

**LAST DAYS OF  
KNICKERBOCKER  
LIFE IN NEW YORK**

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Last Days of Knickerbocker Life in New York by Abram C. Dayton

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**ABRAM C. DAYTON**

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Yes truly  
Alm C. Daylan

1857

LAST DAYS

OF

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KNICKERBOCKER LIFE

IN

NEW YORK.

<sup>BY</sup>  
ABRAM C. DAYTON.

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1883.

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## INTRODUCTORY.

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A decade has well nigh passed since the following pages were penned. They will be perused now with added interest, for their author bade farewell to earth in August, 1877, and is sleeping by his father's side in Greenwood. The last few years of his life were spent in retirement. His impaired health of body found relaxation in intellectual employment, and many will remember how inexhaustible was the fund of anecdote and pleasant humor, with which he was wont to entertain the household circle, concerning "New York forty years ago."

It would seem as though these talks of other days awakened congenial memories, for when he died, there was discovered a neatly rolled manuscript—now unfolded to the public, letter for letter and line for line, just as he wrote and left it. He was witness to the scenes described, and contemporary with the events detailed. Such of his "troops of friends" whose eyes may meet these pictures of the past, will recall the courtly manner, the amiable, sparkling flow of cultured conversation, the graceful modesty and unreserved honesty which charmed, attracted and won all who came within his environment. Of him may be said, in the words of the master limner of human characteristics:

"A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman,  
Framed in the prodigality of nature;

\* \* \* \* \*  
The spacious world cannot again afford."

C. W. D.

*New York, June, 1886.*





## PREFACE.

If it be an admitted fact that "a man is known by the company he keeps," it cannot be a wrong proposition, that a state of society can best be described and understood by a "bird's-eye view" of habits, customs, occupations and amusements which ruled in every day life at that particular epoch. In the endeavor to present these peculiarities, it matters little if occasional discrepancies, or even exaggerations should creep into details, which are honestly intended to be truthful and, in the main, exact. Time, despite the most conscientious resolves, will light up pleasurable reminiscences of the past with an enhanced glow; it also will throw a denser shadow over recollections of those dark spots met with even in the sunny stage of childhood. Due allowance should always be made for the irresistible influence of prejudice; once engendered it never slumbers; it grows with our growth, strengthens with our strength, and as if it had become a dominant part of our being, rules supreme over man's warring powers, when age weakens reason. The impressions made by early associations are indelibly stamped—

—; "for lives there one

Whose infant breath was drawn, or boyhood's days  
Of happiness were passed beneath that sun,

That in his manhood's prime can calmly gaze  
Upon that bay, or on that mountain stand,  
Nor feel the prouder of his native land."

The landmarks of the Knickerbocker era are one by one disappearing, and very soon all will be swept from the face of Manhattan Island; and scarcely a vestige remains to bring to mind the staid customs and primitive mode of life which ruled in New York only forty years ago.

Forty years ago New York was by comparison a village; one cargo of the mammoth Great Eastern would have stocked its warehouses with luxuries; the passengers of one train of cars from the far West would have overflowed its houses of entertainment; its limited places of amusement were kept alive, but the managers did not amass wealth; its quiet streets offered little inducement for display, but at the same time they afforded limited scope for detective skill; its aggregate municipal outlay would scarcely be considered an object by a modern politician. Home with its legitimate influences ruled supreme, and to the unintroduced traveler from the old world our city offered but few attractions. It was unhesitatingly pronounced *dull* by the English sporting gentleman, "*horrible*" by the Parisian who had revelled in the ever changing pleasures of the gay Capital.

After New York emerged from the financial crash of 1837, occasioned primarily by the disastrous conflagration of 1835, but augmented by the explosion of a land speculation which would be unheeded now, it sprang as if by magic into metropolitan proportions. It became the moneyed centre of the continent; its banks were the depositories of the almost worthless tokens with which