

SERRANUS CLINTON ^VHASTINGS.

[We take great pleasure in copying from the volume recently given to the public by James Parton, Esq., entitled "Men of Progress," the following interesting biographical sketch of the Hon. S. C. Hastings, whose career in Iowa was unfairly and unjustly represented and animadverted upon in a paper by the Hon. Hawkins Taylor, published in the last October ANNALS.—EDITOR.]

SUCCESS is not always an evidence of genius, no more than failure is an assurance of incapacity; yet he who triumphs in life's battle, despite many serious obstacles in his early years—he who, in due time, attains honored prominence among his fellow-men, without such accessories as wealth and influence to render the struggle less arduous—in a word, he who, by dint of his own brain and muscle, rises from poverty and obscurity to affluence and position, surely develops rare ability, and illustrates a life story worthy of emulation. Such a man is the subject of this sketch, and his career is another and convincing example of that success which follows merit, and to which all may aspire who, like him, possess the will, the force of character, and the perseverance essential to its accomplishment.

The ancestry of Mr. Hastings can be traced to times quite remote, and he is supposed to be a descendant of the general of his name who, during the Heptarchy, led the Danish forces into England. His grandfather emigrated from England to Rhode Island early in the seventeenth century, and afterward settled in New York. Robert Collins Hastings, his father, was a well-educated and intelligent mechanic, a native of New York, and married Patience Brayton, of the large family of that name, who were among the first settlers of the counties of Jefferson and St. Lawrence. He was conspicuous in the stirring political events of his day, and was a warm friend and supporter of De Witt Clinton, after whom he named his son. He was in command of a company at Sackett's Harbor at the close of the war of 1812, and, in a personal encounter, provoked by the colonel of

his regiment, he dealt that officer a sword-thrust, on account of which, though never prosecuted *criminaliter*, he was harassed and persecuted by the colonel and his numerous powerful friends, until he became reduced from comfortable affluence to poverty. In this condition he removed to near Geneva, where he died, at the age of thirty-four years, destitute and despondent, leaving a wife and five children, of whom the subject of this notice was the eldest.

Before speaking of the son, we will mention another incident in the career of the father. Robert C. Hastings, during the war of 1812, with two others of Watertown, became security for a paymaster, who, some time after, represented that he had been robbed of \$80,000 in government funds. This statement not being credited, the three sureties repaired, one Sunday morning, to the residence of the suspected paymaster and invited him to a walk in the fields, and thrust him three times into a water-pit, declaring each should be the last unless he would reveal the truth. The third time convinced the culprit of the terrible earnestness of the parties with whom he had to deal, and, after being restored to consciousness, not without considerable difficulty, he finally acknowledged that the money was concealed on his wife's person. Acting on this confession, they immediately returned to the house, and forcibly took possession of the secreted funds, whereupon the enraged wife and proud woman, belonging to one of the first families of the country, unwilling to survive the disgrace of herself and husband, ran to the center of Black river bridge, near at hand, leaped into the stream, and was drowned.

Serranus Clinton Hastings was born November 22, 1814, in Jefferson county, New York. In early youth he passed six years in study at Gouverneur Academy, and, from this time to manhood, no one but himself can appreciate the difficulties, arising from poverty, he had to contend with in meeting the necessities of life, and at the same time prosecuting his studies. At the age of twenty he became principal of the Norwich Academy, in Chenango county, New

York, where he introduced the Hamiltonian system of instruction in the languages, the analytical system of mathematics, and improvements in other branches of education. After one year's successful teaching, he resigned this position, and commenced the study of law with Charles Thorpe, Esq., of Norwich. Here he continued his studies but a few months, and, in 1834, emigrated to Lawrenceburg, Indiana, where he completed his legal course with Daniel S. Majors, Esq. He did not, however, enter at once upon his professional labors, and in 1836, during the bitter presidential contest, we find him editing, in the interests of the democratic party, the *Indiana Signal*, an influential journal, which gave spirited and effective support to Martin Van Buren. His editorial career of six months closed with the triumph of his candidate; and he then parted with his younger brother, who migrated to Texas, enlisted in a company of which he afterwards became captain, fought four years on the Texan frontier and Mexican border, and was killed, with nearly all his command — victims of the treachery of his Mexican allies.

