

# Christmas Classic in Author's Hand

"A Visit From St. Nicholas," Written by Clement C. Moore 100 Years Ago and Known to Every Child

*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 on their heads;  
And mamma in her 'kitchen, 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 shutter 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, Dash! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!  
On, Comet! on, Comet! on, Donner and Blitzen!  
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!  
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"*

A LITTLE book bound in red morocco holds the kernel of the children's celebration the world over of Christmas. To look at it no one would dream its hidden words are even now vibrating in the hearts of countless children, yet the charm its bright covers embrace is perennial. It is the manuscript of the famous children's classic, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," written by Clement C. Moore almost a hundred years ago, and dedicated to his own children in particular, and as it has since proved, to childhood the world over.

This season it has as its companion in the library of the New York County Historical Society in Central Park West a photographic copy of the original text enlarged sufficiently to enable it to be easily read, for though the original chirography is quite remarkable for a man of Dr. Moore's years—eighty-two when he indited the poem—it is fine and old-fashioned, and therefore somewhat difficult to read.

The innovation has proved a rare treat to the library patrons, and it is interesting to note with what reverence it is handled by men and women whose childhood days are long past, yet whose holiday memories are still bright. Two pages and a half are consumed in committing the poem to paper, and the repetition of the old familiar lines brings to mind pleasant thoughts of the season, for no one has ever visualized our American Christmas from the children's viewpoint as has Clement C. Moore in his rare little poem.

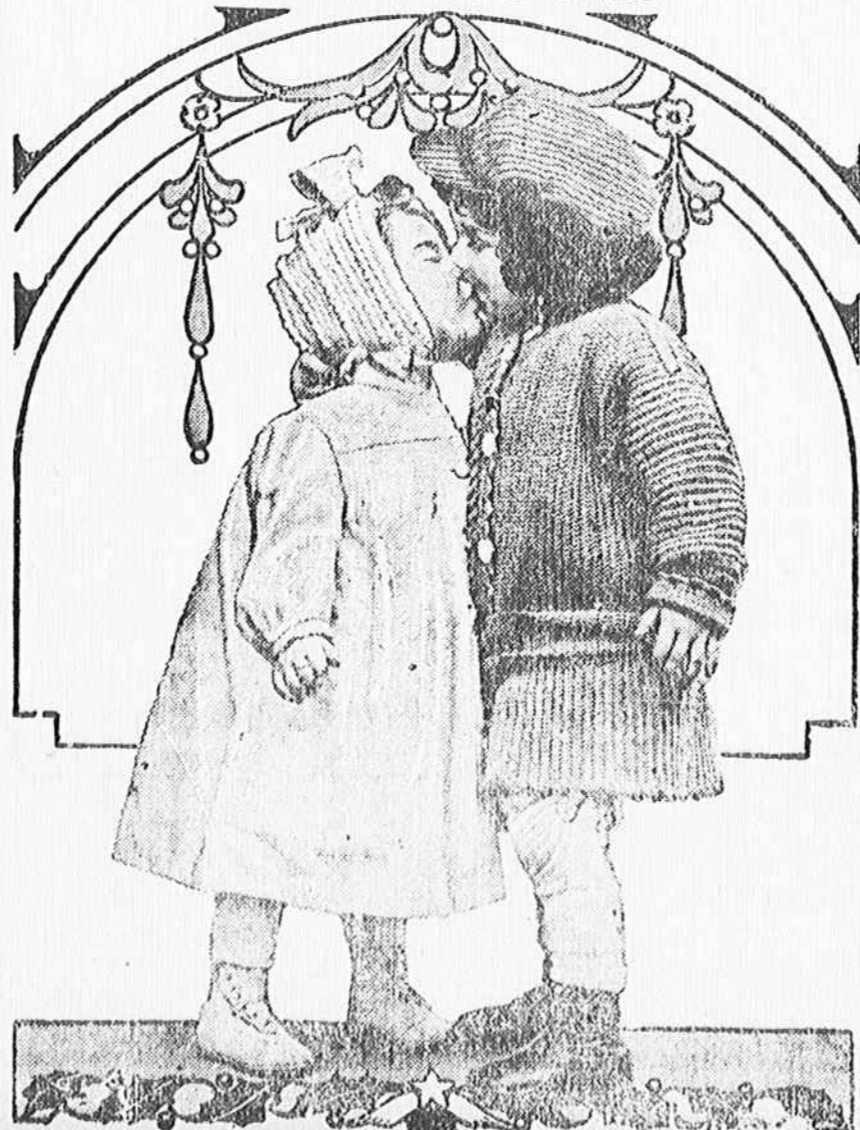
The lines were written as a Christmas gift for the author's two young daughters nearly a century ago, but it has since become a progressive gift to countless other girls and boys. Accompanying the original manuscript when it was presented to the society by T. W. Moore, a relative, some fifty years ago, is a letter in which the writer tells how the verses came to be written and how it happened that they were eventually published.

Mr. Moore lived at the time in a handsome house overlooking the Hudson, at Ninth Avenue and Twenty-third Street. Then Chelsea, like Greenwich Village, further south, was quite remote from the city. Each was largely populated by the Dutch settlers from New Amsterdam. Living near his country seat was a portly, rubicund Dutchman, who suggested to him the idea of making St. Nicholas the hero of a Christmas piece for his children.

It was, however, with no thought of its ever being published that Mr. Moore wrote the poem, but the lines were copied by a relative of the author in her album. From it another copy was made by a friend of hers from Troy. Some time later, much to the surprise of Dr. Moore, it was for the first time published in a newspaper. By such small chance was this choice little poem saved for posterity.

In those days there was no such celebration of Christmas as is now the case, but Dr. Moore, having absorbed the ancient traditions of his Dutch neighbors, wove them into the poem for his children. He did more than that, for he built up around the central thought an interpretation which has gradually come to be our own. As some one has so aptly said, it has become so much part and parcel of our literature that it seldom occurs to people it ever had an author. Since for nearly a hundred years American children have been fed on it, it has now become theirs in very truth.

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