JNO. R. G. HASSARD, '55.

GEN. M. T. MCMAHON, '58.

SINCE my return from Calvary where I saw the earth closing slowly on the grave of John Hassard I have several times attempted to answer your request that I write of him for the Monthly.

During the greater part of his half century of life from early boyhood to that same grave in Calvary, he was my friend, and over this friendship, true and earnest and loyal, it is to me both comfort and consolation to remember that there never passed a cloud.

Many times since he laid down to rest "calmly as to a night's repose," I have read the beautiful and touching things that have been said of him by his fellow laborers of the press; I have recalled the beautiful words of Father Campbell which affected so many to tears in the church on the day of his funeral, and I am free to say that I am much discouraged. I never knew a more perfect man in all things than John R. G. Hassard. Strong both in character and acquirements; earnest always in duty; fearless ever in defense of the right; modest and simple as a child with a lofty scorn which never found expression however in uncharitable word of everything that was false or mean, he was without doubt I think the truest type of the Christian gentleman that it has ever been my good fortune to know. He has passed away but his memory and example stay with us an ever living influence for good.

When a life like his has closed leaving fresh memories that are a lasting consolation to those that loved him, it is a pleasure to recall how universal was the esteem in which men held him. His literary work was like himself, pure and strong and simple. I had occasion once before, in the columns of the Monthly, to speak of him as one of the strongest and purest writers of English then at work. This judgment has been confirmed by the unanimous voice of the city press. One trait, however, has been but little noticed. In fact, owing to the earnest character of the work done by him in later years, he had little scope for the play of his humorous fancy. Many a time in earlier days, for his own amusement or that of his friends, he would write sketches and stories full of the most exquisite humor. One of those, written many years ago, is vividly recalled to my mind by his labor in unraveling the cypher dispatches. It was a detective story, written to satirize a class of literature then much in vogue; and it has often occurred to me that nothing even of his more serious efforts of later years exceeded it in literary merit. It was never published, of course, as it referred to some members of our class and it was written with pretended seriousness, describing in a most humorous way a very trivial incident.

His letters afterwards to the Tribune from Bar Harbor were written in a similar playful vein, and certainly were the most interesting descriptions of that famous resort that have been given to the public. His work on the American Cyclopaedia, which he commenced very shortly after graduation and continued through all the volumes of that great work, was of immense advantage to him. Commencing with the highest class of subjects he was rapidly advanced by Messrs. Ripley and Dana until he became the managing editor. Almost every article published passed under his supervision. This naturally gave him a wealth of learning which few men attain. When his work upon the Cyclopaedia was completed he went with Mr. Dana as private secretary to the War Department during the later days of the rebellion. There again his experience was of great use to him.

Afterwards he accompanied Mr. Dana to Chicago, in journalism, but soon returned to the New York Tribune, to which journal the best years of his life were given.

A few words selected from what was said of him by those who knew him best in his profession will convey more to the readers of the Monthly than anything that I may write.

His lifelong friend, Mr. Charles A. Dana, says: "John Hassard, so long known in this town as a distinguished writer in the Tribune upon literature, music, and a wide range of social and practical subjects, is to be buried to-morrow morning from St. Ann's Church, in Twelfth Street, and we cannot allow the occasion to pass without a tribute of esteem and affection for his memory. Intimately and officially associated with him during a considerable portion of the civil war, as we had previously been in the preparation of the American Cyclopaedia, and as we were afterwards in journalism, we knew him as a man of uncommon ability, extensive accomplishments, manly and faithful, high-minded and true. He has departed from this world at far too early an age, and we bid him farewell with sincere sorrow. May his soul have peace, and may the Divine Providence send more such laborers into the harvest field of life."

The Herald says of him: "Journalism and literature lost a bright and most cultivated mind in the death of Mr. John R. G. Hassard, a man who ranked very high as a writer of strong, sweet English, as a critic in whom intellectual honesty was allied with lucidity and learning, and as an editorialist thoroughly at home in all matters of taste and feelings. . . . His delicate sensibility, quaint fancy and extreme care in expressing exact shades of meaning, coupled with his great experience and natural faculty for analysis were recognized as helpful influences in art." . . .

And here follows in the same article what I have had frequent occasion to observe during his long illness of nearly nine years.

"The extraordinary feature of Mr. Hassard's career is the fact that while suffering and weakened by disease, there was a steady flow of thought from his pen which delighted and instructed lovers of art and literature for its virility and sweetness. His book reviews became noted for their power of conveying the whole substance of a book in a few words. When he censured it was always in the spirit of good natured and sincere advice. In private life Mr. Hassard was a gentle, modest man, full of the spirit of helpfulness, a strong defender of principle, a good citizen, an enduring friend, and a true man."
From the New York Times. “Mr. Hassard all his life was a scholar, a keen lover of books, and in every sense of the word a brilliant journalist. He had a style of great clearness, simplicity and force, and his criticisms both of music and of books were absolutely honest. When he condemned a book it was always done in a singularly gentle manner, which never bore a spiteful or savage stamp. The same can also be said of his musical criticisms. His personal character was very pleasant and gentle, and he was greatly beloved by all his associates and friends.”

