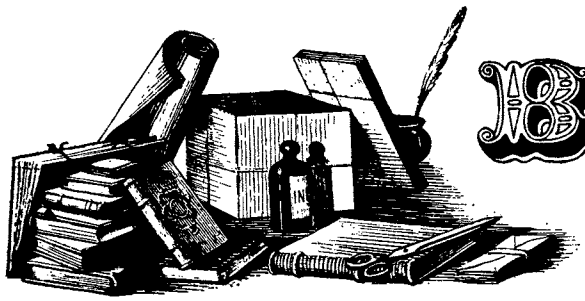

BOOK REVIEWS

The Papers of Madison and Franklin: A Review Article

By MERRILL JENSEN

The publication of the papers of the Founding Fathers takes a long step forward with the issuance of the first two volumes of the Papers of James Madison who has his own particular claim to the title of "Founding Father." The editors have followed the precedents established by Julian Boyd in his edition of Jefferson's papers. They print the letters written to Madison as well as those written by him, and documents in any way relating to his career. These are accompanied by elaborate editorial notes, which are, in some cases, perhaps, unnecessarily detailed. For instance, a two-line receipt for money received in 1770 is followed by twenty-eight lines of notes. Sometimes too, it would seem difficult to justify the inclusion of material such as the proceedings of the Virginia Council of State while Madison was a member. On balance, however, the editorial notes and most of the documents are a godsend to the scholar, as is the index at the end of each volume. Some idea of the scale of the project can be realized by comparing it with the Hunt edition of Madison's writings. That covered the years to March, 1781, in 125 pages and perhaps 40,000 words, whereas the present edition takes 636 pages of text and at least 400,000 words for the same time span.

What does the new edition reveal of Madison himself? In 1781, the wife of his fellow delegate in Congress, Mrs. Theodorick Bland, admitted that he might be clever in Congress, but that he was "a gloomy, stiff creature . . . has nothing engaging or even bearable in his manners—the most unsociable creature in existence." Nevertheless, in college he made friends with some remarkable men such as William Bradford, Philip Freneau, and H. H. Brackenridge, and he continued to do so throughout his life. When he left college in 1772 he became a recluse interested only in books. He told Bradford that he did not "meddle" in politics and was apologetic for mentioning the scarcity of money in Virginia.

By the end of 1773 a change was under way. He wrote Bradford that the "inquisitive mind" could not ignore the principles and modes of government and asked for information about Pennsylvania, and in particular

The Papers of James Madison: Vol. I, 16 March 1751–16 December 1779; Vol. II, 20 March 1780–23 February 1781. Edited by WILLIAM T. HUTCHINSON and WILLIAM M. E. RACHEL. (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962. Vol I: Pp. xlii, 344. $10.00; Vol. II: Pp. xix, 344, $10.00.)

The Papers of Benjamin Franklin: Vol. III, January 1, 1745 through June 30, 1750; Vol. IV, July 1, 1750 through June 30, 1753. Edited by LEONARD W. LABAREE and others. (Yale University Press, New Haven, Vol. III, 1961. Pp. xxvi, 513. $10.00; Vol. IV, 1961. Pp. xxix, 544. $10.00.)

about its religious freedom. A month or so later he confessed that he had been too much captivated by poetry, romances, plays, and the like. His "political awakening" was the result of the prosecution of Baptist ministers by his fellow Virginians: "that diabolical Hell conceived principle of persecution," he wrote Bradford. He became interested, too, in the conflict between Britain and the colonies after 1774, but he seems to have been an understudy to his father, who was a leader in Orange County politics.

Then, in the spring of 1776, Orange County elected Madison to the convention that voted for independence and wrote the first Virginia Constitution. Here he made a major contribution. George Mason's first draft of the bill of rights provided only for religious toleration. Madison offered amendments that produced a far wider declaration in the final draft: that men are entitled to "the free exercise of religion." Thereafter he served in the legislature, with no apparent distinction, until defeated for re-election in the spring of 1777, when he refused to treat the voters to the liquor they expected from candidates on election days.

He returned to politics in November, 1777, when the legislature elected him to the Council of State where he served with governors Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson until the legislature elected him to the Continental Congress in December, 1779. He at once undertook the study of a central problem of the times: public finance. This was the sort of thing he was to do time and again in the future, as in his preparation for the Constitutional Convention of 1787. His essay on the quantity theory of money is well worth comparing with Hamilton's financial essays of the same period, and it was first printed in 1790 as an answer to some of Hamilton's financial policies.

