

The
FORTY - EIGHTH GOVERNOR
of
C O N N E C T I C U T
was
T H O M A S M . W A L L E R

Left an orphan at nine years of age, with absolutely no means of support, he began earning his own livelihood as a newsboy on the streets of New York—He later became a cabin boy and made several long voyages to sea—His native ability attracted attention and he was adopted by a New London family and educated, becoming one of the ablest barristers and orators in this country, honored by political trusts, and appointed by President Cleveland as United States consul-general at London, England



Thomas M. Waller

T H O M A S

M c D O N A L D

W A L L E R

IN the life of Thomas M. Waller there is much romance. It is a matter of note that the majority of the governors of Connecticut have been the architects of their own fortunes, and it is especially true of Governor Waller. He was born in New York about the year 1839 and was the son of Thomas Armstrong. His parents died when he was nine years old. Left an orphan at this tender age, with absolutely no means of support, in a great city, he began at once to lead the life of a newsboy. From that time on he sold newspapers about the crowded streets in the lower portion of the city, and every day was filled with hard work. He started his successful career at this age by extraordinary devotion to duty and submission to the circumstances in which he was placed. His best customers were found about the old Tammany Hall of those days, and it is said that more than one night he "pillowed his head on the steps of the old Tribune building."

After a while he took to the sea and made several long voyages as cabin boy and cook-mate. This life agreed with him and he probably would have passed his days on the ocean had not a

circumstance occurred which changed his whole career. In 1849 he made arrangements to ship to California on the "Mt. Vernon," sailing from New London. About the time the ship was to sail the late Robert K. Waller, of that city, found the boy on the wharf, took a fancy to him at once, and adopted him. Recognizing the ability the young man possessed, Waller had him take his own name, and the boy was given every advantage by his benefactor. He attended the schools in New London, and was graduated from the Bartlett High School with honors. He then studied law and was admitted to the New London County bar in 1861. Soon after, however, he enlisted as a private in the Second Regiment, Connecticut Volunteers, and was appointed fourth sergeant in Company E.

After going to the front with his regiment Waller was compelled to resign because of an eye difficulty. Although very young he developed unusual oratorical powers and throughout the war helped the Federal cause by delivering many patriotic addresses during those dark days. His magnetic words gave renewed courage to many faltering men. Returning to New London, he entered the practice of his profession and soon gained an envious reputation as an able advocate. At the same time Waller entered politics as a Democrat and was an acknowledged leader almost from the start.

He was elected a representative from New London to the General Assembly in 1867, 1868, 1872 and 1876. During the

last session he was speaker of the House. Waller was elected secretary of state on the Democratic ticket with James E. English in 1870, and in 1873 was honored by being chosen mayor of his adopted city. He was chosen state attorney for New London County in 1875, a position which he held until 1883. In 1882 Waller was nominated for governor and after a memorable campaign in which he visited all portions of the state, making speeches in his own behalf he was elected by a majority of 2,390 over W. H. Bulkeley. He served as chief executive from 1883 to 1885. His charming personality, courtly manners and pronounced ability made his name famous throughout the country. Soon after retiring from the governor's chair in 1885, President Cleveland appointed Governor Waller as United States consul-general at London, England. He held this position until 1889, when he returned to the United States and resumed the practice of his profession. His famous speech at St. Louis in 1888, when he placed in nomination Grover Cleveland, for president proved remarkable as oratory. He was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1901.

Governor Waller has held no political office of late years but has attained great eminence at both the Connecticut and New York bar. A writer in commenting on his career says: "Governor Waller has consistently been a Democrat in politics. He has been frankly independent on many occasions in convention of his party, and in other places of partisan debate. As an orator

T h e G o v e r n o r s o f C o n n e c t i c u t

he is impressive to a degree which, on occasion of party strife in important gatherings, had given him a magnetic hold of men, and no man of his party in the state has so often carried conviction by the power of eloquence or any other influence."