

## **What This Country Needs is a Really Good Five-Cent Cigar**

by

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In 1908 William Howard Taft captured the presidency with relative ease. Nationally the Republican Party maintained a comfortable position in both the House and the Senate. Indiana was different. Taft carried the state (with its 15 electoral votes) by a plurality of merely 10,000 votes, and Thomas Riley Marshall of Columbia City won election as governor of Indiana by the same margin. In addition to the governorship, the Democrats also picked up ten seats in the state Senate and thirteen in the state House. The House then had a Democratic majority, and the Senate would, too, after the next elections. In the congressional races, Democrats gained seven house seats to make the state's delegation eleven to two.

Marshall's success and his party's victories brought him immediate attention from the Democratic Party, which for a time looked at him as a potential presidential candidate. A reasonably, although not exceptionally ambitious man, Marshall gave some thought to his chances for the nation's highest office, as did Thomas Taggart, the party leader who had helped make Marshall governor. Prospects for the nomination dimmed, though, as they both knew, in face of substantial support for the early favorite, Champ Clark, the Speaker of the House, and the rise of Woodrow Wilson, the Governor of New Jersey, who (successfully) challenged him. But Taggart did see one opportunity and took it at the Baltimore convention — a deal with the Wilson campaign that made Marshall the Democrats' vice-presidential candidate.

Marshall's record as governor displayed a progressive spirit. He asked for bills to protect investors against watered stock in corporations, to regulate insurance companies, to give boards of health more authority to prevent pollution and to provide healthier conditions in tenement

houses. He proposed auditing public accounts by a State Board, a reform the legislature first resisted, then adopted. He was an active governor whose “leadership was vigorous, especially after the 1910 election gave the Democrats majorities in both houses of the legislature. Marshall’s reforms included new taxes and regulation of railroads, telegraphs, and telephone companies. New laws regulated employer’s liabilities and limited the use of child labor.” (Davis, 1999, p. 577)

Although eager for certain reforms, Marshall’s liberalism was moderate. He was, as he described himself, “a progressive with the brakes on.” (Davis, 1999, p. 577). He did not favor women’s suffrage (but then, Wilson dragged his feet on the issue until he finally put some effort into supporting the 19th amendment). He had no desire to turn the functions of government, as he put it, into “either a business asset or a guardianship over the incompetent, the ignorant and the shiftless.” (Thomas, 1939, p. 69) Marshall was no friend of powerful vested interests and refused to allow his administration to act as their servant. At the same time he had no inclination to propose radical social legislation (although some of his Republican opponents considered his programs dangerously liberal) or to open the public purse to experimentation.

Marshall’s selection as candidate for vice president meant regional balance to the 1912 Democratic ticket and a way to capture the electoral votes of Indiana, a swing state through much of its history. Theodore Roosevelt’s candidacy as a (Bull Moose) Progressive badly split the Republicans, and the Democrats won the election. After a somewhat rocky start, Marshall established himself as thoughtful, well-liked national figure and made it his business to master the arcana of presiding over the Senate. He ably filled in for Wilson during the president’s illness but consistently refused any notion of usurping Wilson’s official position.

### **Thomas R. Marshall Remembered**

For what, then, is Thomas Marshall best known? How is he remembered? His solid record as governor of an important Midwestern state? His proposal of a new constitution for Indiana that would curb the power of the judiciary, which, he believed, tended to interfere with the business of the other branches of government? His integrity? His service during the Wilson administration?

No, his career and accomplishments are largely forgotten. This, Calvin Davis writes, “is unfortunate, for even his speeches, which included his wittiest remarks, were essays of substance and ideas. His service as governor was distinguished. In his difficult role as Wilson’s vice president, he made few mistakes and conducted himself with tact and grace.” (Davis, 1999, p. 578) He is known for a flash of wit, his remark about a five-cent cigar.

“Literally millions of persons,” Charles Thomas writes in 1939, “recall this quip, while scarcely thousands know that Marshall was ever a progressive governor of Indiana.” (Thomas, 1939, p.174) He continues, “Many of Marshall’s more serious-minded friends regret that his fame is being perpetuated through successive generations by the witty sally of the moment. They would prefer to see emphasis placed on the statesmanship of a governor whose

administration brought many constructive laws, and on the contributions of a vice-president who was dependable in time of need.” (Thomas, 1939, p. 174)

Colonel Edward House, Wilson’s close advisor, spoke with the historian George S. Viereck and said of Marshall, “Marshall was held too lightly. An unfriendly fairy godmother presented him with a keen sense of humor. Nothing is more fatal in politics. Many politicians destroy themselves by their wit. Wit makes enemies. It stirs up the hornets. Marshall made friends, not enemies. But they looked at him as a jester.” (Viereck, 1932, p. 45)

In his review of Charles Thomas’s *Thomas Riley Marshall, Hoosier Statesman*, Christopher B. Coleman describes Marshall in a quick sketch.

A county-seat lawyer and Democratic leader at Columbia City with an extensive practice in most of the counties of northeastern Indiana, an outstanding governor (1909-1913) elected when the state vote went to the Republican William H. Taft for president, and a generally acceptable and popular vice-president (1913-1921), his most widespread fame is regretfully attributed to his *sotto voce* comment on Senator Bristow’s enumeration of the country’s needs: “What this country needs is a really good five cent cigar.” (Coleman, 1940, p. 310)

On March 6, 1913 the *New York Times* reported on the new Vice President’s address to the Senate when he began his tenure as president of that august body.

There was something very refreshing in the spectacle of the Vice President, on the eve of “four years of silence,” addressing the Senate as Mr. MARSHALL did on Tuesday. The form of address was novel and naive: there were metaphors verging on the grotesque, and there were touches of sentiment on the one hand and whimsical, almost boyish humor on the other that must have tickled the jaded ears of the older Senators and suggested some ventures of their own to some of the new ones.

The *Times* was not always kind to Vice President Marshall. Under the headline, “The Duty of Indiana,” the newspaper of record criticized Marshall in its May 16, 1915 issue for “flippant epigrams” because it took exception to his comments on the Lusitania incident.

If she cannot raise any men of Presidential calibre, she should at least try to train mediocre men in some of the negative virtues. She should train them to keep silence when they have nothing to say; in particular to keep silence when a great national emergency calls for wisdom, patience, and understatement, and when they have not the mental equipment to fit them for an understanding of what is required. She should train up a school whose members, if some of them attain the Vice Presidency, will have sense enough not to embarrass the President by utterances at odds with his settled policy, and who will not spatter flippant epigrams on an international tragedy.

If Indiana had founded this school years ago the present Vice President of the United States would not have made the speech he delivered on Thursday at Tupelo, Miss., on the sinking of the Lusitania.

The article “Marshall and the Sandbag” in *New York Times* of October 25, 1915 combines praise for Marshall’s honesty with an elbow to the ribs.

If this story is true, one thing is plain. Mr. MARSHALL cannot yield to blackmail without forfeiting his own respect and that of his fellow-citizens. He can better afford to lose the Vice Presidency honorably than to win it at the cost of honor. There can be no doubt which course he will choose. Even those who have been most impatient with his loquacity, his lack of wisdom, and his blunted sense of proportion gladly admit his impeccable honesty, an honesty which is not limited to dollars and cents, but is an intellectual honesty as well. There is no difficulty in forecasting his course.

From October, 1911, to March, 1912, *World’s Work* ran a six-part series championing the candidacy of Woodrow Wilson for president. The author, William Bayard Hale, later published his articles as a campaign biography, *Woodrow Wilson: The Story of his Life* (1912). The same adulation that marked the Wilson pieces and book, repeats in his article “Thomas Riley Marshall,” subtitled, “The Picturesque and Original Governor of Indiana who Amended a State Constitution Single-Handed and who is the Democratic Candidate or Vice-President of the United States.” (Hale, 1912, p. 360)

“Tom Marshall stories” are seldom really funny. There is a peculiar odor, a peculiar timbre to them. When you hear the first half dozen of them you wonder why he thinks them worth telling, they are just little incidents that happened somewhere, something that somebody said, not particularly interesting, not especially bright. But by and by you begin to expect them and to enjoy them, and you begin to see that this is this man’s way of thinking and of dealing with life; he cherishes homely instances, he thinks it worthwhile to repeat rather commonplace happenings. He takes a frank delight in them himself. I found nothing more interesting in Mr. Marshall than his story-telling habit and the character of his stories, the preponderance of anecdotes with only the slightest flavor of the most common kind of humor. At first I was disappointed; I enjoy a good story. After a while I caught sight of a certain realistic art, true, pertinent, and illuminating, like the exquisite realism of a great French or Russian story-writer. (Hale, 1912, p. 365)

Hale later fell out with Wilson — as did others, including Bill McCombs (his campaign manager), Lindley Garrison (Secretary of War), Colonel House, Joseph Tumulty (his devoted but later exiled private secretary), and Robert Lansing (Secretary of State). Eventually Hale became an agent of pre-war German propaganda and paid dearly for it.

