BOOK REVIEWS


Have you ever wished you could step backward in time to some great moment in history, and experience its drama firsthand with the warmth of feeling and the excitement and suspense of its contemporaries; that you might cast aside for a little while the cold intellectual analysis of the social scientist and see through the eyes and throb to the heartbeat of those who were the participants in or witnesses of those events? Or, that you might, in somewhat of a reverse Rip Van Winkle fashion, wake up in an earlier age, peer over the shoulder of one of your ancestors as he pored over the latest gazette and share with him his doubts and uncertainties? Catherine Drinker Bowen in *Miracle at Philadelphia* has given her readers an opportunity to do this.

In a superb pen portrait of men and events she leads them behind the locked doors of the State House at Philadelphia. She introduces the delegates as they come and go, and permits her readers to be eye-witnesses of the debates, to feel the dry heat of flaring tempers and sharp differences and to experience the humid heat that hung like a pall over the city during the long summer months. The picture is presented with sympathy and understanding, but without sentimentality. The delegates are cast neither in the mold of demi-gods nor of base selfish schemers. They are portrayed as human beings with various capacities of mind and temperament. The author points out their strengths and weaknesses, their peculiar graces, mannerisms and dress. There is balance and judgment.

If the day-to-day chronicle of convention debate, with its confusing backtracking as delegates moved to reconsider issues seemingly put at rest on an earlier vote, makes more difficult the examination of conflicting positions on particular provisions of the Constitution, it nevertheless gives a truer picture of the frustrating process of reconciling sectional and personal differences. The reader vicariously shares the suspense and irritation that tried the tempers of these men as they faced the tedious thrashing-out again and again of points of difference, until by compromises, great and small, they ultimately agreed on the Constitution. Some delegates, of course, never were reconciled and
left the convention or refused to sign the convention report.

For the young scholar this book presents a lesson in the value of original documentary sources, of diaries and letters not only for documentation but to add depth and color, and to transform historical characters from lifeless wax figure museum pieces into flesh-and-blood human beings. For the scholar who is familiar with the records of the convention, with the philosophical beliefs of the convention leaders, with the literature of social and economic interpretation of their motivations and with critiques of the balance of interests on which the success of the new framework of government rested, there are no new insights. But, this was not the purpose of the author. For the laymen it is an old story that has been made refreshingly new.

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In authorship, organization, content, sponsorship and typography, this book is a distinct success. It has excellence of many kinds.

Lengthy comment could be made on the type of history exemplified by this "Study." It is but one of many volumes on the political history of Pennsylvania. There is in such volumes much variety. Generally they are narrowly restricted in the period of time taken as the limit of consideration and treatment; and within the area covered, the temptation to indulge in detail is sometimes irresistible. The names of individuals, parties, conventions, meetings and other items over-rule not only the common man but the common historian. When, as is often the case, political history is tied up tightly with party politics, the situation is aggravated.

Fortunately the trained historiographer gives politics some and often much of the old Greek conception of politics as inclusive, as involving the whole circumstances and society of an era.

That Dr. Evans has the broad concept of politics, is evidenced in several ways. It appears, though faintly, in the title, it crops out in the preface, it is indicated in the dozen chapter headings. It is seen clearly in the bibliography and footnotes, it shows up in the index, and is obvious in the context. The author has, indeed, consulted a vast