John Jay, Defender of Liberty, by Frank Monaghan

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Mr. Monaghan presents the life of John Jay in truly reportorial style. As the author points out in the preface, he has had access to sources of material hitherto untouched and in reading his work one is led to believe that Mr. Monaghan's greatest effort was exerted in the accumulation and marshalling of this material in chronological order. Be it the cause or the effect, this wealth of material characterizes the style of the work. Every comment by the author is substantiated by direct quotations from, or footnotes to the documentary sources. The reader is given the raw material and allowed to draw his own conclusions and do his own reading between the lines. Rarely does Mr. Monaghan allow himself the luxury—as do many of his coevals—of injecting his personal conclusions or opinions.

Of special interest to the reviewer were the chapters dealing with the pre-Revolutionary period and the work of Jay as the first chief justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Mr. Monaghan brings forth the facts to show that in the pre-Revolutionary period personal aggrandizement, political machinations, and graft colored the conduct of many "statesmen" in their handling of the problems of that day. Though disaster could apparently have been avoided by the concentration of united endeavor toward obviously wise objectives, then as now, the petty motives of picayunish representatives vitiated the purposes and harassed the movements of that day. The difference between the reaction of the vested interests and the radicals to British oppression also sounds a note familiar in the present conflict between these interests.

In regard to John Jay's work as the first chief justice, Mr. Monaghan does much to take Jay out of the shadow cast by John Marshall. One is led to the conclusion that the tasks presented to each were so different in nature that had the two men been interposed a reputation like that of Marshall's would have been Jay's. Certainly the popular fallacy that the United States Supreme Court lacked dignity prior to the reign of Marshall is blasted, and the fact that at Jay's time the Justices of the Supreme Court were itinerant is made to lend rather than subtract dignity.

In conclusion, it cannot be overemphasized that the work under review is a purely factual exposition. If the book has one fault it lies not in this overzealous adherence to the facts, a rare quality, but rather in Mr. Monaghan's insistance that such adherence be made wearily clear to the reader. One accustomed to the lax style of modern biographies is likely to become exasperated by the tempting footnotes (that lead of course to the back of the book rather than to the bottom of the page) which instead of expanding interesting bits merely point out the source of the proof of factuality.

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