Mr. Hastings resumed his journey westward in December, 1836, and, on reaching Terre Haute, Indiana, presented himself to Judge Porter, of the circuit court, and ably sustained the test of a severe legal examination at the hands of that distinguished jurist. His next move was still further west, until he reached the "Blackhawk Purchase" (now the state of Iowa), and arrived at Burlington, in January, 1837. The following spring he took up his abode on the west bank of the Mississippi, where has since sprung up the city of Muscatine, Iowa, and here resolved to commence the practice of the profession for which he had prepared himself, having first been examined by Judge Irwin and admitted to the bar. At that time this vast stretch of country was attached to the territory of Wisconsin for judicial purposes.

Shortly after his admittance to the bar, Mr. Hastings was commissioned a justice of the peace by Governor Dodge, of

Wisconsin, with jurisdiction extending over the country between Burlington and Davenport, a distance of ninety miles. The western limit of this jurisdiction being unconfined, the ambitious young magistrate, for his own satisfaction, fixed it at the Pacific Ocean—not having the fear of Mexico before his eyes. The first and only case during his term of office was a criminal charge against a man found guilty, by the justice, of stealing thirty dollars from a citizen and three dollars from the court. The sentence, characteristic of the early and summary jurisprudence of the west, was that the prisoner be taken to an adjacent grove and tied to an oak tree, and receive upon his back thirty lashes for the money stolen from the citizen and three lashes for the three dollars taken from the court, and to be thence conveyed over the river to the Illinois shore, and banished from the territory forever. This sentence was duly, formally, and thoroughly executed, in the presence of the court and all the people.

On June 12th, 1838, Iowa was created a separate territory, and Judge Hastings soon after became the democratic candidate of his district for the first legislature to assemble under the territorial government. To this position he was elected, after a very spirited contest; and from time to time thereafter, and until 1846, when Iowa was admitted into the Union, he continued in public life, representing his constituents either in the house or council. During one of these sessions of the territorial legislature, he was elected president of the council, and discharged the duties of the office with marked ability and dispatch. At another session, while a member of the judiciary committee, and associated with Hon. James W. Grimes, since United States senator, he reported from the committee the celebrated statute known in Oregon and Iowa for many years as the "Blue Book," and this severe and comprehensive task was accomplished in ninety days, the limit of a legislative session.

About this time occurred what is known in the history of

Iowa as the "Missouri War," originating in the attempt of the sheriff of Clark county, Missouri, and other Missouri officials, to collect taxes within the territorial limits of Iowa. Governor Boggs, of Missouri, and Governor Lucas, of Iowa, were the acknowledged and opposing leaders of the "war;" and so great was the excitement at that time, and so bitter the feeling engendered, that bloodshed seemed inevitable. Judge Hastings took an active part in the conflict. He left his seat in the legislature and repaired to Muscatine, where he assumed command of the "Muscatine Dragoons" and three companies of militia. Without tents or sufficient clothing, with no arms save pistols and bowie-knives, no forage for his animals, and but a scanty supply of food for his men, he led his forces, in the middle of a severe and bleak winter, to the northern boundary of Missouri. The result of this campaign was the bloodless but glorious capture of the obnoxious sheriff, who was taken in triumph back to the outraged soil of Iowa, and lodged in the Muscatine county jail. Before Major Hastings could again cross the Missouri line, where the Missouri forces were arming and preparing to meet him, the difficulties were adjusted and peace fully restored. Shortly after the termination of this serio-comic campaign, Major Hastings was appointed on the governor's staff, with the rank of major of militia.

Early in 1846, a convention of the people of Iowa assembled at the capital and accepted the boundaries proposed by congress for the new state. Major Hastings was unanimously nominated for congress, and subsequently elected by the people. Iowa being admitted into the Union June 28th, 1846, he took his seat as her representative in the twenty-ninth congress in December. With one exception he was the youngest member of the house—a body then noted for the virtues and abilities of its representatives. John Quincy Adams had not then been removed from the theatre of his triumphs, and Abraham Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglass, Andrew Johnson, and other bright names shone on the roll of members.

