

**HON. SILAS M. CLARK, LL.D.**, Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, was born at Elderton, Armstrong county, Pennsylvania, in 1834. His ancestors were Scotch-Irish, a sturdy race, which probably as much as any other has contributed to the annals of the State and country. These ancestors went to western Pennsylvania from the Cumberland Valley, where in the early affairs of the Commonwealth they occupied an honorable position. Captain James Clark, from whom the Judge is directly descended, was an officer in the war of the Revolution, and after the close of that heroic contest settled near Hannastown, Westmoreland county, the first place west of the Allegheny mountains where justice was administered according to the forms of law. When the Indians under the famous Seneca chief invaded the settlement, burned the town and massacred the large part of the population in 1782, Captain Clark was among those who sought refuge in the fort near by and prepared to defend it against an expected attack. But the attack was not made, for after plundering the town and reducing it to ashes, the Indians withdrew. Soon after this event, Captain Clark removed to South Bend, Armstrong county, where he resided many years, and died, leaving a numerous and respected progeny.

Judge Clark's maternal ancestor was Fergus Moorhead, who, like Captain Clark, went to Westmoreland county from the Cumberland Valley. As early as 1772, Mr. Moorhead with his family settled near the present town of Indiana. He was more than usually well provided with the goods of this world, and brought to the new home, where land was abundant, a liberal supply of cattle, sheep and other domestic animals and fowls to stock his farm, and implements to cultivate it. Like Captain Clark he had dangers to encounter. The forests were overrun with savage beasts and peopled with still more savage men. For four years, however, the family was unmolested, but in July, 1776 while returning from the fort at Kittanning, then under command of his brother Samuel, his horse was shot under him, and he was taken prisoner by a band of Indians, who carried him to Quebec, and sold him to the British. His wife and children, thinking him dead, left Indiana and returned to the Cumberland Valley. After a year of imprisonment, the husband and father was exchanged and rejoined his family, having traveled on foot from New York to the Cumberland Valley. An account of his capture appeared in the *Gazette*, Benjamin Franklin's paper, the files which are still preserved by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. At the close of the Revolution, Mr. Moorhead and his family returned to the border home from which they had been so summarily driven five years before, and there, at the advanced age of seventy-nine, he died. Among his descendants are the prosperous and wealthy iron masters of Pittsburgh, of that name, and others who have distinguished themselves in business and professional life.

In 1835 James Clark, Esq., the father of Judge Clark, removed from Elderton and settled in Indiana, the county seat of Indiana county, where he has since resided in the enjoyment of the respect of his fellow-citizens, by whom he has been honored with every evidence of confidence and esteem, and has had conferred upon him many offices and positions of trust.

With such an ancestor, it is not surprising that Judge Clark exhibits the characteristics that distinctly mark him, namely, warmth of heart, courage, tenacity of purpose and public spirit. He is essentially a man of the people, and through all his busy life has found pleasure in serving his neighbors. His own success has only multiplied the opportunities to help those less fortunate, and he is as free with his means in dispensing

of charity as he is generous in giving aid and assistance to deserving young men who are entering the struggle of life.

Judge Clark obtained his rudimentary education in the public schools of Indiana, in which he continued as a pupil until he sufficiently equipped with learning to enter the academy of that town. There he pursued the course of study that prepared him to enter the Junior class of the Jefferson college at Cannonsburg, Pa., from which he was graduated in 1852, standing fifth in a class of about sixty members. He was an adept in mathematics, a fluent and forceful speaker, and in literary experiences excelled. In recognition of this, the Philo Literary Society invited him to deliver the valedictory address on the occasion of the semi-centennial anniversary of the college.

After his graduation Judge Clark became an instructor in the academy in which he had been prepared for college and continued in this position for two years. He entered into the work with much spirit and earnestness, and aroused among the pupils the greatest enthusiasm. The sympathy with school work which was implanted during that period, has never abated. Soon after he was admitted to the bar, and while a young and struggling lawyer, he was elected director of the public schools of the town, and for twelve consecutive years served the people faithfully and efficiently, in that important capacity. Later on he became one of the projectors and founders of the Normal school of Indiana, of which he has from the first been a member of the trustees and most of the time president of the board. The great success of the institution is attributed largely to his intelligent efforts in its behalf. In recognition of his long and faithful service in the interest of educational progress Lafayette College in 1886 conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, and the compliment was never bestowed upon a more deserving recipient, or the judicial ermine more appropriate for the person of any one.

After two years of service as an educator Judge Clark abandoned the profession and entered the office of a prominent lawyer, then of Indiana, but now Philadelphia, and in 1857, at the age of twenty-three years, was admitted to the practice at the bar of Indiana county. Then, as now, the bar of that county embraced some of the strongest lawyers in the State, but the young aspirant for legal honors was not long in making a place for himself among the most successful, and it is a matter of record that during the ten years preceding his elevation to the Supreme Bench, not a single case of importance was tried in the county in which he did not appear as counsel. His fame was limited to his own county, either, and during the period of his successful practice he received many tempting offers to conduct important cases tried elsewhere. But, as a rule, all such offers were declined, for unless the persons interested were personal friends or home clients he preferred to attend to his extensive and lucrative practice in his own district rather than go to other fields.

