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A POLITICIAN OF THE PRIMARY DAYS.
BY HAWKINS TAYLOR.

Some of the early settler and active politicians of the early days of Iowa should be recorded. Amongst the number is S. C. Hastings, now one of the *solid men* of California. Hastings came from the central part of New York to Iowa as early as 1836, and settled in Buffalo, then in Dubuque county where he remained until 1838, when he went to Bloomington now Muscatine. Hastings was peculiar in all things; he was very tall and as straight as a bean-pole, had long black hair, dark complexion, expressionless countenance, was cool and deliberate in all things; a good lawyer, calculated to win, for he had plenty of brains without conscience, and was a good whisky drinker, and remarkably plausible in all things. Governor Hempstead during the first Iowa legislature (then a councilman from Dubuque, and Hastings a member of the house from Muscatine), took great delight in telling about his first meeting with Hastings; it was some two years previous. Two horse thieves had been caught in the act of stealing two horses in Dubuque county; they were put in jail, but saw no lawyer until the meeting of court, when they sent for Hempstead. When Hempstead saw them they told him that they had a lawyer that they had expected before that time, but as he had not got there, they feared that he was sick and could not come; they asked Hempstead to keep off the trial until they could hear from their lawyer.

The next morning soon after the court opened a tall dark visaged suspicious looking character entered the court room and looked around with a searching scrutiny, until he appeared to understand the situation, when he asked for Hempstead, who being pointed out, he approached and announced his name as Hastings, the attorney for the two persons held as horse-thieves. Hempstead introduced him to the sheriff when he went and saw his two clients. The next morning the two prisoners were brought into court and pleaded not guilty to the charge of horse-stealing, and swore that they could not safely proceed to trial for the lack of a material witness. The case was continued. Hastings brought forward a man who swore that he was free from all just debts and claims against him and worth the sum required as bail. Hastings, the bail, and the two horse thieves left on the same steamboat, and neither the horse thieves, bail, or attorney had been heard of in Dubuque thereafter, until he met Hastings as a member of the legislature.

The first time that I met Hastings was in November, 1837, as a brother delegate to the territorial convention that met in Burlington that time to memorialize Congress for a separate territorial government, pre-emption laws, boundary question, etc., etc. We both put up at Mrs. Parrott's and were put in a filled room of some half dozen beds, and two to a bed, and some times more; for if we got up to go down for that which was common through the night, some one else was very sure to take his place before he got back. Hastings had the chills and made several trips that night for medicine; chills were one of the pleasures of Muscatine at that day, but he did not appear to mind them much; he said by filling in a yard or two of red eye that he could manage the chills easily, in fact that they were rather a pleasure, but it was h—ll in the fever. The next year he turned up as a member of the legislature from Muscatine county. Gov. Lucas had settled in, and was very popular in Muscatine, and his friend Fuerson, a good man, was the other member from that county; Hastings was an active member during the session, at

first the earnest friend of the governor in his fight with the legislature and then a most bitter enemy. During the session of the legislature Hastings had several hundred dollars in counterfeit money; he was the acknowledged employed attorney for the numerous bands of thieves and counterfeiters that at that day infested the upper Mississippi, and that he might not himself be cheated, and also know whom he was to defend, a bill of each new counterfeit issued was sent to him; he did not deal in the article, at least he said so, he only defended those that did. There were many curious incidents of Hastings in that legislature, but they will be more appropriate in an article on that session. At the end of the session the people of Muscatine county appeared to be unanimous in denouncing him for his opposition to Governor Lucas, and in their praise of Fuerson. Hastings swore that he would never be a candidate again, but as the election approached in the fall, and candidates for the legislature began to announce themselves, Fuerson was the universal favorite, Hastings still pretending that he would not be a candidate; but he was active in getting other candidates out in all parts of the county, assuring each one of his support. There was no party nomination then. Amongst the candidates was Tim Clark, a citizen of Moscow. Tim was a whig, and a good fellow. He says before the election, Hastings announced himself as a candidate, and sent runners to each neighborhood in the county to work for him. He had previously arranged with Clark— privately and confidentially—to unite with him in mutual support. The result was, that Hastings and Clark were both elected, and Fuerson was defeated.

Hastings was afterwards elected to congress for one session. Up to that date it was the custom to give members of congress such stationery as they needed, leaving the amount to their own honor. After that session, however, the law was changed, giving them a certain sum, that they could either take in stationery or money. It is said that the amount *needed* by Hastings that winter induced the passage of that law. That is the only good law of congress that can be placed to his credit, I believe. After that he was for a short time supreme court judge. For many years Governor Lowe and Hastings lived in Muscatine. Lowe ranked as the first lawyer in that part of the state at that time. Probably no two men were more unlike than Lowe and Hastings,— the one a temperance whig, the other a whisky democrat—the one, honor itself—the other, — well, I will not say in this article.

At that time, Joe Leverage was the captain of the mass of Hastings's clients. Joe lived out somewhere in my friend Tuthill's county, and the grand jury charged him with taking a horse that did not belong to him, and the chances were that the fact would be proven on him. Joe concluded that it would not do to risk Hastings—he needed a better lawyer, so he employed Governor Lowe, and Lowe objected to having Hastings associated with him. Lowe examined the indictment and said that it was not good. But Joe was uneasy,—he was like the Irishman that feared justice,—and each day of court he would go to Lowe and suggest that it might be best to employ Hastings, but Lowe would not agree to it. Finally, Lowe got so vexed that he told Joe that he would give up the case, and that he might employ Hastings. "Oh, no! oh, no! " says Joe, "I can't do without you," and, lowering his voice to a whisper, he said, "It may become necessary to steal the indictment." Lowe told him that if that was the object, he must employ Hastings or some one else than himself. Joe got off without the indictment being stolen.

Before Hastings was elected to congress he joined the Methodist church, but he left his robes in Iowa. Since in California he was for a short time on the supreme bench. He is now a devoted Catholic (at least, he says so), has made a large fortune, and is, of course, respectable, as all men of wealth must be. Hastings only lacked honesty, principle, and a conscience to have made him one of the first men of the state. I do not suppose that his wealth in California has paid him for his loss of position in Iowa, even in his own selfishness and selfish nature.