Pilloried by pitiless publicity, the storm broke upon him afresh. Clubs expelled him. Magazines and publishing houses closed to him. Biographical handbooks expunged his name. He had no recourse but to seek cover and for the rest of his life he remained in comparative seclusion, writing little, though his publication attacking Wilson’s style was to have been part of a larger work. He died in Munich. (Rosewater, 1931; 1960, p. 113)

After Marshall’s death June 1, 1925 obituaries naturally appeared. *The Literary Digest* printed one such memorial and noted how the former vice president’s “reputation as a humorist stood in the way of his acquiring a more dignified sort of fame.”

He put his own valuation on himself and America accepted it. He was too much the jester to be taken seriously, and no one is taken more seriously than he takes himself. ...

He was a philosopher in a popular vein. He had the gift of homeliness in speech and manner. He seemed to be at home on the front steps of the village store, but he was just as much at home presiding over the United States Senate.

It may have been that had he taken himself more seriously, had his sense of humor been not so keen, he might have gone higher. Americans, who at first questioned this man of humor and philosophy in the office of Vice-President, came not only to like him but to respect him. He understood the temper of the people, for he was of the people. His philosophy was something all could understand.

He was probably the most popular Vice-President. He presided over the Senate equably and well. His decisions were considered sound. He was really a sound man, but his reputation for humor would not down. He contributed something to American life that was refreshing and wholesome. (“‘Tom’ Marshall—Humorist,” 1925, p. 46)

A biographer, David J. Bennett, repeats the lament, writing, “His self-deprecating humor didn’t help his stature in policy-making circles. While popular at dinner parties and often quoted in casual conversation, Marshall played a role much more akin to a court jester than a trusted policy advisor.” (Bennett, 2007, p. 160)

Mary McGrory’s column, “Johnson Is Carving Out Strong Role on the Hill,” in the Washington (DC) *Sunday Star* of January 8, 1961 compares the soon-to-be vice president to Thomas Marshall. She predicts, “He [Lyndon Johnson] will probably be unlike any other Vice President in history. Even now, however, it is certain that he will go down in history for more than Thomas G. [sic] Marshall, President Wilson’s Vice President, who lives only because he said, ‘What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar.’” Is the error in Marshall’s middle initial a mark of disrespect or simply the result of careless proofing? McGrory was not suggesting he was so insignificant she did not need to get his name right, was she? Surely she would not go so low to make her point, would she?

Herbert Mittgang commented on Marshall and the provisions of the twenty-fifth amendment in the *New York Times* (“The Possible President After the Next President”) of July 29, 1968. “Under the present law on disability,” he wrote, “his Vice President, Thomas R. Marshall, could have replaced him [Woodrow Wilson] as Acting President and gone down in history for a little more than his remark, ‘What this country needs is a really good five-cent cigar.’”

In his *When the Cheering Stopped* Gene Smith’s dismissal of Marshall is nearly absolute. “Marshall,” Smith observes, “had come to the governorship of his state after practicing law for a third of a century in Columbia City, Indiana, population three thousand, and was a rustic type, physically unimpressive, who often said very amusing things that made people laugh. (William McAdoo saw Marshall’s best scene as a country grocery store where he could sit by the stove and tell stories with his cronies.) (Smith, 1964, p. 101) Smith’s belittling words about Marshall contrast in tone and emphasis with Coleman’s more positive sketch in his book review. Both men worked from the same basic set of facts and reached very different assessments of the man from Indiana.

A. Scott Berg in his biography of Woodrow Wilson recounts the story of Marshall's selection as a candidate for vice president.

During the post-nomination recess, McAdoo called Wilson to ascertain his preference for Vice President. Wilson thought the convention should decide. McAdoo said the delegates would want to abide by his choice and, to balance the ticket, suggested Marshall of Indiana, whom he did not know except by reputation as an affable and popular liberal Governor of a Midwestern state. Nobody appeared to have told Wilson that McCombs had, in fact, already horse-traded the position to Marshall in exchange for Indiana's votes. Wilson had earlier mentioned to Albert Burlison [a representative and later postmaster general] of Texas that Marshall was a "small caliber man," though he conceded that he was a vote getter. (Berg, 2013, p. 234)

Berg fails to mention that Wilson tended to consider most other men "small caliber" by whatever term, compared to himself. And Wilson shared a certain social snobbery with second wife, Edith Bolling Galt. Progressive credentials and Phi Beta Kappa key notwithstanding, Tom Marshall of Columbia City, Indiana was just not their kind of people, nor was Mrs. Marshall. Still, it was not he (or she) who circulated the joke about what Mrs. Galt did when Wilson asked her to marry him.

Although hardly a jester, Marshall seems to have been unable to resist his own impish sense of humor, and occasionally his wit is a bit more barbed than homey. The relatively mild five-cent cigar quip has a certain kick to it.



Thomas R. Marshall, Library of Congress

### **The Five-Cent Cigar**

Fred C. Kelly's syndicated column "Statesmen Real and Near," datelined Washington, Feb. 5, appeared in the February 6, 1914 issue of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*. Kelly reported an incident involving a senator (unidentified) and Vice President Marshall.

A senator was making a speech one day and telling with a great many gestures exactly what this country needs.

After the speech was over the senator met Vice President Marshall out in the senators' private lobby lighting a cigar.

"You overlooked the chief need of the country," remarked Marshall.

"What's that?"

"The thing that seems to be needed most of all," declared Marshall puffing thoughtfully, "is a really good 5-cent cigar."

Kelly followed up his original story with another item in his April 14, 1914 *Plain Dealer* column.

Some weeks ago Vice President Marshall made the remark that the greatest need of this county is a good 5-cent cigar. The remark was printed in the newspapers and manufacturers of 5-cent cigars began to bombard the vice president with sample boxes of their wares. Marshall has now tried a great many more brands of 5-cent cigars than he had a month or two ago, but he now issues the statement:

“The country’s greatest need still exists.”

On March 1, 1914 the *Trenton (NJ) Sunday Times-Advertiser* published in the feature “Under The Big White Dome,” an account of Marshall and the five-cent cigar.

Yea, Verily.

Vice President Marshall was rocking back and forth in the vice presidential chair in the Senate recently during a heated debate between republican and democratic senators over the remedies really needed by the country in its condition of unrest.

Senator Bristow of Kansas had just concluded an emphatic declaration of the country’s needs as seen from a progressive-republican standpoint when the Vice President leaned over his desk and in a scarcely audible voice addressed Henry M. Rose, assistant secretary of the Senate:

“Rose,” he said, “what this country needs is really good five cent cigar.”

Thomas F. Logan wrote of the vice president and Senator Joseph Bristow in “Behind the Scenes at Nation’s Capital,” published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of January 18, 1915.

SENATOR BRISTOW was holding forth in the senate. He was addressing himself to the demands of these progressive times. In his most solemn fashion he was explaining to the country its needs. Vice President Marshall was listening. He leaned over his desk to Henry M. Rose, the assistant secretary.

“There’s some truth in what Bristow says,” he allowed in a whisper. “But he hasn’t yet hit the most important thing. What this country really needs is a good five-cent cigar.”

Theodore M. Knappen wrote an appreciation piece on the vice president, “For Once the Limelight Shines on a Vice-President of the U.S.,” as Marshall began his final year in office. The *New York Tribune* published the story on January 4, 1920, and it did not fail to mention the five-cent cigar.

On one occasion pretty nearly all the speakers were giving their views of “what this county needs.” Mr. Marshall listened to many versions of the nation’s need. [sic] Suddenly he bent over the thronelike desk of the President of the Senate and whispered audibly to Rose, the Assistant Secretary of the Senate:

“Rose, what this country needs is a really good 5-cent cigar.”

A concurring chuckle vibrated through the Senate. The time and the place of the remark made it humorous, but it was loaded with earnestness, coming from a man who had lived for fifty years in Columbia City, Ind., or like small places. In them the quality of five-cent cigars looms large.

In February 1920 *Current Opinion* ran a reworked version of Knappen's article, with nearly the same title. Another variant ran in *The State* (Columbia, South Carolina) on March 17, 1920.

*The Phi Gamma Delta* ran a piece on Marshall in its April 1923 issue, apparently reprinting a story from the *Philadelphia Record* about their fraternity brother.

Former Vice President Marshall (Wabash '73) of Indiana, was in Williamsport the other day and he told over again the oft-repeated story that in the midst of a Senator's speech during Mr. Marshall's incumbency as presiding officer of the Senate he urged upon his colleagues the country's needs in certain directions and how to relieve them. At an opportune moment, the Vice President motioned to a newspaper man and quietly whispered in his ear: "What this country really needs is a good five-cent cigar."