In January, 1848, Major Hastings was appointed chief justice of the supreme court of Iowa, which position he held a little over a year, immediately before he emigrated to California. He arrived in that state in the summer of 1849, and settled at Benicia. He was soon thereafter unanimously elected, by the legislature, chief justice of the supreme court, and served out his term of two years with characteristic ability, and to the satisfaction of all.

In 1851 Judge Hastings received the democratic nomination for attorney general of California, to which position he was elected, receiving the highest vote cast at the election, except that given on the same ticket to the candidate for state treasurer. This vote was considered highly complimentary, as the field was occupied solely by his eloquent whig opponent, who thoroughly canvassed the state.

At the end of his two years term of office he retired from public life, and has not since been before the people as a candidate, although he has been prominently interested in, and identified with, the growth and prosperity of his adopted state.

Judge Hastings was the guest of William H. Seward in his tour of observation through Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, in the summer of 1869, and private duties interfered to prevent him from accompanying the distinguished statesman in his journey through our sister republics. On the return of Governor Seward, in the summer of the past year (1870), *en route* for Japan and China, he was the guest of Judge Hastings for about ten days, at his residence in San Francisco. The entertainment was highly pleasing to the governor and his party, and he often speaks of the hospitality of his friend as being "unsurpassed." Judge Hastings claims that the people of California especially owe a debt of gratitude to William H. Seward, and cannot do him too much honor—to say nothing of the respect due to one recognized as a great statesman and philosopher by all civilized nations.

The judge is a married man, and has seven children liv-

ing—three sons and four daughters. He is of an active, nervous temperament, genial manners, and agreeable presence; is tall in stature, of powerful build, and evidently possesses great physical endurance. Although a ready and racy debater, he lays no claim to oratory; nor is he particularly adapted to the legal profession, his nature rebelling against the restraint of judicial office, notwithstanding his legal attainments are considerable, and his conduct and decisions, as the highest judicial functionary of two states, have been generally commended, and seldom, if ever, condemned.

He is a good Latin scholar; is blessed with large and liberal views, extended information, and fine conversational powers, infused at times with wit and humor. Politics and finances generally engross his thoughts; still he is addicted to travel, and, since he left public office, the greater part of his time which could be spared from the proper superintendence of his children's education and the management of his estates, has been spent in extended travels in this country and Europe. He frequently, of late years, visits the scenes of his early life in Iowa, and is always received by the old settlers of that country with demonstrations of pleasure characteristic of the western pioneer.

While wearing the honors and cares of office, whirling in the dizzy round of political agitation, he always husbanded his resources, and managed his private business with consummate wisdom. During the exciting, prosperous times when the state of California was in its infancy, he wisely foresaw and embraced the opportunity of laying a broad and solid foundation for future wealth. Indeed, his whole career, whether viewed from a political or financial standpoint, has been one of unbroken success.

As one of the pioneers of the marvelous development of the far west, he is to-day witnessing the fruits of his early labors, and those of his co-workers in the great field of modern progress. Scarcely beyond the prime of life, he can now look back upon a past well employed, a noble work

accomplished, and enjoy that satisfaction which emanates from a consciousness of success the more abundant that, in advancing individual prosperity, it has also enhanced public good.

The heart of such a man cannot grow old, nor will his memory die.

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"SWINGING AROUND THE CIRCLE."

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BY R. B. GROFF, MARENGO, IOWA.

A PERSON lost on the prairies is very apt to "swing around the circle." The fact has often been observed, but a satisfactory reason (to my mind, at least) has never been assigned. I admit that when a man's mind becomes bewildered or confused, he is not as apt to think correctly as in his calmer, reflective moments. But why should this be a reason why he should go *wrong* sooner than *right*, when they are both equally the subject of choice? This certainly is a curious manifestation of mental phenomena, and worthy of a more thorough investigation.

I remember the first summer I was in Iowa, one night after I had gone to bed, a man knocked rather violently at my door. I asked, "Who is there?" He answered promptly, giving his name, and stating that he wanted to go home to his own house. After a few more remarks, I knew the man by his voice, and arose and admitted him to my log fire. He soon got warm and felt more comfortable, and then commenced telling me that he had been trying to find his house for a long time; "But I cannot see it," said he. "I am not far from home, am I?" He stood about six feet in his boots, had a light, greyish beard, and large, full, rolling eye. From the eyebrows to the summit of the head there was a grade of about forty-five degrees. The hair had

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