Madison took his seat in Congress in the spring of 1780, and for the next thirty-seven years he held one public office after another, a remarkable record for a man without political or personal glamor. And throughout he was involved in an internal conflict. At heart he was a Virginian, devoted to her interests, yet intellectually he was a nationalist whose aims could be achieved only at the seeming expense of at least some of the interests of his state. As a member of Congress he was at once involved in crucial and long-range problems. There was the struggle over the navigation of the Mississippi, which was not solved until the purchase of Louisiana, when he was Secretary of State. There was the struggle over the control of western lands which did not end until long after his death. And there was the attempt to solve the problems of public finance, which only romantics assume have any solution either in time or place.

These two volumes therefore serve as an introduction, not only to the life of an extraordinary man, but also to the life of the nation.

The Papers of Benjamin Franklin for the eight and a half years between 1745 and the summer of 1753 are the record of a man with an almost infinite variety of interests, an incredible amount of energy, and a capacity for wit and commonsense unequalled at the time, and perhaps ever since. During no period in his long life did Franklin engage in so many and such varied projects and with so much success. He turned active management of his printing business over to David Hall in 1748 and thereafter received a handsome income. However, he continued to supervise his almanack and in 1748 he began publishing *Poor Richard improved*, an enlarged version which reflected an ever-wider range of interests. He found time to write such occasional pieces as the advice on choosing a mistress, the "speech" of Polly Baker, and the hilarious poetic parody on the speeches of the governor and council of Virginia after the burning of the Virginia capitol.

During the same years he was more and more active in politics. By 1745 he was clerk of the assembly. In 1748 he was elected to the common council of Philadelphia and in 1751 to the board of aldermen, and to the colonial legislature as well. He was also postmaster of Philadelphia and was shortly to become deputy postmaster-general for British North America.

Meanwhile, Franklin was one of the promoters, and often the principal promoter, of a whole series of public measures, as earlier he had promoted the Library Company and the Philosophical Society. In 1747, despite the fact that French privateers were raiding in Delaware Bay and threatening Philadelphia, the Quaker-controlled legislature refused to vote money for defense. Franklin therefore organized a voluntary militia, secured weapons, and established a successful lottery to pay the cost. He won colony-wide fame and popularity, and the enmity of Proprietor Thomas Penn, who declared him a

"dangerous man." However, the Proprietor was forced to admit that he must be treated with regard since he was "a sort of Tribune of the People. . . ."

In 1749 Franklin began the campaign that soon resulted in the establishment of the Academy, the predecessor of the University of Pennsylvania, and despite the Proprietor's early objections, secured a charter and a gift of money from him. When Dr. Thomas Bond tried to raise funds for the establishment of the Pennsylvania Hospital without consulting Franklin, he got nowhere. But when Franklin took charge, the money was raised and the hospital founded. He also helped organize a fire insurance company, and when Philadelphia sent an expedition to search for a Northwest Passage, Franklin was one of the managers.

Despite all the time spent on public affairs, Franklin still found time and energy for "natural philosophy," but unlike many eighteenth-century "scientists" he combined theorizing with practical experimentation. Above all he was fascinated by electricity. He summed up his ideas and his experiments in a series of letters to Peter Collinson and to others. Collinson, the London merchant-philanthropist, published the letters in London in 1751 and by the next year they were translated into French. Franklin soon had an international reputation. Others had theorized that electricity and lightning were identical but Franklin suggested how to prove it, and then did so by flying a kite during a storm. He invented the lightning rod. He tried electric shock treatment for illness and he electrocuted hens and turkeys, insisting that they were better eating than those killed in the normal way. Once, in a moment of carelessness, he was knocked out by an electrical charge.

No eighteenth-century scientist limited himself to a single field, nor did Franklin. He speculated at length about waterspouts, the weather, agriculture, and medicine. He studied the origins and results of population growth. He circulated his ideas in letters and essays to other leading "scientists" of the times such as Cadwallader Colden, James Bowdoin, and Jared Eliot. He won their respect and admiration in a class-conscious age, a consciousness reflected in the Rev. Samuel Johnson's comment on the proposal for the establishment of the Academy. He wrote Franklin: "Nobody would imagine that the draught you have made for an English education was done by a Tradesman."

The above review is only a catalogue, and a very partial one at that, of activities of one of the most fertile-minded men of the age. The editors have provided full notes which illuminate the letters and documents, and the years during which they were written. More than that, one can not ask from editors.