As a sequel to the story, it is told that the former Vice President received 20,000 five-centers of various good brands from eager manufacturers as a compliment to the man who had procured fresh and valuable interest in their product, and had emphasized its desirability in price, a piece of publicity which they appreciated, and from which they profited. And Mr. Marshall didn't fare badly either, for in dropping a little witticism into the newspaper man's ear he got agreeable publicity for himself from one end of the country to the other, proving anew and [sic] old saying that "it pays to advertise."—*Philadelphia Record*. ("Another Marshall Yarn," 1923, p. 701)

Louis Ludlow, a political correspondent, member of the congressional press gallery and later a member of the House of Representatives, published a memoir in 1924, *From Cornfield to Press Gallery; Adventures and Reminiscences of a Veteran Washington Correspondent*. He included "the correct story" (never before told) of Marshall, Bristow, and the five-cent cigar.

The correct story of how Vice President Marshall defined "the country's greatest need" has never been told. Here it is:

Senator Joe Bristow of Kansas arose in the Senate one day and made a speech that bore a general resemblance to one of his native Kansas cyclones.

"What this country needs—" he would exclaim, and then would finish the sentence by naming some national desideratum. Time after time during his speech he used this phrase, and every time he mentioned a different thing that the country needed. When he had done this about the tenth, or eleventh time, the Vice President leaned over and whispered to Henry Rose, Assistant Secretary of the Senate, who sat at a desk nearby:

"Bristow hasn't hit it yet. What the country needs is a good five-cent cigar."

The remark was too rich to pass unnoticed. Mr. Rose spread it around. It got into the newspapers and the Vice President was swamped with cigars sent to him by manufacturers and dealers who took him seriously and were bent on showing him there already were good five-cent cigars on the market. The Vice President smoked some of these offerings and others he tried out on his devoted, self-sacrificing secretary, Mark Thistlethwaite, before he tackled them himself. (Ludlow, 1924, p. 313-314)

A few days after Marshall's death, Richard V. Oulahan wrote a piece about the late vice president, "Marshall's Part in the Wilson Drama," which appeared in *The New York Times* on June 7, 1925. The item contained an account of the cigar remark similar to Ludlow's.

Having glimpsed what lay deep in his character, the public looked differently at his humorous sayings, which took on significance from the sidelights they threw upon the man. His best-known remark was made apropos a speech in the Senate by Senator Joseph Bristow of Kansas. Mr. Bristow was telling what was the matter with the country and what the country needed. Apparently in Mr. Bristow's view, the country was in a bad way and needed many things. Sitting in the Vice President's rostrum, Mr. Marshall leaned over to Henry Rose, assistant clerk of the Senate.

"Henry," he said, "what this country needs is a good five-cent cigar."

The remark was widely published and Mr. Marshall was deluged with boxes of cigars.

The Washington (DC) *Evening Star* on June 11, 1925 ran a tribute to Marshall, "Public Faith in T. R. Marshall Voiced from Coast to Coast."

Of all the fine bits of homely philosophy for which he was famous, perhaps the most quoted is, "What this country needs more than anything else is a good 5-cent cigar." Calling Marshall a "real American," the Sioux City Tribune says of this expression, uttered in a time of long-winded congressional debate, "No academic statement in behalf of a return toward normalcy could have made the situation more clear or more impressive." And the Cincinnati Times-Star adds, "We will not be around to verify the truth of our prediction, but we suspect it will live as long as Patrick Henry's 'Give me liberty or give me death.' We are going to be a bit of the Philistine and say we think Marshall's statement is the better of the two."

*The Literary Digest*, too, took note of Marshall's passing. In the June 20, 1925 issue, the *Digest* recounts, among other things, the cigar story, and the article quotes George Buchanan Fife who had written about Marshall in the *New York Evening World*.

During the eight years of his Vice-Presidency in the two Wilson administrations, and correlatively, as President of the Senate, he had many an opportunity to demonstrate his ready, kindly wit. Once the Senate was indulging itself with an endless, tiresome symposium of oratory as to the welfare of the nation. Senator after senator got up, delivered himself of his views as to what would cure the ills of the body politic. Mr. Marshall was patience itself. But one Senator, more verbose than any of his colleagues, went on and on and on. Finally Mr. Marshall leaned over to the Secretary of the Senate and said in a voice which must have reached the loquacious speaker:

"What this country really needs is a good five-cent cigar!" ("Tom' Marshall — Humorist," 1925, p. 45)

Under the headline "The Nickel Cigar Returns" the *New York Times* of October 18, 1925 tells of the worthy nickel of another day and what it might buy, including a cigar and a glass of beer.

The story has been often told of the circumstances that prompted him to deliver his mind of that barbed shaft, but each time it is told differently. The facts seem to be these:

Mr. Marshall, as Vice President, had presided in the Senate on a hot day, listening for hours to one or those prolonged debates that sometimes occupy the upper Chamber. As

the day wore on and patience ebbed low he is said to have leaned from his august chair to whisper in a visitor's ear the remark which drew forth a national response. It summed up a wise and homely philosophy, coupled with a gentle satire. By the nickel cigar Mr. Marshall typified many things belonging to an earlier day.

Frederick William Wile writing in a column, "Washington Observations," in the Washington (DC) *Evening Star* of October 27, 1933 offered a number of capital tidbits and added the name of James Baker to the account of Marshall and the cigar.

It was to James Marion Baker of South Carolina, recently appointed Minister to Siam, that the late Vice President Tom Marshall addressed his famous remark: "What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar." The amiable Hoosier had been listening to a long-winded speech by Joseph L. Bristow, then a Senator from Kansas, who was endeavoring to diagnose the ills of the Nation from the viewpoint of a Western progressive and to suggest cures. Baker, then secretary of the Senate, was at the Vice President's side on the rostrum. Time and again Bristow kept saying: "What this country needs," etc. After noting six or seven of these starts, Marshall, turning to Baker remarked, "Jim, Joe hasn't hit it yet. What this country really needs is a good five-cent cigar."

In his biography, *Thomas Riley Marshall: Hoosier Statesman*, Charles M. Thomas vouches for the authenticity of Marshall's cigar comment and recounts what has become the standard version.

At least the story of Marshall and the five-cent-cigar sentence is not apocryphal. There is unusual agreement concerning this story on the part of those who were in or near the Senate when the Vice-President made the statement. He was presiding, and Senator Joe Bristow of Kansas was making a long speech, enumerating the needs of the country. It was a period of relaxation, typical of the United States Senate on such occasions. After one of the perorational passages in Senator Bristow's speech, the presiding officer leaned over and spoke to one of the secretaries of the Senate in a voice that easily carried to nearby persons. It is difficult to be certain of the exact order of the words in a sentence that was not immediately written down, but Marshall probably said, "What this country needs is a really good five cent cigar." (Thomas, 1939, p. 174-175)

Thomas's notes cite as sources separate interviews with James D. Preston, former superintendent of the Senate Press Gallery and Louis Ludlow, a former Washington correspondent. (Thomas, 1939, p. 265)

Not everyone hews to Thomas's narrative. Garnett L. Eskew provides a different account without direct reference to the senate in *Willard's of Washington: the Epic of a Capital Caravansary*.

Earlier I said that every President since Franklin Pierce had either lived or sojourned at Willard's. So have many Vice Presidents. Woodrow Wilson's running mate, Thomas E. [sic] Marshall, made the Willard his first Washington home and remained for years. A

former Willard manager tells me that the price of cigars at the Willard lobby newsstand caused the salty Indianan to come forward with that epic statement about the nation's need for a nickel smoke. Later when Coolidge rode into power as Harding's Vice President, Marshall sent the *New Englander* a telegram from the Willard offering his deepest sympathy. Marshall knew—he'd been there! (Eskew, 1954, p. 200)

The Washington (DC) *Evening Star* of July 16, 1968 ("Willard Saw Glory for Century") more or less repeats Eskew's story, including the error of Marshall's middle initial.

Of the famous lines reportedly coined at the Willard, Woodrow Wilson's vice president, Thomas E. [sic] Marshall, is said to have stood in the hotel's lobby and enraged at the price at the tobacco stand, remarked, "What this country needs a good 5-cent cigar."

The Willard story continued to appear in later years. Judith Morgan, writing in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 11, 1989 in the travel section, offered, "History has literally been made for years at famed D. C. hotel." She states, "It was the price of cigars at the Willard newsstand that caused Woodrow Wilson's vice president, Thomas Marshall, to complain: 'What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar.'" The *Houston Chronicle* of November 13, 1994 makes the same claim and identifies the date as 1916. The *Chronicle* maintains, "The often-quoted 'What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar' was uttered by Vice President Thomas Marshall in 1916 as he criticized the hotel's newsstand prices."

