prospect you have of a nice pleasant life.'

'Well, said, master Dunghill,' cried Pig in a rage,
'You're doubtless, the prettiest beau of the age,
With those sweet modest eyes staring out of your head,
And those lumps of raw flesh, all so bloody and red.
Mighty graceful you look with those beautiful legs,
Like a squash or a pumpkin on two wooden pegs.
And you've special good reason your own life to vaunt,
And the pleasures of others with insult to taunt;
Among crackling fools, always clucking or crowing,
And looking up this way and that way, so knowing,
And strutting and swelling, or stretching a wing,
To make you admired by each silly thing;
and so full of your own precious self, all the time,

That you think common courtesy almost a crime;
As if all the world was on the look out
To see a young rooster go scratching about.'

Hereupon, a debate, like a whirlwind arose,
Which seem'd fast approaching to bitings and blows;
'Mid squeaking and grunting, Pig's arguments flowing;
And Chick venting fury 'twixt screaming and crowing.
At length, to decide the affair, 'twas agreed
That to counsellor Owl they should straightway proceed;
While each, in his conscience, no motive could show,
But the laudable wish to exult o'er his foe.

Other birds, of all feather, their vigils were keeping,
While Owl, in his nook, was most learnedly sleeping:
For, like a true sage, he preferred the dark night,
When engaged in his work, to the sun's blessed light.
Each stated his plea, and the owl was required
To say whose condition should most be desired.
It seem'd to the judge a strange cause to be put on,
To tell which was better, a fop or a glutton;
Yet, like a good lawyer, he kept a calm face,
And proceeded, by rule, to examine the case;
With both his round eyes gave a deep-meaning wink,
And, extending one talon, he set him to think.

In fine, with a face much inclin'd for a joke,
And a mock solemn accent, the counsellor spoke --
''Twixt Rooster and Roaster, this cause to decide,
Would afford me, my friends, much profesional pride.
Were each on the table serv'd up, and well dress'd,
I could easily tell which I fancied the best;
But while both here before me, so lively I see,
This cause is, in truth, too important for me;
Without trouble, however, among human kind,
Many dealers in questions like this you may find.
Yet, one sober truth, ere we part, I would teach --
That the life you each lead is best fitted for each.
'Tis the joy of a cockerel to strut and look big,
And, to wallow in mire, is the bliss of a pig.
But, whose life is more pleasant, when viewed in itself,
Is a question had better be laid on the sheld,

Like many which puzzle deep reasoners' brains,
And reward them with nothing but words for their pains.
So now, my good clients, I have been long awake,
And I pray you, in peace, your departure to take.
let each one enjoy, with content, his own pleasure,
Nor attempt, by himself, other people to measure.'

Thus ended the strife, as does many a fight;
Each thought his foe wrong, and his own notions right.
Pig turn'd, with a grunt, to his mire anew,
And He-biddy, laughing, cried -- cock-a-doodle-doo.

Clement Clarke Moore