The Evening Post thus writes of him: “All his work was, in brief, like himself, full of gentleness, dignity and sweetness. He was a very keen observer, had a delightful sense of humor and a quick insight into the motives and conduct of his fellow men, yet he never said a word or wrote a line which carried pain or left a wound. . . . It was a lifelong habit with him never to speak of his own work or his own feelings. From the beginning to the end of his long illness not a word of impatience or complaint escaped him. A more unselfish, generous noble soul never lived. No man ever knew him but to become his friend, and in all the world he had no enemy. He was a true man, a faithful friend, a good workman, a devout Christian, and the world, which is better because he lived in it, is poorer to-day, as it always is when such a spirit departs from it.”

In the beauty and earnest simplicity of this quotation, I cannot help recognizing the hand of his lifelong friend, Mr. William Winter, whose more elaborate tribute to the memory of his dear friend was published in the Tribune a day later. It is particularly grateful to those who loved Mr. Hassard, because of the fact that the description will apply to Mr. William Winter himself.

The Commercial Advertiser says: “He was one of the earliest writers to direct Americans on the right musical road, and many of his criticisms in the earlier years of operatic and symphonic production in this city were masterpieces in their line, and were of the utmost use in informing and cultivating the artistic sense of the community.”

The Mail and Express says: “The late John R. G. Hassard, of the Tribune, was an honor to the profession, whose duties he performed with such rare fidelity and ability, and whose opportunities he improved so nobly. Conscientious in all the details of his work; gifted with the art of conveying the impressions of a nature peculiarly susceptible to the beautiful in nature, art and literature; modest, yet with a just pride in his excellent work; following his profession not as a business, or for its baser rewards, but as a sacred ‘calling,’ he was as much beloved as honored by all who knew him.”

The Hartford Post: “Mr. Hassard was a man of the keenest perceptions. His work as an editorial writer was of the very best, and his thorough knowledge of the literature of music made him one of the most valuable of critics in that field. He was a man thoroughly honored and beloved by the profession.”

From the Freeman's Journal: “Mr. Hassard was naturally gifted with strong powers of analysis and synthesis. It is rare that so evenly balanced an intellect comes into the world. And these powers were cultivated to the highest degree by indomitable will force, which triumphed over sickness, suffering and adverse circumstances.

He was one of the few critics of his time who never sacrificed the expression of what to him seemed the truth to the chance of writing a clever thing. His style—unlike that of the other great writer, Mathew Arnold, who has just passed away—was without that self-consciousness that comes of an over consciousness of being of the elect in literature. It possessed however that quality which Arnold most admired. It was lucid. It was manly.

Following Hassard on any subject the reader felt that he was safe. He—and this is an unusual thing to say of a journalist—wrote only on topics that he had thoroughly mastered. This gave him an unique reputation, and in the ranks of Journalists, when men find their true level very quickly, Hassard's name was always mentioned with the deepest respect which it exacted, because around it clung the aroma of the most solid qualities, as well as of the most beautiful acquirements.”

I close the quotations here, although I have at hand many in the same strain. I think it well for those for whom these lines are written to read and appreciate what one of their predecessors at St. Johns, who was, in his day, the most modest and unassuming student of the college, and who carried with him through life that same unselfish, unassuming modesty, achieved among men without knowing it. Could he return to day he would be overcome with wonderment at the universal praise which his work has commanded, and the high and kindly appreciation in which he was held because of his simple, and manly virtues.

When, as Father Campbell said, “Like his namesake, John, the beloved, he laid his head upon the bosom of his God and slept,” as he was still lying in the room surrounded by so many evidences of his taste and refinement in art and music and literature, his mother said to me “If by the waving of my hand I could call him back I would not do it.” In this there was a pathos that was heroic. She thought of his long years of suffering—his patience, his resignation, his gentle and genial spirit which triumphed over pain and suffering; the kindly greeting which, even up to the last quiet and supreme moment when he passed gently away, was extended to every member of his family, and to the friends who visited him; and then of the ineffable reward that dawned upon him when he said to her and his dear wife the last farewell and laid down to sleep in the peace of God. Quoting again from his friend Mr. Dana, I can only say “May his soul have peace and may the Divine Providence send more such laborers into the harvest field of life.”

To this I, as the last survivor of his class, humbly say, Amen.