John M. Taylor contributed "Modest start but fancy future for Willard Hotel - Wartime politicians favored it" to the *Washington (DC) Times* of August 18, 2000. About the Willard's tobacco shop and Thomas Marshall he wrote, "The new hotel was a thing of splendor. Its arcade, which ran the length of the building from Pennsylvania Avenue to F Street, came to be known as Peacock Alley, not only for its decorations but for the extravagantly dressed promenaders who came to see and to be seen. It was at the Willard's tobacco shop that Vice President Thomas Marshall summarized the state of the Union with the bon mot, 'What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar.'"

John E. Carey is terser in his "Willard Hotel: Elegant landmark in city - Central gathering place of powerful, the hopefuls," published in the *Washington (DC) Times* on August 7, 2004. He tells us, "Woodrow Wilson's vice president, Thomas A. [sic] Marshall, fretting about the Willard's high prices, coined the phrase, 'What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar.' He made his declaration at the hotel."

Although the Willard Hotel figures in several accounts of Marshall's quip, the scene more usually mentioned is the Senate chamber. Keith S. Montgomery in his dissertation, "A Rhetorical Analysis of the Forensic and Occasional Speaking of Thomas R. Marshall," connects the senate site, Marshall's "fame," and the down-to-earth quality of the vice president.

Humor. "What this country needs is a really good five-cent cigar." Unfortunately, Thomas Marshall's fame has been perpetuated more for that remark, whispered during a Senator's speech, than for his years of able public service. Senator Bristow of Kansas

was enumerating the needs of the country in a speech before the Senate when the Vice President leaned over and uttered his famous aphorism to one of the secretaries of the Senate. It was not offered in jest or as a detraction from Bristow's purpose, but with brevity, compactness, and pungency it summarized a hundred words and thoughts. The sentence was popular because it reflected an understanding of the American people and their society; this kinship with the "common" man was at the root of Tom Marshall's humor. (Montgomery, 1956, p. 134-135)

Philip F. Clifford's article, "Thomas R. Marshall and the 5c cigar," appeared in the Sunday Magazine of the September 26, 1965 *Indianapolis Star*. Subtitled "The colorful Vice-President from Indiana as a witty man whose way with words won him respect," the piece was a kind of appreciation after the fortieth anniversary of Marshall's death. His source for the cigar story is Louis Ludlow, with a variant told by Mark Thistlethwaite. Both tales refer to the senate chamber and do not mention the Willard Hotel.

THE SENATOR'S oratory, Ludlow wrote, was literally peppered with "What this country needs" and would finish the sentence by naming something of vital interest to the nation. "He used the phrase time after time. After the 10th or 11th time, Marshall leaned over to Harry Rose, assistant secretary of the Senate, and said, 'Bristow hasn't hit it yet. What this country really needs is a good 5-cent cigar,'" Ludlow reported. Rose, who reportedly had a puckish sense of humor, thought this bit of homespun Hoosier wit was too priceless to die in the staid area of the Senate rostrum, and in what amounted to a stage whisper, passed it along to a nearby aide. Marshall, meanwhile, had retired from the Senate chamber, but his satiric gem spread through the august precinct like a Kansas prairie fire. And it wasn't long before the dozing men in the press gallery became aware of the restrained ripple of laughter washing across the Senate floor. Practically every paper in the country carried it in the next day's editions. This was the chance remark which catapulted Marshall to national recognition.

Thistlethwaite's story was somewhat different, although not fundamentally so.

The late Senator J. L. Bristow, Kansas publisher, was holding forth oratorically, on a long list of things this country needs. "He had just reached his 'lastly' when Henry Rose, Senate clerk, approached the vice-president to remind him it was time to leave the Senate chamber for his customary 'smoke and siesta' for Marshall a modern type of coffee break. "What this country needs,' quipped the Hoosier vice-president humorously as he rose to leave, 'is a good 5-cent cigar.'"

In the *Los Angeles Times* of September 13, 1980 John H. Averill ponders the vice presidency, wondering whether it is an "Office of Esteem or Crashing Bore?"

One of the more colorful vice presidents was Thomas R. Marshall of Indiana, who served during Woodrow Wilson's two terms and was the author of a famous bon mot.

Marshall was presiding during a dull speech by Sen. Joseph L. Bristow on the subject of "What this Country Needs."

Unable to contain himself, Marshall leaned over to a Senate attaché and said in a stage whisper heard throughout the chamber:

“What this country needs is a really good five-cent cigar.”

John E. Brown recounts the story of a Bristow speech in his dissertation, “Woodrow Wilson’s Vice President.” Like Averill he connects Marshall’s quip to Joseph Bristow and a speech the Kansas senator gave on the senate floor.

Joseph L. Bristow, a Kansas Progressive, had had a distinguished career as Senator. His last two years in the Senate were during the peak period of Wilson’s progressive legislation, 1913 and 1914. Many are the speeches he made on the floor of the Senate Chamber. During one of them, the story goes, he was expounding on the needs of the country, and would follow each need with a suggested remedy. He talked about the needs in industry, in finance, in agriculture, in labor, and so on and on. At this point in the story, the traditions vary. (Brown, 1970, p. 189)

Brown also refers to an item that appeared in the *Pathfinder: America’s Oldest News Weekly* of April 18, 1942. The editor, Emil Hurja (E.H.), writes about having lunch with Mark Thistlethwaite under the column heading “Between You and Me –and the Gatepost,” a collection of primarily political miscellany. The two reminisced about Tom Marshall and the vice president’s quip which Hurja described as “a saying which will live longer than many an offering of sage moral counsel.”

It was back in the days when the Republican progressive group was making a strong fight in the Senate for reform. The Kansas Senator, Joseph Bristow, was speaking at length. Bristow would make a statement of conditions, and after a brief summary, would prescribe a remedy. “What this country needs” would be his introduction, and then he would go on to outline the cures for industry, for finance, for the railroads, for the farmer, for labor, and so on, interminably. After listening an hour or more, the Vice President called one of the Senators to take over the Vice President’s chair, and preside over the Senate, while he took a rest in the cloakroom.

So, pulling out a cigar from his vest pocket, Marshall called the secretary of the Senate, Henry Rose, to his side, and remarked to him: “Henry, Joe hasn’t hit it yet. What, this country really needs is a good five-cent cigar.”

And Fred Kelly, the leading newspaper columnist of that day, printed the remark which will live longer, perhaps, than any other of the many genuine and deep moral sentiments that Marshall uttered during his interesting lifetime. (Hurja, 1942, p. 23)

A variant lets Marshall remain in his Senate chair. From there he leans over and makes his remark to John Crockett, chief clerk of the Senate, rather than to Henry Rose. (Brown, 1970, p. 190) Brown gives as his source “Indiana’s Masonic Governors” in *The Indiana Freemason* of August, 1962.

Marshall’s behavior as Wilson’s vice president interested A. Scott Berg, albeit only mildly. He offers one (rather dismissive) sketch that includes the tale of the cigar, “Marshall’s most durable legacy.”

Even so, he [Marshall] remained a popular figure in Washington. TR's acerbic daughter Alice Roosevelt Longworth especially enjoyed poking fun at him, claiming that his business card read "Vice President of the United States and Toastmaster." Indeed, Marshall was a delightful speaker and always had an amusing quip on the tip of his tongue. During one session when a Senator was holding the floor for far too long, yammering about all the things "this country needs," Marshall leaned in toward a clerk and said in a stage whisper, "What this country needs is a really good five-cent cigar." The quotation stands as Marshall's most durable legacy, coupled, perhaps, with his anecdote of a mother who had two sons, one of whom became Vice President while the other was lost at sea ... "and nothing has been heard of either of them since." (Berg, 2013, p. 406)

David Bennett, too, places the action in the senate with an account that echoes the Louis Ludlow version.

As the presiding officer of the Senate, Marshall helped gain legislative approval for Wilson's proposals. Marshall was presiding over the Senate one afternoon when he uttered what has become one of the most often-quoted phrases in American politics. Joseph Bristow, a Senator from Kansas, was droning on and on with a long-winded speech in which each sentence started with the phrase "What this Country needs ...". Most of the senators had long ago left, but Marshall, along with the clerks and reporters nearby, were forced by their duties to remain in the chamber. Finally Bristow concluded his remarks and Marshall, sensing relief in the room now that the speech was over, turned to the clerks and reporters and said, "Bristow hasn't hit it yet. What this country really needs is a good five-cent cigar." (Bennett, 2007, p. 184)

### **What did the Vice President Say, and When did he Say it?**

What did Marshall say, exactly? Charles Thomas has pointed out the uncertainty of the exact order of Marshall's phrase since it "was not immediately written down." He proposes that Marshall probably said, "What this country needs is a really good five cent cigar." (Thomas, 1939, p. 174-175)

Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* in its eleventh edition records the quip as "What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar" and also observes: "Remark to John Crockett, Chief Clerk of the United States Senate" (Bartlett, 1937, p. 714). The twelfth through fifteen editions contain the same information, but the sixteenth (1992) gives the circumstance simply as "Remark while presiding over the Senate." No edition indicates a date, or a source.