In his law practice Judge Clark was always a clear and profound thinker, a strong and logical reasoner and an eloquent advocate of surpassing power. It was a hopeless case, indeed, where he failed to secure a favorable judgment or verdict. Whether arguing questions of law before a court, or questions of fact before a jury, the strong points of his cases were so strongly and forcibly presented that the weak ones were likely to be lost sight of altogether. Nor was it in the trial of causes alone that he excelled. Contracts, wills and other legal papers prepared by him were so skillfully executed, contingencies so

carefully provided for and guarded against, and their terms so clearly expressed that they never gave rise to litigation by reason of their ambiguity.

Judge Clark inherited his political convictions, as his other characteristics, from his ancestry, and from boyhood has been a Democrat. While he holds it to be both the right and duty of every citizen to maintain his political convictions fearlessly, and share the labors and responsibilities of citizenship, he has never been an office-seeker, and, with the exception of membership in the Constitutional Convention of 1873, he never held any office except that one which he now holds. As a member of the Constitutional Convention, he served on the following committees: Declaration of Rights, Private Corporations and Revision and Adjustment. Of that body of Pennsylvania's representative men he ranked as one of the ablest, and Mr. Buckalew, himself a member, in his very able work, "The Constitution of Pennsylvania," referring to the discussion of the judiciary article, makes special mention of some of Mr. Clark's speeches, remarking that they were among the ablest upon the subjects discussed. During his long career at the bar he was frequently invited to accept nominations for office, but invariably declined, with the exception named and one other. He was nominated for president judge of the judicial district composed of Indiana, Westmoreland and Armstrong counties, and was defeated by the Hon. James A. Logan, the adverse majority in the district being too great for one of even his popularity to overcome. His election to the Supreme Bench occurred in November, 1882, and he entered upon the duties of his office in January following.

Judge Clark meets and discharges the duties of advanced citizenship in such a manner as to win the respect, esteem and confidence of all classes of his fellow-men. Every enterprise, having for its object the advancement of their interests or the improvement of his town, finds in him an energetic and active supporter. We have spoken of his interest in education. His interest in agriculture is not less; he took time in the midst of his large practice, not only to cultivate a fine farm that he then owned, but to serve for several years as president of the Agricultural Society of his county, then one of the most flourishing in the State. Perhaps the very best evidence of the esteem in which Judge Clark is held by his fellow-citizens of the county is that fact that in the election to his present position they gave him a majority of one hundred and fifty-one votes over his Republican competitor, whilst the Republican candidate for governor at the same time had a majority of two thousand. In his judicial capacity he stands very high, and is regarded universally by the profession as one of the ablest members of the court. His opinions, singularly brief, are couched in the clearest and choicest language, and as readily understood by the layman as the lawyer. Many of them have received favorable comment from the law critics in the leading periodicals in the country, and all of them are models of forceful and graceful rhetoric.

Upon the death of the late Hon. Morrison R. Waite, chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, the leading newspapers of the State, irrespective of party, pointed to Judge Clark as a man eminently qualified to fill the exalted position thus made vacant. In the support of their petition it was argued that he was in full vigor of intellect and physical strength, young enough to promise a protracted period of useful work, and old enough to bring to the position ripe experience, and an able and honorable record, both at the bar and on the bench.

Judge Clark, on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1859, was married to Clara Elizabeth Moorhead, daughter of William Moorhead, late of Pittsburg, Pa. Her death occurred on

the 17<sup>th</sup> day of January, 1887. This has been the one great sorrow in Judge Clark's otherwise happy and successful life. To speak publicly of a nature so modest and dimple, and life so private as Mrs. Clark's seems almost a wrong, but a sketch of her husband, however slight, would be incomplete without reference to the woman whose gentleness and courage and wisdom were the good angels that, since his earliest manhood, breathe their benediction upon him. Mrs. Clark was of the women whose lives are noiseless, who live at home—she was a wife, a mother, yet her character was so firm, tranquil and self-possessed, that it would have met without doubt or hesitation any form of suffering for conscience or duty. Her absolute truthfulness was a standing rebuke to falseness and pretence, and the memory of her loyalty and unselfishness is a perpetual blessing. In the refined and beautiful home, attuned now to a deeper and sadder note by the loss of the woman who filled it with her rich life, Judge Clark's warm, domestic and social nature finds its truest expression. There he meets his friends and neighbors in genial intercourse and hospitality, and there, amid the highest charms of life, his children are growing into a gracious man and womanhood.