

The Papers of James Madison. Volume III, 3 March 1781—31 December 1781. Ed. by William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963. xxvi + 381 pp. Illustrations, notes, and index. \$10.00.)

Volume III makes a shambles of the old canard that Madison's father was overjoyed to learn that Captain William Murray shot Colonel Francis Taliaferro in the pants with a rampart musket near the forks of the Pomunkey. Boldly ignoring the canard as if it did not exist, the editors calmly set the record straight in unconnected, elaborate, and monumentally trifling footnotes. Madison père, it now appears, might have been overjoyed at something else (p. 13, fn. 11); William Murray, brother of Dan, was selling pork and tallow at the time to George Rogers Clark out in Illinois, far from the forks of the Pomunkey (also spelled Pamunkey) which is the junction of the North and South Anna rivers (p. 159, fn. 5); as for the rampart muskets, their great weight and recoil made them too unwieldy for use on the field of honor (p. 87, fn. 2). Most significantly, it may have been William Taliaferro, brother of Mrs. Joseph Jones, not Francis Taliaferro, a first cousin once removed, whose pants figured so heavily in the life of Congressman Madison. Though we are relieved to know that Madison's involvement was limited to picking up the leather breeches from the tailor (p. 51, fn. 4), it is disappointing not to be told their size. Happily this is the only important lapse in the incredible industry and meticulous scholarship of the editors. With a sharp eye for the irrelevant and farfetched, they have generously squandered their magnificent editorial talents by assembling and massively annotating every document remotely connected—and sometimes unconnected—with Madison during the ten months from March through December of 1781, a period "unmarked by any significant event in the life of Madison or in the

history of the Confederation Congress of which he was a member" (p. xv).

The pages of this volume constitute an imperfect verbal democracy, for while the editors believe that every scrap of Madisonia has a natural right to be included, they make some words more equal than others. The treatment of documents of unequal importance is remarkable. Only twelve days after the final ratification of the Articles of Confederation, Madison claimed that Congress possessed "general and implied" powers and yet proposed an amendment to the Articles authorizing Congress to employ the military force of the United States to compel delinquent or recalcitrant states to fulfill their federal engagements and to apply economic sanctions against "any of the Citizens thereof. . . ." The editors, who do not supply an introductory headnote giving the context and reasons for this document, perfunctorily note Madison's "first use of a phrase of great moment in our constitutional history," and mention passingly that sanctions against individuals was probably the chief nationalizing provision. So much for the most important document in the volume. But let one Simon Nathan complain, not to Madison but to the state governor, about Virginia's debt to him and we get a page of footnoted explanation (p. 21). Madison's terse recommendation for adding an assistant and two clerks to the staff of the Superintendent of Finance merits forty-seven lines of annotation ranging from information on Spanish pieces-of-eight to George Bancroft's misinformation to President Grant concerning the nomination of Alexander T. Stewart for Secretary of the Treasury (pp. 171-72); but Madison's motion for complete nonintercourse with Great Britain, a regulation of commerce implied from the war power, merits no explanations or comment except as to stylistic drafting changes (pp. 22-25). Madison "shared little, if at all," in the discussions leading to the Franco-American consular convention, though the story is told in a lengthy footnote pegged to the following vital document, quoted here in full: "Com(mitte)e on plan of Consular Convention Randolph Elsworth Vandyk" (p. 201). But at least the document is in his hand. Perhaps the prize document of the collection is the one not included, the letter "not found," from the Virginia Delegates to Governor Jefferson; the six-hundred-word editorial essay (pp. 139-40), which doesn't mention Madison, surmises that the letter was probably written by his congressional colleague, Joseph Jones (it was he who asked Madison to pick up Colonel Taliaferro's pants), to Jefferson or maybe William Fleming (not to be confused with William Murray—Dan's brother, or with William Taliaferro—Mrs. Jones's brother).

There are 174 documents in volume III, most of them not worthy of the lavish scholarship of the editors. Included are 21 letters by Madison

himself, more than half of which were addressed to Edmund Pendleton; 37 letters to Madison, of which 21, weekly dispatches of war news from Virginia, were by Pendleton; 26 from the Virginia delegation and 28 to the delegation—mostly weekly exchanges with the governor of Virginia; 24 motions; and a miscellany of reports, expense accounts, and random notes by Madison on congressional activities. The documents are overwhelmingly concerned with military events—battles, captures at sea, and the movements of men and supplies, but there are also some documents on the creation of the national domain, the boundaries of the United States, diplomatic negotiations, and the administration of Congress. Good use has been made of the manuscript collection of the papers of the Continental Congress in the National Archives. There are few editorial headnotes, none of extended length.

The editors state in their regrettably brief preface that only 22 of the documents in the volume have appeared in whole or in part in previous collections of the writings of Madison. They are rightfully modest in not venturing to say whether anything other than quantitative has been gained by their prodigious labors. I reread the relevant sections of Irving Brant's grand biography and of Edmund Cody Burnett's *The Continental Congress*. Comparing them with what volume III has to offer, I conclude that neither could have been improved by the use of this volume. I wonder what purpose is served by the publication of Madison's papers on so huge a scale as this, with such fantastically detailed annotations whose total wordage probably exceeds that of the documents themselves.

The editors promise "some twenty volumes," but when they devote a whole volume to less than a year admittedly "unmarked by any significant event" in his life, we can anticipate being smothered by tons of trivia. Madison was thirty-one years old in 1781. A long life, to 1836, and the great years of constructive achievement lie ahead of the editors. If these ten months are worth a volume in the life of a young congressman, who in these pages remains a shadowy and relatively unproductive figure, will we get a book for each month of the life of the mature Constitution-maker and congressman, a book for each week of the Secretary of State, and a book for each day of the Presidency? Given their present rate of progress and incapacity to judge what is worthy of inclusion and of annotation, the editors have plunged headlong into making the profession of editing look purely pedantic. Volume III sometimes seems intended as a satire on the now flourishing industry of editing the papers of our great statesmen.

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