Reviews and Notices


There was much of interest in the life of Thomas R. Marshall. A successful lawyer, as success was rated in the small county seat of a rural county, he rose to be Governor of Indiana and Vice-President of the United States. He was a shrewd politician, and the possessor of a rather keen wit which he loved to indulge. He had ideas of his own and was quite independent, sometimes to the point where he could be called stubborn. He was honest and inclined to be frank in expressing himself. He was ambitious. He possessed ability, though he was not a man of broad vision. The fates were kind to him while he lived and have been kind to him in regard to his biographer, if it is true that a high class biographer is one who tells a straight-forward, unvarnished story.

Dr. Thomas has had access to the best sources of information and he has used them intelligently and with fairness. He tells the story of Marshall's life simply and naturally. Three short chapters cover more than fifty years. After being graduated from Wabash College in 1873, the "Country Lawyer" was scarcely heard of outside of the congressional district in which he lived, for thirty long years. In this period, he practiced law and enjoyed a fair income. He made many political speeches. He did not marry until he was past forty. Undoubtedly Mrs. Marshall deserves great credit for his later successes. From college days until after he was married, he used intoxicants. In 1898, he even took "the cure," a step which surely helped to make his later successes possible. His biographer has learned the facts and has not suppressed them, which is well. Statements that have floated around Indiana for years in regard to the habits of Marshall can now be checked and forgotten.

The pre-convention campaign of 1908 was so skillfully conducted that Marshall was nominated for governor in the Democratic state convention of that year to the surprise of the intelligent and able Thomas Taggart. For an adequate explanation of this success of Marshall, regarded as something of a miracle in Indiana politics, the public has waited for more than thirty years. It can now be read in chapters
four and five of the volume under review. The story of the four-year term as Governor of Indiana is not marked by dramatic events. Marshall was considered a radical by Indiana’s confirmed conservatives, but he was a mild liberal, to say the most, who did not veer farther to the left than the middle of the road. The author portrays him truthfully as an executive who stands out well among the governors of his period.

The strength and independence of Marshall, coupled with the sanity and political genius of Taggart and the situation that developed in the Baltimore Convention of 1912, brought about the placing of Marshall on the ticket with Woodrow Wilson. Renominated with Wilson in 1916, Marshall served eight years as Vice-President. From the beginning of the extremely serious illness of President Wilson in October, 1919, to March, 1921, Marshall’s post was a critical one. This was the most trying period of his public career, and he acquitted himself well. It was not what he did but what he didn’t do that revealed elements of greatness in his make-up. Dr. Thomas has handled the last seventeen months of Wilson’s second term with skill and without bias.

Marshall lived four rather uneventful years after he left the vice-presidential office, and a single chapter suffices for these years. Like many other public men, he was more conservative after the World War than before. Dr. Thomas says: “Marshall demonstrated a markedly growing conservatism as his years advanced.” If this affected his standing, it increased the respect in which he was held in his home state. Much water has flowed under the bridge since the death of Marshall in 1925, and he has been somewhat forgotten. Nevertheless, a reading of the excellent biography which is now offered to the public will greatly interest numerous persons, especially citizens of Indiana, to all of whom it is highly recommended by the reviewer.

WILLIAM O. LYNN


Religion was a significant phase or condition of American frontier life. Religion was ever present on the frontier—at times somnolent and yet at other times explosives.