COMMEMORATIVE TRIBUTES TO
LA FARGE, ABBEY, AND
MILLET

By THOMAS HASTINGS

READ AT
SESSION FOLLOWING ANNUAL MEETING OF
THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
ARTS AND LETTERS
NEW YORK CITY
DECEMBER 13, 1912

REPRINTED FROM VOL. VI
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By Thomas Hastings

While here assembled, let us pay tribute to the distinguished services of three members of this Academy who have recently been taken from us: John La Farge, Edwin Austin Abbey, and Francis Davis Millet. As they lived in their work, they are still alive in the influence their untiring endeavors have produced upon modern art. They have helped to quicken within us our sense of beauty, and to aid us to understand better its uplifting and refining influences. Such lives largely contribute to the happiness of their fellow-men. Those of us who enjoyed personal intercourse with them must

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realize how they themselves found happiness in their work; they were happy temperamentally, and so imparted happiness to others. There was another inherent quality of character of which they all had full measure—that enthusiasm which made all intercourse with them interesting and stimulating. It was the enthusiasm of the real artist, the enthusiasm which stimulates the creative faculties and intuitively quickens the insight and understanding. When we find the experience and knowledge which come with age stimulated by an enthusiasm which does not grow old under these conditions, men have retarded their declining years and have often produced their best work late in life. The flowing stream never becomes stagnant. While a man's interest in the opportunities of life continues, the possibilities of productivity are unlimited. We may think that by observation we have learned what
to expect of one another, but if we still have enthusiasm, we need know no limitations in what we may expect of ourselves. The loss of enthusiasm is the end of the artist's career.

John La Farge was a young old man. He was born in New York in March, 1835. His father was a Frenchman, an officer in the navy, who, in 1806, took part in an expedition to Santo Domingo, where he married the daughter of a planter who is said to have had some skill as a miniature-painter. John La Farge married Margaret M. Perry, the granddaughter of Commodore O. H. Perry. In his early life La Farge undertook the study of law; but, always attracted to art, it was not long before he devoted himself wholly to the study of painting. At that time, while in Newport, he studied under William Morris Hunt. The charm of some of his early
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landscapes, painted there and while he was studying with Couture in Paris, is well remembered by those of us who have seen them at our current exhibitions.

It was in the early seventies that he first began experimenting in glass that afterward resulted in his ingenious and well-known new methods of construction and use of materials, with their accompanying brilliancy of color. His work in this direction made a remarkable impression upon American glass. Through all the years of glass-working he continued to paint, producing many important decorations, more especially in some of our churches. An event in his life was when H. H. Richardson commissioned him to decorate Trinity Church in Boston. Later, his work appeared in the Church of the Ascension, the Church of the Paulist Fathers, the Brick Church, and the St.
Thomas's Church that was destroyed by fire.

In 1886, La Farge went to Japan with his friend Mr. Henry Adams, and afterward to the South Sea Islands. His correspondence, which later appeared in the *Century Magazine*, established him in the minds of the public as a writer of unusual natural ability. In his later work as a literary man he showed an unusual degree of versatility and flexibility of mind. For those of us who know well the extent and unusual quality and merits of the man's talents, it is futile at this time to comment further upon his undertakings, his drawings, his water-colors, his paintings, his glass, or his writings, or to attempt to enumerate the many honors he received during his long and successful life—honors not only from his own country, but from France, England, and Germany. Had we time, we would rather dwell upon
him as our friend and fellow-Academician, a remarkable character, an artist-philosopher. Those of us who knew him would agree, I believe, that, when all else had been said, to know him and to talk with him was to find La Farge at his best. He was indeed an artist in conversation, a man of ideas, with as brilliant a coloring in his personality as in his painting. His talk, drawn from his broad experience, was always full of suggestion, delightful in anecdote and incident, with a profound sense of humor, and a literary quality of great refinement unusual even in written form.

From the time of Benjamin West until John S. Sargent, there has always been a considerable number of self-expatriated American artists who have given renown to American art in Europe. Edwin Austin Abbey was unquestionably one of the most illus-
trious of this number. He was born in Philadelphia, April 1, 1852, a grandson of Roswell Abbey, a prosperous merchant, who was also an inventor of type-foundry appliances and a man of decided artistic temperament. He was the son of William Maxwell Abbey, who was likewise a Philadelphia merchant, and something of an amateur artist.

In 1866, when only fourteen years of age, Abbey published his first drawings in Oliver Optic's paper, Our Boys and Girls. During the early years of his life he was a student in the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts. Coming to New York at the age of twenty, he quickly developed, and was soon after employed by Harper's Magazine. Here he acquired a remarkable facility as a draftsman in black and white. His distinguished work as an illustrator gave him at an unusually early age a wide and popu-
lar reputation. Even at this time Old-World legends had a potent influence upon his character and the general direction of his work. In his portrayal of old songs and ballads, as well as in his illustrations of historic characters, he seemed to bring to life and to make real the finest fancies of English literature. *She Stoops to Conquer, The Deserted Village*, Herrick's poems, and Shakespeare's plays, were brought into a new light by the facile pen of the young artist. It was perhaps this special interest in English literature that, in 1883, influenced him to make his residence in England.