The *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (2009) cites, "What this country needs is a really good 5-cent cigar," and indicates as its source the *New York Tribune*, January 1920, pt. 7. The *Tribune* article gave no date for the remark.

*Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations Requested from the Congressional Research Service* reads under “cigar,” “What this country needs is a good 5-cent cigar. ... Vice President THOMAS R. MARSHALL, a remark reportedly made to Henry M. Rose, the assistant secretary of the Senate, while Marshall was presiding as president of the Senate. This episode is detailed in the New York Tribune, January 4, 1920, part 7, p.1.” H. L. Mencken gives the same version in *A New Dictionary of Quotations on Historical Principles from Ancient and Modern Sources* and dates the quip as c. 1920.

*The Literary Digest*, among others, presented a variant: “What this country really needs is a good five-cent cigar.” (*The Literary Digest*, 1925, p. 45)

The *Yale Book of Quotations* records the Marshall quote, with two illustrations, one a bit incorrect.

1 The chief need of the country ... is a really good 5-cent cigar  
Quoted in *Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh, Wis.), 6 Feb. 1914. Marshall is usually said to have uttered this in 1920. In both the 1914 newspaper article and the standard 1920 account, Marshall is responding to a senator’s speech about “what this country needs.” However, there is a much earlier occurrence in the Hartford Courant, 22 Sept. 1875: “What this country needs is a good five cent cigar. – *New York Mail*.”

The *Daily Northwestern* citation is to the Fred C. Kelly’s column (“Statesmen Real and Near”) which also appeared in the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* on February 6, 1914, and where Kelly’s text is the same in both.

There are numerous other sources, but oddly Marshall says nothing about his quip in his *Recollections*. The only reference to it appears in a caption (surely editor-inserted) beneath a photograph reads “Letter from Ambassador Riaño; Mr. Marshall loved a pipe but made famous the saying, ‘What the country needs is a good five-cent cigar.’” (Marshall, 1925, caption facing p. 244)

The word “really” is sometimes absent from the quote. Other times, it precedes “needs” or “cigar.” A more wordy version gives “What this country needs more than anything else is a good 5-cent cigar.” (Washington (DC) *Evening Star*, June 11, 1925) Thomas and consensus seem to favor “What this country needs is a really good five-cent cigar.”

In spite of Fred Kelly’s article which fixes Marshall’s comment before February 6, 1914, others have adopted more elastic dates. “Answer Line” in the Harrisburg (PA) *Patriot-News* of April 14, 1992 informs the reader, “It was Vice President (under Wilson) Thomas R. Marshall who, about 1920, made his mark in history by lamenting, ‘What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar.’” Ted Buss in the January 7, 2005 Wichita Falls (TX) *Times Record News* writes, “While presiding over a heated Senate debate regarding the country’s many pressing needs in 1917, Woodrow Wilson’s Vice President Thomas R. Marshall stood up and eased the tension with his great line. Despite its political frivolousness, the quote lives on; right up there with the best of Abe Lincoln and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.”

Jim Timmermann, opinion page editor of the *Holland (MI) Sentinel*, comments unkindly on March 26, 2006, “Thomas Riley Marshall is barely a footnote in American history, and only merits that status because of one off-hand statement he made. As vice president of the United States he was presiding over the Senate one day in 1917, listening to senators fulminate about what the country needed, when, as the story goes, he leaned over to a clerk and said, ‘What this country needs is a really good five-cent cigar.’” An item in the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* (July 11, 1994) also refers to 1917, saying, “Marshall, a Democrat, served two terms as vice president under Woodrow Wilson. He is known best for his 1917 declaration that ‘What this country needs is a good 5-cent cigar.’”

In the York (PA) *Daily Record* of October 18, 2007 Jim Hubley noted in his “Off the Record” column, “It was a one-time vice president, Thomas R. Marshall, who said after the end of the World War I, ‘What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar.’” Walter Gray, writing in the Providence (RI) *Journal* (April 17, 1997) offers a date of 1920, writing, “After a long-winded senator expressed his own view of what America needed in 1920, Marshall reportedly responded, ‘What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar.’”

Other newspapers recorded the date as “on the eve of the United States’ entry into World War I” (Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, June 26, 2008) or “congressional leaders were haggling over what the U. S. needed post WWI” (Lexington (KY) *Herald-Leader*, August 21, 2008). Perhaps the best (or worst) came from the Scripps Howard News Service in February 1998.

The feds may also want to formally renounce the famous economic prescription of Thomas Riley Marshall, vice president of the United States from 1917 to 1925: “What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar.”

To whom did Vice President Marshall make his remark? Was it to a senator (unnamed) or Henry Rose (who perhaps passed it on to a nearby aide)? Or to John Crockett, James M. Baker, a newspaperman (unnamed), a visitor, the Secretary of the Senate, one of the secretaries of the senate, a clerk, the chief clerk, a senate attaché (unnamed), or to someone (unnamed) in the Willard Hotel? It varies in the telling, although three names do turn up: Rose, Crockett, and Baker.

Henry M. Rose, the son of a Baptist minister, was born on March 16, 1858 in Hornellsville, New York. His family moved to St. Johns, Michigan in 1865. He left college in his junior year and eventually went into the newspaper business, at various times as an owner, editor or reporter in several Michigan cities. During the 1887-88 legislative session he was engrossing clerk in the Michigan House of Representatives. Active in Republican politics, he worked for the election of Julius Caesar Burrows (1837-1915) as a U. S. Senator. Burrows, who served from January 24, 1895 to March 3, 1911, made him his confidential clerk, then clerk of his committee, after which Rose became Chief Clerk of the Senate. Following an appointment as collector of internal revenue for the fourth district of Michigan, Rose returned to Washington, where he became assistant secretary of the senate in 1905 and served in that position until his death on July 11, 1932. (*Men of Progress*, 1900; *The Evening Star* (Washington (DC) January 5, 1905; *Evening Star* (Washington (DC) July 13, 1932; *The New York Times*, July 12, 1932.)

John C. Crockett was born in Galena, Illinois, on June 17, 1864 and grew up on a farm in Hardin County, Iowa. After studying law, he practiced in the office of S. M. Weaver but switched to legal administration when his brother appointed him deputy county clerk. He was then elected county clerk, after which he became reading clerk of the Iowa General Assembly, clerk of the Iowa Supreme Court, and eventually, reading clerk of the U.S. senate where he served for forty years until his retirement. He died on June 6, 1952. In politics he was a Republican. (Iowa, 1952, p. 400)

James Marion Baker was born on August 18, 1861 in Lowndsville, South Carolina. He attended Wofford College, then travelled to New York City where he studied law. After working on a railroad project, he returned to Lowndsville and took up banking and business. In 1893 he became the Democratic “caucus representative” and assistant Senate librarian. After the democrats won the senate in the 1912 elections, they met to select a secretary. Among Baker’s rivals was Joseph R. Wilson, the new president’s brother. A potential financial scandal briefly postponed his selection, but the caucus approved him and he took office on March 13, 1913. Baker held the job for six years. In 1919 Wilson appointed him deputy commissioner of Internal Revenue. With the arrival of a new administration he left government service and established a Washington legal practice. As a reward for assisting in Franklin Roosevelt’s campaign he became minister to Siam in 1933 and remained in that post for three years. He died November 21, 1940. (*The New York Times* Nov 22, 1940; U.S. Congress. Senate. Historical Office, online)

In the tellings, circumstances vary as well as the text and the date. Did Marshall make his remark at the newsstand in lobby of the Willard Hotel? Did Marshall meet a senator in the in the senators’ private lobby and speak directly to him about missing the mark in his speech? Did he go to the senate cloakroom and speak with Henry Rose? Or was Marshall presiding over the senate from his chair on the rostrum? Did he rise? Was he rocking back and forth in the vice presidential chair? Or was he simply sitting, before bending over to the desk of the clerk or secretary or assistant secretary of the senate?

Most accounts seem to favor an aside to Rose in the senate chamber (and Rose may have “spread the word”), but did Marshall whisper to him quietly (*sotto voce*), or whisper audibly or in “a scarcely audible voice” or speak “in a voice which must have reached the loquacious speaker?” Did his voice carry easily to nearby persons? Did the senate chuckle? Was the debate heated? Was there a storm of fulmination? Did “senator after senator” speak? Or was there only one senator droning on at tedious length to a full, or nearly empty chamber? If so, who was it? Was it Joseph L. Bristow, the senator most commonly named as the object of Marshall’s wit?

