The Illustrious Period

THE PAPERS OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN. Volume 8, April 1, 1758, through December 31, 1759. *Edited by Leonard W. Labaree. Yale University Press. $10.*

THE PAPERS OF JAMES MADISON. Volume 4, 1782. *Edited by William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal. University of Chicago Press. $12.50.*

THE PAPERS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON. Volume 17, July 1790 to November 1790. *Edited by Julian P. Boyd. Princeton University Press. $15.*

Reviewed by ADRIENNE KOCH

A fresh volume apiece for three of America's greatest men is a jackpot for American history buffs. The editors of these majestic documentary publications projects have once again opened new sources of information and insight to all who desire to know about the emergence of this country as an independent nation, through the agency of its great men who committed their country to a new set of individual and social values.

The original mandate for these grand, comprehensive editions of the papers of the leading philosopher-statesmen and others was issued by President Truman in 1950, when he was presented with the first volume of the standard-setting *Papers of Thomas Jefferson,* edited by Julian P. Boyd and published by the Princeton University Press. President Truman, who was more than an official enthusiast for American history, was deeply impressed with the superb quality of Boyd's Jefferson volumes, and he instructed the National Historical Publications Commission to submit a plan to make available "the writings of men whose contributions to our history are now inadequately represented by published works."

The Franklin and Madison volumes and the pace-setting new Jefferson volume constitute three imprints in the series of sturdily progressing publications projects. Another splendid series of volumes, *The Adams Papers,* under the editorship of Lyman Butterfield, and the rapidly increasing series devoted to *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton,* complete the circle of five major editorial enterprises devoted to the lifelong correspondence and writings of the keenest intellects among the founding fathers. To these new documentary treasure troves of eighteenth-century America we will soon be able to add the first volume of *A Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution and the First Ten Amendments,* edited by Dr. Robert E. Cushman and Leonard Rapport. Several other magnificent plums lie *below* the surface of the historical pie—juiciest of these (the cooks whisper) is in its initial preparatory stage, and will document the history of the first Federal Congress.

It would be too much to ask for a neat pattern from the three invaluable volumes that have just been added to the Franklin, Madison and Jefferson editions respectively. Nonetheless these welcome volumes permit us to set down probes at three revealing points in the illustrious period when America, and the American character, were being formed. Volume 8 of *The Franklin Papers* highlights the American state of mind just prior to the rise of the revolutionary movement. Volume 4 of *The Madison Papers* opens before the reader the evidence of the uncertain unity achieved by the war-weary American states under the Articles of Confederation; and it makes luminous the dangers, both domestic and foreign, that beset the United States on the very eve of victory and peace. Volume 17 of *The Jefferson Papers* convinces us that the near-miraculous preservation and strengthening of the union, which resulted from the Constitutional Convention and the ratification of the Constitution, represented only one wave (although it was a big wave) breasted, in the surging ocean of temporal affairs. The fact is that Jefferson's transactions in his first year as Secretary

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of State, when he was establishing the office and its powers, provides a fascinating record of the daily leadership that transferred the *outlines* of an American republic to the reality of a republican political system. But by what painful processes of discovery, adjustment and adjudication the calendar of political creation was filled, may only now be glimpsed in its eloquent and intricate human terms.

Despite this valuable cargo of information on the times, embracing the rise of the revolutionary mind, the dangers of American disunity on the eve of victory after seven hard years of the Revolutionary War, and the creative acts that shaped the American pattern of public responsibility in the opening years of the Republic, it remains true that the greatest interest these publications continue to excite centers in the men whose writings are put before the reader. Never were they presented with such fidelity and so much clarifying editorial information to help the reader gauge their true import. In this regard, each volume provides a candid profile of the man at a particular phase in his life journey.

One finds Franklin in the year 1758-59, enjoying considerable celebrity already, as a natural scientist and a significant man of letters and inventive ideas. In the course of this volume, he receives an honorary degree from St. Andrews University—the magic Doctor of Laws that converted the once humble printer into "Doctor" Franklin. The language of this first of the many honorary degrees he was to receive is illuminating about his reputation outside America, even before the Revolution would bring Americans to notice before the intelligentsia of the European world. The degree read, in part:

> Whereas the ingenuous [*sic!*] and worthy Benj: Franklin has not only been recommended to us for his Knowledge of the Law, the Rectitude of his Morals and Sweetness of his Life and Conversation, but hath also by his ingenious Inventions and succesful Experiments with which he hath enriched the Science of natural philosophy and more especially of Electricity which heretofore was little known, acquired so much Praise throughout the World as to deserve the greatest Honours in the Republic of Letters . . . we declare the above named Mr. Benjamin Franklin Doctor of Laws and will that for the future he be treated by all as the most worthy Doctor, and we grant to him with a liberal hand all the Privileges and Honours, which are anywhere granted to Doctors of Laws.