At frequent intervals his work, more especially his drawings, pastels, and water-colors, has been shown both here and abroad at the exhibitions of the numerous societies to which he belonged. It always attracted the admiration of a large and appreciative audience. It was not until 1895,
through the influence of Charles F. McKim, that he was commissioned to paint his first important decoration, the well-known series of panels, The Holy Grail, for the Boston Public Library, which, with Sargent’s notable decorations in the same building, have become renowned as perhaps the most remarkable mural decorations ever painted by American artists. Not only did he show in this comparatively new undertaking his great ability as a painter, but he fulfilled to the utmost what his earlier work had promised—a studious conscientiousness in all matters of detail, with a remarkable capacity for research into the costumes and customs of past ages.

In 1890 he married Gertrude Mead of New York, and for many years they lived in Fairford, Gloucestershire, England, surrounded by a most artistic atmosphere.

In 1901 he was commissioned by
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<td>King Edward VII to paint for Buckingham Palace the official picture of the coronation. From that time the greater part of his life was devoted to painting, his last and most recent work being three important decorative panels for the State House at Harrisburg, in his native State. Unfortunately, he did not live to see this work completed.</td>
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<td>In this country many honors and university degrees were conferred upon him, and he was the recipient of many foreign decorations, and in 1898 he was made a Royal Academician. His last year was the sixtieth of his life, and judging from the progressive excellence of his work and the vitality and enthusiasm of the man, there was every promise of even greater and finer results if he had lived longer to reap more fully the benefits of experience and his constant and untiring habits of work.</td>
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An unparalleled event in the history of navigation was the foundering of the great steamship Titanic. Francis Davis Millet was one of her passengers. In mid-ocean, under a starlit sky, which had dissolved the darkness of the night, he must have seen the last of this world. Amid the confusion and débris of the sinking ship, he could see only an unbroken horizon over the waters of the Atlantic, a circle on the earth's surface, emblem of eternal life. Thinking more of the safety of others than of himself, our friend was taken from us in the fullness of his power. I know of no other American artist who has served such high and varied purposes with such unselfish devotion to the interests of American art, and with such an untiring capacity for work, unhesitatingly sacrificing his time for the good of others. Indeed, he was so public-spirited that I have often
thought he gave himself so freely that his unselfishness seriously interfered with his own private interests in life.

Though gentle and unassuming, he was a leader of men, an educator of men. He would have succeeded in whatever he might have undertaken. He had a singular gift for making friends. To know him was to love him. He had a remarkable fund of interesting information on the widest variety of subjects.

We were members together of the National Fine Arts Commission in Washington, where I learned to know what a delightful privilege it was to work with him. Intellectually he was somewhat inclined to wander, being often drawn into other channels than art.

He was born at Mattapoisett, Massachusetts, in November, 1846. He was the youngest man of sixty-six I have
ever known. During the Civil War he was a drummer in the 50th Massachusetts Regiment. In 1869 he was graduated from Harvard, later associating himself with Boston journalism, and devoting what spare time he could find to the study of art. It was not long before he went to Europe and entered as a student in the Royal Academy of Antwerp, where he made great progress and showed much promise. He then traveled widely, returning to Boston to assist La Farge in his work in Trinity Church.

For his brilliant services as correspondent for the New York and London papers in the Russo-Turkish War, and for bravery on the battle-field, he was decorated by the czar. Later he was sent as a war correspondent to the Philippines. He was chairman of the Advisory Committee of the National Museum, a member of the Municipal Art Commission of New York, a trus-
tee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, secretary of the American Federation of Arts, and member of the National Fine Arts Commission. He had recently been appointed the executive officer of the United American Academy and the American School of Classical Studies at Rome, and was returning on the Titanic after visiting Rome in the interest of this institution. It seemed a fitting place for him, with his unusual ability for organization.

In 1879 he married Elizabeth Greeley Merrill. While their home was in Broadway, Worcestershire, England, his life in recent years was spent mostly between Washington, New York, and Rome. With all this time given to traveling and public affairs, it seems almost incredible that he could have produced so much in painting, which was the actual means of his livelihood. He had traveled extensively all over
the world, and spoke nearly all of the principal languages of Europe.

In 1891 he made a canoe trip the full length of the Danube for Harper Brothers, who published his book entitled *The Danube from the Black Forest to the Black Sea*. About the same time appeared his collection of short stories and his translation of Tolstoi's *Sebastopol*.

In recent years he devoted a great deal of time to decorations. The historical paintings in the capitol at St. Paul, the decorations in the custom-house at Baltimore, and a historical decoration in the court-house at Newark, New Jersey, are among his most important later works.

Few men enjoyed life as he did, and few men gave more enjoyment to others. He will be missed, and no one man can be found to fill his place—alas, so many places!

Millet was a strong, intelligent man
of character, with a sweetness and simplicity almost childlike. His nature was joyous, which attracted men to him, and always assured him their collaboration in whatever work he undertook.

John La Farge died November 14, 1910; Edwin Austin Abbey died August 1, 1911; Francis Davis Millet died April 15, 1912.