

THE PAPERS OF JAMES MADISON. Volume I, 16 MARCH 1751–16 DECEMBER 1779; Volume II, 20 MARCH 1780–23 FEBRUARY 1781. Edited by *William T. Hutchinson* and *William M. E. Rachal*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1962. Pp. xlii, 343; xix, 343. \$10.00 each.)

GREAT men's *juvenilia*, like nineteenth-century novels of character, can entertain and enlighten. Both also can gratify the reader with a sensation of unique prescience. Eyes opened by hindsight and inexplicably sharpened by insight delight to perceive in the unconscious and trivial outpourings of youth an image that is father to the man, the key to the puzzle. Not so with James Madison. Seekers of the inner man will find these two volumes unrewarding, unrevealing, and uncommonly dull. The flat surface of the personality that comes down through this record derives not from inborn reticence or missing letters; Madison, whom childhood did not become, plainly came into focus—became recognizable as James Madison—only under the pressure of adult responsibility and after the world had made its demands upon his remarkable but unobtrusive talents.

Where the papers reveal most of Madison as a private person, from his arrival at Princeton in 1769 to his entry into public life as a delegate to the Virginia Convention in May 1776, they are of least interest and of least importance. Madison the student developed his invaluable capacity to go straight to the point and to express it accurately and succinctly. He began the reading that made of his mind a storehouse on which he drew in 1787. And he wrote mildly scatological verse, which was a mistake. Back at home from Princeton in 1772, he gave every evidence of being a conventionally pious rather sentient young man obsessed with his health and, except for incidents of religious suppression, which he abhorred, little interested in the world about him. When the fever of revolution finally overtook him, he proved to be less a radical than an undifferentiated young gentleman responding to radical opinion in the usual way. Mild little Jamie, a member of the Orange County committee of safety, considered tar and feathers too good for laggards; he saw traitors everywhere and was only too ready to believe Benjamin Franklin guilty of treason. Then in 1776 he went to Williamsburg, and something happened. The private, commonplace Madison recedes and virtually disappears from these pages, and the papers become largely the unadorned record of a rare intelligence operating upon questions of public concern.

As Madison moves into the convention that drafted Virginia's first constitution, ratified George Mason's declaration of rights, and served as the state's first legislature, and from here goes to the council of state and then in 1780 on to the Continental Congress, his letters and public papers reflect, without explaining, the growing powers and deepening perceptions of this creative politician. When he argues that the value of a government's currency depends as much upon intangible public confidence as upon the mechanics of supply and demand, or that Congress by its "voluntary relinquishment" of its power to emit money has wrought a

"total change" by which Congress is made "as dependent on the States as the King of England is on the parliament," we see in embryo his two most important contributions to American statecraft: an unrivaled understanding of the relationship of economics to politics and a precise conception of the necessary dimensions of central power. The difficulties met with by Congress in 1780 and 1781 in its efforts to cope with inflation and interstate conflict over the disposition of western lands confronted Madison for the first time directly with manifestations of the central political problem of this crucial if not critical decade. The Revolution engaged his mind in an object worthy of it; the unique opportunity to create a nation drew forth what he had to give. Of all his generation, shy and wizened Madison perhaps owed most to the Revolution, would have transplanted to an earlier or later age least well. The country's good fortune in having Madison when it did was Madison's as well.

The editors of the two initial volumes of the projected twenty have supplied the definitive record of Madison's first thirty years. Volume I begins with the record of the birth and baptism of James Madison, Jr., and Volume II with a letter to his father reporting his safe arrival in Philadelphia to attend Congress in 1780. Included are all extant letters by or to Madison and all his other writings (except copy work), papers directly relating to Madison, and extensive samples of work done by committees and boards while Madison was a member. For the time span covered, the two volumes provide a guide to the externals of Madison's life, a record of his work and thought, and an introduction to his times. The value of the new edition can be appreciated when it is noted that of the material in Volume I, Gaillard Hunt, whose edition this supersedes, included only fifteen of thirty-seven letters written by Madison, and some of these are inaccurately or incompletely transcribed and some misdated. Biographer Irving Brant, it is true, consulted most if not all these documents, but one reason for publishing a man's papers is to provide means for going behind the interpreter directly to the man while retaining the advantages of the interpreter's guidance and insight.

If the editors had stopped with presenting the text of the papers, it would have been work well done and worth doing. But it would have been thin fare indeed. Madison's unconcern for the random world, his consistent tendency to let the concrete, the tangible, the specific, the personal, pass unnoticed and unnoted if not immediately relevant to matters of moment drains his early letters of interest and makes them peculiarly uninformative. With patient skill the editors have tracked down, identified, and explained persons, places, relationships, books, issues, and events only mentioned or barely alluded to so that the footnotes not only supply the spice of small talk so notably lacking but also constitute an extended excursion into the byways of revolutionary Virginia. For one of many examples of painstaking and imaginative research, see "Snodgrass (John or William)," page 30, note 87. Julian Boyd's approach to the editing of the Jefferson papers is one of elegant restraint, which is exactly right, but Madison's editors were astute enough

to know that this would not do for their man. The richness of the documentation gives these two volumes a distinction they would not otherwise have and provides relief in many an arid stretch.

Rice University

W. W. ABBOT