Despite this engaging tribute to "the Rectitude of his Morals and Sweetness of his Life and Conversation," Franklin was *persona non grata* to Thomas Penn and the other members of the Proprietary family in London. His official mission was that of Colonial Agent for Pennsylvania, charged with pressing the Assembly's complaint against the Proprietors before the Privy Council in London, and presenting the request that the Proprietors' immunity from taxation on their vast estates be rescinded. Although in these months Franklin won no decisive victories on this issue or on the Proprietors' alleged fraud in Indian lands, he was already unmistakably an American, a man to be reckoned with—although it would be absurd to imply that he had rebellion in mind.

During this period, Franklin also traveled extensively in England and Scotland, including various "rambles" through the English Midlands where he and his son, William, visited their ancestral homes at Ecton and Banbury, and even hunted up Deborah Franklin's Birmingham connections. This genealogical interest on Franklin's part is worth noting, since he is notorious for priding himself on being a "self-made" man and was entirely sincere in his enlightened commitment to "the family of mankind." But he was no Thomas Paine, and had too strong a sense of human character to rest content with Everyman's lineage from Adam and Eve! A touching letter from his aged first cousin, Mary Fisher, compliments him for having taken "more Care to preserve the Memory of our Family, than any other Person that ever belonged to it"—a family of which she was proud because "it acted that Part well in which Providence had placed it, and for 200 Years all the Descendants of it have lived with Credit, and are to this Day without any Blot in their Escutcheon, which is

more than some of the best Families i: e. the Richest and highest in Title can pretend to." Thus even Franklin's "common sense" had had a lineage.

The Madison volume reveals the thoughts and doings of James Madison, aged thirty, up to his ears in work as a Virginia delegate to Congress in 1782. By that time the aged Doctor Franklin was living in Paris, serving the cause of American Independence with a luster perhaps never matched by anyone in the long line of American diplomats from his time to ours. But otherwise it was a younger generation's day; and Madison, although eclipsed by a greater political leader who was already his friend, Thomas Jefferson, was coming into the public limelight as an acute reasoner and farseeing statesman. The book opens with Madison in the midst of the bitter contests in Congress over the terms of a treaty of peace with Great Britain. Characteristic of the wise policy-making that would distinguish his zenith years, Madison's "Report on Instructions on Peace Negotiations" sought to reconcile internal sectional differences between New England and the Southern states (the former anxious principally about fishing rights on the Banks of Newfoundland, the latter adamant about freedom of navigation of the Mississippi from its source to its mouth). Even more important, Madison intended to achieve, by Congressional agreement upon the indispensable terms of the British treaty, an inducement for the continuance of union, hoping that the states would stand together in the common effort to obtain optimum treaty provisions. An excellent editorial headnote to the intricate issue of the peace negotiations prefaces Madison's report and illuminates the political import of its terms.

These issues continue to occupy Congress throughout the year. Madison's motion, urging the states to send full delegations to Congress, and Resolutions on fidelity to the alliance with France—both of which were adopted by Congress—are closely related to them. In June, a splendid public letter was written anonymously by the Marquis de Barbé-Marbois and supposedly merely *translated* by Madison. But in truth Madison seems to have been responsible for its composition—otherwise, in the acute judgment of Irving Brant, Madison's biographer, "Marbois had a genius for uttering Madisonian thoughts." The letter rejects a "divide and conquer" approach to the American-French alliance by the British. It reviews the grounds of America's obligations to France, congratulates Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia for their declarations, disdainfully rejecting every offer of a separate peace "and every proposition which would throw the slightest stain on our national character." Pride in "the title of American" is eloquently avowed at the end of this striking letter to the public, and justified on the grounds of the varieties of courage already proved by Americans in standing up to the devastation of war without being shaken. Contentment, however, was not Madison's intent. He reserved the surprise for his final sentence: "Nothing is above our courage, except only (with shame I speak it) except the courage to TAX ourselves." The financial crisis was produced at least in part by the refusal of the states to comply with requested appropriations by Congress, and by their unwillingness to yield to that body the power of compulsory taxation. In this instance it is perfectly logical—and not absurd—to see the shape of things to come. Madison's perception of the critical weakness and "imbecility" of congressional responsibility for a union without congressional authority over money, troops, or domestic order and harmony in the commercial and other policies of the states, set him smartly on the road to the Annapolis Convention, and ultimately to the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