Although Kelly did not mention a name in his articles of February and March, 1914, the March 1, 1914 *Trenton (NJ) Sunday Times-Advertiser* did. Louis Ludlow also identifies the ardent orator as Joseph L. Bristow of Kansas. Oulahan does the same, and Thomas agrees. If they and the *Times-Advertiser* are right, the remark dates between March of 1913 and March of 1915, the years when the senatorial term of Joseph Bristow and Marshall’s service as presiding officer of the senate coincided. Given Kelly’s pieces, a more precise range would likely be between December 1, 1913 and February 5, 1914. Although hardly alone in knowing what was best for the country, Bristow, a zealous, outspoken Republican progressive, may well have

provoked the cigar comment during those nine weeks. He also might simply have been a convenient name, with a convenient personality.

### Joseph L. Bristow

Joseph Little Bristow served one term in the United States Senate, from March 4, 1909 to March 3, 1915. “Bristow had been slow to adopt the progressive position,” his biographer, A. Bower Sageser, writes, “but, once converted, he was impatient and critical of any delay.” (Sageser, 1968, p. 103) High on the list of progressive desiderata was the popular election of senators, and “Bristow’s most important legislative contribution was his authorship of the resolution which, with some modification, became the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution, providing for direct election of Senators.” (La Forte, 1973, p. 104)

Bristow’s entry in the *Dictionary of American Biography* describes him as “Tall and ungainly,” and continues, “Bristow did not fit the prevailing image of Senatorial dignity. His voice was rasping and his English unpolished, but he was a commanding speaker of great earnestness and an uncompromising fighter on the floor. He based his arguments on fact and, according to one writer, “cared nothing for ‘senatorial courtesy’ or feelings.” (La Forte, 1973, p. 105)

In his *Joseph L. Bristow: Kansas Progressive* Sageser, quotes from an item in *Kansas City Star* of March 22, 1897 and paraphrases the reporter’s comments on Bristow and his appointment as fourth assistant postmaster-general in the new McKinley administration.

Many of Bristow’s fellow Republican editors praised McKinley for his excellent selection. The Topeka representative of the *Kansas City Star* was accurate in his appraisal of Bristow: McKinley, according to the *Star’s* reporter, “could have made a more popular selection ... but his [Bristow’s] worst enemies concede his peculiar fitness for the place.” As a campaigner Bristow had been “resourceful and alert,” and “many of his flanking movements on the enemy” credited to Leland were Bristow’s “conception and execution.” The reporter declared that Bristow came from sturdy stock and was “never given to drink or the tobacco habit.” He was a man who had the patience for details. He had made enemies because he was “blunt and straight forward and to the point.” He was not an adroit man, but sincere; “a good hater” who had “no patience with shams.” He was a man, continued the reporter, who liked “to fight in the open” and wanted “his forces and allies to be inspired by pure patriotism.” He was also a willful man. If he saw his way clearly, he had no patience with men who took a different view or who had another method. In the eyes of the reporter, it was this last trait that had made Bristow “obnoxious” to many men in his own party. (Sageser, 1968, p. 31)

The Canadian-born American journalist, humorist, poet and philosopher Walt Mason contributed a sketch of Bristow to *The American Magazine* of October, 1909.

All human affairs present their serious aspect to the junior senator from Kansas. His earnestness is almost tragic; and humor is to him a mere theory, unsupported by Facts,

and consequently unworthy of consideration. When he attempts to assume the light and jovial manner, as when campaigning, he becomes unspeakably pathetic.

... Having no conception of humor, he is impervious to ridicule or sarcasm, and the glittering shafts of the plumed knights of debate slide off him and leave no mark. He has a peculiarly active and healthy conscience, and consults it frequently; his ideas of morality, political and otherwise, are inflexible. Above all things, Bristow is distinguished for his zeal and his industry.

... He will become a nightmare to those whom he opposes in the Senate; they may think that they have him expunged today but to-morrow he will be in the same old place, the same old Bristow; six feet of protest; one hundred and sixty pounds of defiance. (Mason, 1909, p. 557-558)

Apparently Bristow had a bit of a tangle with Marshall during one senate session. And the Kansan had uneasy relations with others as well, his senatorial brethren among them.

A combative member of the Republican minority, Bristow spoke frequently and forcefully. Marshall even gaveled him out of order on July 8, 1913, for a vitriolic attack against Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan. During an August 12 debate on cigar duties, Bristow went out of his way to assert: "I am not a user of tobacco." Also a teetotaler, he taxed the patience of senators on both sides of the aisle. Bristow's December 9 speech criticizing the Federal Reserve Bill filled four and a half, double-columned pages in the Congressional Record and in debate thereafter two and a half pages more. Repeatedly during his single term in the Senate, Bristow impugned the integrity of colleagues. (Harstad, 2014, p. 52)



Joseph Little Bristow, Library of Congress

### **Embellishment**

Fred Kelly's article of February 6, 1914 and the follow-up in March lacked detail. In his "What this Country Needs is a Really Good Five-cent Cigar": A Historical Puzzle," Peter Harstad explains how the cigar story acquired body and drama, thanks to Louis Ludlow, "a member of the congressional Press Gallery and correspondent for Indiana and Ohio newspapers." Ludlow, "one of Indiana's best raconteurs," a man who "knew how to embellish a tale," "had been telling the cigar quip for a decade before he published it in his 1924 book *From Cornfield to Press Gallery*." (Harstad, 2014, p. 50) Ludlow, it seems, named Kelly's unnamed senator and introduced Joseph L. Bristow of Kansas into the account as the energetic, long-winded speaker.

Harstad talks about Ludlow and quotes from his book, emphasizing Ludlow's belief in the journalist's responsibility to add creative vigor to a story.

In the same book in which he presented his "correct story," Ludlow offered a credo and a "confession." The reporter "who instinctively picks out the points of interest in an

address, and makes up his own terse and condensed story therefrom is the one who catches and holds the attention of the reading public,” wrote Ludlow. He confessed that some correspondents “take a run-down, emaciated, anemic, sallow-looking interview that has punctuation paralysis, grammatical jim-jam and rhetorical rheumatics ... and when they turn it out ... It looks like a million dollars.” Politicians who reaped the glory of such window-dressing did not complain. “This is legitimate journalism, as we conceive it,” Ludlow declared. (Harstad, 2014, p. 51)

Marshall’s biographer, Charles Thomas, made an effort to sort out the truth, not an easy task, considering the passage of time. In the end, he endorses, with little reservation, the Ludlow account.

After the publication of Thomas’s biography of Marshall in 1939, the Ludlow/Thomas version became sacrosanct, and historians have repeated the undated story of Bristow delivering a long-winded speech about the country’s needs and Marshall responding with his quip to Rose near the vice president’s desk. (Harstad, 2014, p. 51)

Was it really Bristow? Neither Kelly nor Knappen mention him. But it could have been. At least he was there in the senate while Marshall presided over that chamber. Unfortunately, though, the *Congressional Record* chronicles no incidence or repetition of the phrase “What this country needs,” or “this country needs,” uttered by Bristow or any other senator in the sixty-third Congress. Still, truth or fiction, Bristow was an inspired choice for a foil, the prickly, righteous zealot, the opposite of the relaxed and genial Marshall.

### **Origin of the Five-Cent Cigar**

The cigar remark was not original with Marshall. He never claimed it was. Fred Kelly suggested that the quip originated with Kin Hubbard. In his biography of Hubbard, creator of Abe Martin, the rustic cartoon character from Brown County, Indiana, Kelly tells the story of Hubbard’s courtship of Josephine Jackson whom he married in 1905. Her father was not too keen on a newspaper cartoonist as a husband for his daughter. When he finally relented, Hubbard offered his soon-to-be father-in-law a cigar.

It was a happy moment for Kin when Mr. Jackson thanked him in a friendly way for a cigar. “What this country needs,” remarked Kin, embarrassed as well as pleased, “is a good five cent cigar,” a comment that he used in a different form soon afterward for an Abe Martin. The idea became famous over the world when it was expressed years later by Vice president Tom Marshall, an ardent Abe Martin fan. (Kelly, 1952, p. 12)

The remark, however, appears well before 1905. The *Yale Book of Quotations* cites the *Hartford Courant* of September 22, 1875 (“What this country really needs is a good five cent cigar - New York Mail”). Other earlier sources include *The Washington Evening Star* of September 22, 1875 (“What this country really needs is a good five cent cigar.”), *The New Orleans Times* of September 25, 1875 (“The Danbury News isn’t a dead journal yet by any means, but continues, at intervals, to hit the nail on the head with astonishing force and precision.

It says: What this country really needs is a good five cent cigar.”), and the *Saturday Evening Post* of October 16, 1875 (“The *Danbury News* says: ‘What this country really needs is a good five cent cigar.’ It is safe to wager ten to one that the editor’s wife entertains an entirely different opinion.”).

