

The Papers of James Madison. Edited by William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal. Volume IV. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965. Pp. 486. \$12.50.)

The editing of historical documents is rapidly becoming a separate profession among American historians. Inspired by the meticulous scholarship of Julian Boyd, who published the first of his elaborately annotated volumes of the writings of Thomas Jefferson in 1950, other historians are devoting a substantial part of their professional careers to turning out equally elaborate editions of the writings of other distinguished Americans. No document which they wrote, however insignificant, goes unmentioned; no letter from any correspondent, however obscure, is neglected; no person:

mentioned in the text, however unimportant, goes unidentified; and no event, however inconsequential, is left unexplained.

Many of those historians who write books rather than footnotes have lavishly praised this new breed of editors, but a smaller number have chided them for usurping both the role of the biographer and the monograph writer. Because *The Papers of James Madison* is the most thoroughly annotated of the current crop of writings of famous Americans—a list that includes the Adamsses, Franklin, Hamilton, and Clay, among others—it has borne the brunt of such criticism. How valid is it?

The latest volume of Madison's papers covers his career from January 1, 1782, through July 31, 1782. During these months Madison, as a delegate from Virginia to the Continental Congress, played a leading role in the important issues of war and peace which confronted the infant republic. The military operations of the American Revolution had come to a close with the decisive victory of the Americans at Yorktown in October, 1781, but the peace was not assured. The fight for American independence was transferred to the conference table in Paris, where the American commissioners were faced with the wily efforts of Lord North and the Marquis of Rockingham to undermine the Franco-American alliance. Would the British, defeated in battle, now grant the Americans independence and the prerequisites of sovereignty to which a free nation was entitled? During the first seven months of 1782, it was by no means certain, and Madison, for one, believed that the British were engaged in an "insidious" policy of delay, economic coercion, maritime intimidation, and domestic subversion.

Perhaps no American in 1782 was a more ardent nationalist than Madison, and the writings published in this volume eloquently portray the skill and prescience with which he sought to enhance the prestige and powers of the union. His observations on states' rights and the national interest, and on the powers of Congress in the areas reserved to it, as well as on the extent of its implied powers, constitute the most astute political analysis written at that time.

This volume of the Madison papers maintains the high standards which its editors established with the publication of the first volume in 1962. The annotation is, as previously, thorough, so comprehensive, indeed, that only the most indefatigable searcher could find an allusion, an obscure fact, a person, a place, or a vague statement that is left unexplained. If there is a flaw in this volume, it is the effort of the editors to prove Madison consistent and to square what he wrote in 1782 with what he later said. Is it the task of historical editors to explain, much less to justify, the seeming inconsistencies of their subjects? In view of Irving Brant's seven-volume defense of Madison, the answer in the latter's case must be a "No."

Despite this minor objection, I think that the criticisms which have been made of the Madison Papers on the score of over-annotation are invalid. To object to explanatory footnotes, of whatever length, is to argue that it is possible to acquire too much information. A little learning may be a dangerous thing, but vast learning, by the same token, is surely not a censur-

able thing. For historians to complain of too much research is surprising to anyone who has spent tedious hours in the drudgery of fact-searching. With the publication of this volume, as well as its companions, historians of early American history are presented with a rich gift. Supplied with such abundant historical material, they are exempt from the exacting labors of historical research and free for the no less demanding task of reflecting anew on the significance not only of James Madison but of his era.

This edition of the Madison Papers is a massive contribution of scholarship and a fitting monument to one of America's most notable philosopher-statesmen.

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