It is the new Jefferson volume, however, that contains the most significant materials and is enriched by the unsurpassed editorial genius of Julian P. Boyd. The discoveries about Hamilton's deceitful dealings with President Washington and Secretary of State Jefferson on urgent foreign policy matters, which Mr. Boyd presented in his pathbreaking book, *Number 7*, on Hamilton's secret attempts to control Amer-

ican foreign policy (reviewed in this journal, Spring, 1965), are a case in point. This entire story of Hamilton's secret dealings with a British secret agent, in his effort to push American policy toward a closer connection with Great Britain than the President, the Cabinet and Congress believed to be in the national interest, represents a major historical break-through. Yet it seems to have come about purely in the line of editorial duty. For Mr. Boyd is the kind of editor who cannot tolerate an unsolved problem, or rest content with gaps in the record. Thus, his phenomenal combination of brilliance in historical explanation and superhuman doggedness in probing the raw materials, indeed in pursuing every recalcitrant scrap of written evidence, raises each successive volume of the Jefferson Papers to the level of major historical discovery. This has proved true, whether the scope of a volume is five months or—as in the superb first volume —approximately fifteen years.

The present volume gives us Jefferson in many other guises than his fateful hassle with Hamilton in the Anglo-Spanish war crisis of 1790. For example, until the appearance of this volume, even the experts could not appreciate the extent and importance of Jefferson's share in creating the Federal City. Everyone was familiar with the famous "bargain" between Hamilton and Jefferson that brought agreement on the assumption of state debts, sweetened by the agreement to fix the permanent seat of the government on the Potomac. Jefferson himself, in his *Autobiography*, had publicized this understanding. But as the editorial headnote makes clear, streams of ridicule flowed in the newspapers, and equally were voiced in Congress, over the location of the permanent residence of Congress. Typical of these was the observation Mr. Boyd quotes of the newspaper wag, who thought "the only kind of permanence would be a peripatetic government, as under the Articles of Confederation, and suggested that Pierre L'Enfant design a mobile capitol on wheels." Jefferson and his Virginia associates could not have been more alive to the danger that despite the Residence Act a new national capital on the Potomac might *never* be established. Credit must now be given to Jefferson, with the assistance of Madison, for guiding the strategy that implemented the Residence Act and indeed read that act in its fullest possible extent of power. By establishing correct dates for hitherto misdated documents, and by reconstructing the historical context in its veridical detailed development, Mr. Boyd conclusively documents his view that Washington, Jefferson and Madison were all thorough "realists," of extraordinary political resourcefulness. As he points out,

> The Act fixing the permanent seat of government did not stipulate that a capital city be laid out. It did not even direct that a district of ten miles square be claimed for the federal government . . . it merely set this as the maximum limit. The government under the Residence Act could have functioned quite as easily within the limits of Georgetown as Jefferson and Washington feared it might continue to do permanently in Philadelphia.

But Jefferson had fixed in his mind the requisite objectives.

> There would be a new city laid out and planned so as to be worthy of the rising empire; the district for the seat of government would be of the maximum size permitted by the Virginia and Maryland resolutions and allowed by the law; and to attain the great object it would be necessary to press forward immediately and vigorously and to appeal to the self-interest of the landowners in the vicinity.

The new chronology of documents concerning the seat of government now makes it clear that Jefferson was the "father" of the city of Washington, influencing far more than its architectural design. We now realize that Jefferson not only devised the strategy for establishing the city but won, by his insistence, a spacious capital city that "one day would become the political capital of the world." The dream of a republican experiment, a new secular order, demanded at least that much of a fresh start.

It is legendary that Jefferson's many-sided interests never dried up, even in the

midst of the most stringent political responsibilities. Volume 17 provides fresh documentation for this legendary yet genuine view. The same man who was preoccupied with shaping a policy of neutrality in the threatened war between England and Spain while exacting substantial concessions for neutrality from both powers, was the man who ordered French wines for the President and for himself. The same man whose hand controlled the creation of the Federal City, worked diligently to create a system of consular establishments commensurate with America's rising importance. Meeting the misdirected Republican slogan that it was folly for a young republican country to get entangled in European courts, Jefferson marshaled charts and data whose intelligence was unmistakable. He succeeded in driving home the uncomfortable truth that even such minor powers as Sardinia and the Sicilies dwarfed the vast empire of the new world in diplomatic establishments.

Perhaps the secret of Jefferson's persisting human appeal may be hinted at in the language of some of his correspondents in this volume. The Italian, Charles Bellini, whom Jefferson in his term as Governor of Virginia had appointed professor of modern languages at William and Mary College, mentioned Jefferson's "natural inclination to assist wretched humanity." Benjamin Vaughan, the English liberal and friend of America, concluded a letter to Jefferson with the observation, "I believe you are the first nation that ever produced statesmen who were natural philosphers." Finally, this volume virtually comes to a close with a report by David Humphreys from London, where the American diplomat was able to compare the political and social climate in England and France with what he judged to be characteristic of America. He wrote: "Here Man, from want, depravity and despair, wars against humanity." Whether true or false of the British scene, his confidence in the humanity of a republic whose statesmen were of the order of Franklin, Madison and Jefferson was not excessive for that time and for the promise of that new country.