Most humorists, historians, and books of quotations, are content to tie the cigar quip to Thomas Marshall, who after all popularized it, but one other name does appear. In his *A Curious Man: The Strange & Brilliant Life of Robert “Believe It Or Not!” Ripley*, Neil Thompson assigns the one-liner to Bugs Baer.

AS A SPORTS CARTOONIST in Philadelphia and Washington, DC, Arthur “Bugs” Baer had drawn insects with baseball bodies, calling his ball-shaped creatures “bugs” and earning himself a nickname. Now writing a humor column at the *New York World*, Baer was developing a reputation as a master of one-liners, having coined the quip, “What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar.” (Milton Berle would later confess to mimicking Baer’s style.) (Thompson, 2013, p. 59)

The *Des Moines Register* of September 21, 1956 also cited Baer at Marshall’s expense.

Thomas R. Marshall, V. P. two terms under Wilson, is remembered only for having said, “What this country really needs is a good five cent cigar.” It was a mangled quotation from a Washington newspaper column by Arthur “Bugs” Baer, who wrote, “What this country really needs is a good five cent cigar and a place to smoke it.”

On September 13, 1961 the *Palm Beach Post* embroidered a bit on the same general story. The *Post* told its readers, “Notwithstanding his professional political alliance with Eastern politicians, the New York type, which of course begot the Chicago specimens, Harry Truman might have been a great American, better and even more American than Thomas R. Marshall, who has received undeserved historical credit for a monumental homeliness which actually was tossed off by Bugs Baer long, long ago. ‘What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar!’ Bugs wrote that in the seidlitz frenzies of his protege, Rabid Rudolph, in the old Washington Something Times or Herald or Post when Wilson was President.”

In a Sports World Special for the *New York Times* of January 12, 1987, Robert McG. Thomas, Jr., wrote about Bugs Baer under the title “He Said It.”

Indeed, his quips were so often adopted by others, and eventually attributed to them, that Baer said he always used fresh material lest he be accused of stealing from himself. It was Baer, in fact, who opined in print that “what this country needs is a good five-cent cigar,” a remark that was soon repeated (without attribution) by Woodrow Wilson’s vice president, Thomas R. Marshall.

Of course Baer may have written the phrase. He would have been twenty-eight when Marshall used it in the senate; nineteen about the time Kin Hubbard treated his father-in-law-to-be to a smoke. And he would have been eleven years short of his birth when the phrase turned up in print in 1875.

## Article II

Vice President Marshall endured criticism, and some ridicule, for failing to assume the presidency after Wilson's collapse and the lingering results of the thrombosis that severely incapacitated him. He might have invoked Article II, section 1 of the U. S. constitution, which provides for presidential succession.

In Case of the Removal of the President from Office, or of his Death, Resignation, or Inability to discharge the Powers and Duties of the said Office, the Same shall devolve on the Vice President, and the Congress may by Law provide for the Case of Removal, Death, Resignation or Inability, both of the President and Vice President, declaring what Officer shall then act as President, and such Officer shall act accordingly, until the Disability be removed, or a President shall be elected.

But the constitution was silent on what constitutes inability to discharge the powers and duties and how such disability is to be determined. Eventually provisions of the twenty-fifth amendment, unavailable to Marshall and his contemporaries, would help clarify the procedure.

John M. Blum in *Joe Tumulty and the Wilson Era* paints a rather unkind picture of Marshall and identifies him as an "important reason" why Wilson would not resign.

Another important reason for Wilson's retention of office was the reputation of Thomas R. Marshall. No one high in the councils of the Administration had great respect for the Vice-President. That affable politician, typifying the mediocrity of most of the holders of this office, stood for little but a good five-cent cigar. Neither as a Governor of Indiana nor as presiding officer of Senate had he demonstrated the vision or capacity for leadership in such critical times. He had attended a few cabinet meetings while Wilson was abroad but contributed nothing to the discussions. Fearful that he could accept Lodge's changes to the League, Mrs. Wilson would not trust him with her husband's precious treaty. Lansing considered him vain and incompetent; Tumulty found him rude and uninformed. (Blum, 1951, p. 215)

Unlike Wilson, Marshall did not see himself as an agent of divine providence doing God's will, and he might very well have accepted Senator Lodge's reservations to the League treaty. Wilson, of course, never would, because his treaty was a holy covenant. And because Henry Cabot Lodge, his stubborn rival, led the forces pressing for changes to the document.

Trying to sound him out, his assistant, Mark Thistlethwaite, spoke with Marshall about taking office as president.

Thistlethwaite went on to another subject: would Marshall take office if the Congress declared the President incapable of holding office? "No," said Marshall. Such a move would be illegal unless the president assented to it or until it had a two-thirds vote, "and a two-thirds vote is impossible." Would Marshall assume office if the Supreme Court

declared the president incapacitated? Well, there was no need to discuss that matter because the Court would never do it. Thistlethwaite finally asked just what Marshall would need to take over. A congressional resolution approved in writing by Cary Grayson and the First Lady. "I could throw this country into a civil war," Marshall summed up, "but I won't." Thistlethwaite wanted something more concrete from his chief, but Marshall refused even to listen to any more talk. "I am not going to seize the place," he said, "and have Wilson, recovered, come around and say, 'Get off, you usurper!'" (Smith, 1964, p. 129-130)

Marshall's statement about civil war was a little over the top, but the need for approval from the president's physician, Cary Grayson, and his wife, Edith Wilson, was on the mark. The trouble was, they would never consent to affirm that Wilson was incapacitated. Edith Wilson recounts the advice Dr. Francis X. Dercum, a neurologist attending her husband, gave her in *My Memoirs*, advice she accepted.

"Then," I said, "had he better not resign, let Mr. Marshall succeed to the Presidency and himself get the complete rest that is so vital to his life?"

"No," the Doctor said, "not if you feel equal to what I suggested. For Mr. Wilson to resign would have a bad effect on the country, and a serious effect on our patient. He has staked his life and made his promise to the world to do all in his power to get the Treaty ratified and make the League of Nations complete. If he resigns, the greatest incentive to recovery is gone; and as his mind is clear as crystal he can still do more with even a maimed body than any one else. He has the utmost confidence in you. Dr. Grayson tells me he has always discussed public affairs with you; so you will not come to them uninformed." (Wilson, 1939, p. 289)

Without their cooperation, no change was possible, and the White House charade would continue until Wilson left office in 1921.

In a report for the Congressional Research Service, *Presidential Disability: An Overview*, Thomas H. Neale also describes the difficulties Marshall (and others) faced during Wilson's illness.

Presidential disabilities of the 20th century are perhaps better known. On October 2, 1919, President Woodrow Wilson suffered a stroke from which he never fully recovered during the remainder of his term. The gravity of his illness was concealed from the press and public, and access to the President was strictly controlled. Vice President Thomas Marshall was excluded from political or executive duties throughout the period, and Secretary of State James Lansing was forced to resign when Wilson learned that he had convened the cabinet informally to deal with pressing questions. Although Wilson's health improved, several measures were introduced in the 66th Congress providing for a disability declaration, while some argued that the Supreme Court should issue a writ of mandamus, directing the Vice President to act as President. Grave doubts as to the constitutionality of such measures deterred any concrete action, however. (Neale, 1999, p. 2-3)

The secretary of state's name was Robert Lansing, rather than James, but Neale is right about his fate.

Writing in the *New York Times* of July 19, 1968, Herbert Mitgang observed, "In the great coverup that followed, the President's wife and personal physician played executive roles in the White House. Under the present law on disability, his Vice President, Thomas R. Marshall, could have replaced him as Acting President and gone down in history for a little more than his remark, 'What this country needs is a really good five-cent cigar.'"

### **Lincoln, Longfellow, Henry and Marshall**

But what about that remark? "With brevity, compactness, and pungency it summarized a hundred words and thoughts," according to Montgomery. (Montgomery, 1956, p.134-135) Hurja counted it as "a saying which will live longer than many an offering of sage moral counsel." (Hurja, 1942, p. 23) Ted Buss found that "Despite its political frivolousness, the quote lives on; right up there with the best of Abe Lincoln and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow." (Wichita Falls (TX) *Times Record News*, January 7, 2005) Even the *New York Times* had to admit, "It summed up a wise and homely philosophy, coupled with a gentle satire." (*New York Times*, October 18, 1925) Perhaps the *Evening Star* went a bit far with "We will not be around to verify the truth of our prediction, but we suspect it will live as long as Patrick Henry's 'Give me liberty or give me death.' We are going to be a bit of the Philistine and say we think Marshall's statement is the better of the two." (The Washington (DC) *Evening Star*, June 11, 1925) And Hale praised Marshall handsomely, "At first I was disappointed; I enjoy a good story. After a while I caught sight of a certain realistic art, true, pertinent, and illuminating, like the exquisite realism of a great French or Russian story-writer." (Hale, 1912, p. 365)

The words are generous, assuming them to be sincere. Even the *Times* said something nice, a tacit acknowledgement that Joe hadn't hit it yet, but Tom had.

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### Beyond the Cigar: A Sampler of the Quotable Marshall

The cigar quip was not the only example of Marshall's wit or his ability with a phrase. As he began his final year in office, the *New York Tribune* published on January 4, 1920, "Some Marshall Epigrams," a boxed section of a larger piece, "For Once the Limelight Shines on a Vice-President of the U.S." Among the nine observations, Marshall treated politics and other, more general matters.

The time when I am liable to be wholly wrong is when I know that I am absolutely right. (*New York Tribune*, January 4, 1920)

I do not talk politics between campaigns and afterward I regret what I said in them. (*New York Tribune*, January 4, 1920)

Shortly following Marshall's death, *The Literary Digest* published "Tom' Marshall — Humorist" in its issue for June 20, 1925. The *Digest*, too, found apt quotations and anecdotes.

Upon his retirement from the Vice-Presidency, Marshall paid his compliments to the senate in the remark, now recalled by the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*: "I have been in the cave of winds. I need a rest." (*The Literary Digest*, 1925, p. 45)

It's got so it is as easy to amend the Constitution of the United States as it used to be to draw a cork. (*The Literary Digest*, 1925. p. 45)

Once in his earlier years, when his friends tried to nominate him for Congress he declined the offer, saying:

"I'm afraid I might be elected." (*The Literary Digest*, 1925. p. 45)

In the later months of 1925 Bobbs-Merrill published *Recollections of Thomas R. Marshall, Vice-President and Hoosier Philosopher: A Hoosier Salad*.

It [Indiana] has perhaps had no towering mountain peaks, but it has surely furnished as many first-grade second-class men in every department of life as any state in the Union. (Marshall, 1925, p. 39-40)

My grandfather, as a fiery Virginian, announced that he was willing to take his chance on hell, but not on the Republican party. (Marshall, 1925, p. 71) [Marshall's father and grandfather were devoted Democrats. A Methodist preacher, whose church they attended, threatened to remove them from the roll of the congregation if they continued to vote the Democratic ticket.]

Then comes the orator of the day. I see him now — tall, gaunt, clean shaved, wearing a Prince Albert coat that reaches below his knees, and a white bow tie that hitches with a clasp at the back and has the inherent viciousness in it to seek, from time to time, to climb up and rest itself on his left ear. Indeed, it is questionable whether his oratorical effort or his effort to keep his neck-tie on, occupied most of the distinguished gentleman's time. What all he said I do not know. It has passed into the limbo of forgetfulness, save this portion of it which still abides in my memory: "Methinks I hear the tramp, tramp of the Pilgrim Fathers as they march from Plymouth Rock to 'Fennell' Hall to sign the Declaration of Independence." It was the end. We vociferously cheered him, and then we nominated him and elected him as our representative in the next General Assembly of Indiana. We felt that we had a champion who would be true to the great principles of American independence. (Marshall, 1925, p. 125-126) [Concerning the Fourth of July orator]

The real amusement of those earlier days was not golf or mah jong. It was local politics. It was played by everybody with the zest of a confirmed gambler. (Marshall, 1925, p. 129)

"Oh, Tom, don't tell that story! I was with you all the while. What you mean to say is that you made one speech one hundred sixty-nine times, in the state of Indiana. And if you dare deny it, I'll deliver it now, and tell you anything else you said!" (Marshall,

1925, p. 166) [Marshall bragged that he had made one hundred sixty-nine speeches throughout Indiana during his strenuous campaign for governor in 1908. His wife, he admits, corrected him.]

No one was ever crazy enough to shoot at a vice-president.  
(Marshall, 1925, p. 201) [On the importance of being vice-president]

If you look at me as a wild animal, be kind enough to throw peanuts at me; but if you are really desirous of seeing me, come in and shake hands. (Marshall, 1925, p. 230) [On being pointed out by guides while in his senate office]

There is, in the Senate wing of the Capitol, a bust of each of the vice-presidents of the United States. Why they have been erected there, is not for me to say. I have always felt, however, that it was a sort of promise from each one to the American people that this was the last bust on which he would ever go. (Marshall, 1925, p. 232)

As far as I know it [the Senate] is the only legislative body in the world that has no power to bring debate to a close save by unanimous agreement. Like Tennyson's brook, the words flow on forever... (Marshall, 1925, p. 293)

Did Lodge object to anybody getting between him and the sun? (Marshall, 1925, p. 298)  
[On Henry Cabot Lodge]

I have sometimes thought that great men are the bane of civilization; that they are the real cause of all the bitterness and contention which amounts to anything in the world.  
(Marshall, 1925, p. 363)

The standing joke of the country is that the only business of the vice-president is to ring the White House bell every morning and ask what is the state of health of the president.  
(Marshall, 1925, p. 368)

Marshall's biographer Charles M. Thomas includes a number of quotable Marshall comments in *Thomas Riley Marshall: Hoosier Statesman*.

There are a great many things I believe that I know are not so; for instance I believe the Democratic party is always right. (Thomas, 1939, p. 36)

I believe in vested rights but not in vested wrongs." (Thomas, p. 148) [On the wealthy, property rights and a government policy of protective tariffs that enabled businesses increase profits by suppressing competition.]

Instead of concluding with the usual words "adjourned sine die," Marshall on this occasion clearly said, "adjourned sine deo." The official record in its dignity states that the Senate was adjourned sine die, but the press gallery was unanimous in hearing the adjournment "without God" instead of "without day." (Thomas, 1939, p. 168)

Having known the Constitution when it was young and vigorous and able to take care of itself, now, in its old age and neglect, I feel constrained to speak a kind word about it. (Thomas, 1939, p. 171)

The important thing, you know, in public life is that those who know nothing are placed in the seats of the mighty. The wise men remain at home and discuss public questions on the end of street cars and around barber shops. (Thomas, 1939, p. 173)

I had to do it, steal or resign. (Thomas, 1939, p. 191) [On receiving compensation for speaking engagements while vice-president]

I am a son of the Middle West. To the people of New York I appear to be provincial, although it may be safely stated that anything is provincial to which one is unaccustomed. The first Westerner who heard a man paged in a New York hotel was doubtless just as much amused as the New York girl who came to Indiana and laughed when she heard the farmers' wives paging their cows. (Thomas, 1939, p. 194)

I've got the best job I've ever had now; no responsibilities. (Thomas, 1939, p. 220) [On the vice-presidency]

Marshall telegraphed Governor Calvin Coolidge, his possible successor as vice-president, after Coolidge's nomination at the 1920 Chicago Republican Convention: "Please accept my sincere sympathy." (Thomas, 1939, p. 240)

Envy is the bane of mankind. When you find out you can't get something for yourself, don't try to worry about someone else getting it. (Thomas, 1939, p. 240) [Marshall played little part in the Democratic National Convention in 1924; he did offer a comment when interviewed by reporters a few days before the Convention assembled in New York.]

A variety of sources quote Marshall on topics that range from Democrats to Charles Evans Hughes and Eve the soubrette.

"If you think I would not make a good Governor of Indiana, it is your duty to vote against me. If you think I would make a good Governor, it is your duty to vote for me." (Montgomery, 1957, p. 156) [On voting]

"Democrats, like poets, are born, not made." (Hicks, p. 331; and *Outlook*, September 28, 1912) [On Democrats]

Marshall compared the vice-president to a person in a cataleptic state. "He cannot speak; he cannot move; he suffers no pain; and yet he is perfectly conscious of everything that is going on about him." (Tally, 1992, p. 221) [On the vice-presidency]

It is no part of government to boost one man and boot another. (*Outlook*. September 28, 1912)

“He doesn’t know what he would have done,” said the Vice President. “He only thinks he knows. I think if I had been in the Garden of Eden I would not have eaten the apple. But I don’t know—I never met that charming soubrette Eve. I might have eaten two apples.” (*New York Times*, October 28, 1916) [Said concerning Charles Evans Hughes, “Marshall Ridicules Hughes’s Hindsight; He Might As Well Say: ‘Had I Been Adam I’d Have Been Apple Proof’”]

“Death had to take him sleeping,” Vice President Marshall cabled from Washington, “for if Roosevelt had been awake, there would have been a fight.” [On the death of Theodore Roosevelt in 1919; quoted in Goodwin, Doris Kerns. *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2013, p. 746; also: “A cable arrived from Vice President Thomas Marshall that said in part, ‘Death had to take him sleeping, for if Roosevelt had been awake, there would have been a fight.’ Another, more parsimonious message— as cold as it was brief— arrived from Woodrow Wilson, now in Europe to attend the Versailles Peace Conference.” Renahan, Edward J., Jr. *The Lion’s Pride: Theodore Roosevelt and his Family in Peace and War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 222.]

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