

W. T. Hutchinson and W. M. E. Rachal (ed.):
The Papers of James Madison Vol. 1. 16 March 1751
 - 16 December 1779 and Vol. II 20 March 1780 -
 23 February 1781 (Chicago and London, University
 of Chicago Press, 1962, each 80s.) Pp xlii, 344;
 xix, 344.

It would be impossible to deduce the subsequent importance of Madison's career from the information preserved in these first two volumes of his papers. And this despite the fact that the editors have set themselves the criterion of publishing "all the extant writings of Madison which appear to have been wholly or in large degree the product of his mind." When one finds that this programme involves the inclusion of school notes on "A Brief System of Logick" of which the editors themselves feel bound to remark, "in a word, they lack originality both in organization and thought," one may ask whether more rigorous selection might not serve as good a purpose, and show a better sense of proportion, than the archival principle of total recall.

Madison's early life was uneventful, and its written remains are devoid of either excitement or revelation. The first volume is

disappointing as a source book for Virginia history. There is nothing of importance about the onset of the Revolution crisis, the Virginia convention, the very keen elections of April 1776, or even of the legislature of which Madison became a member. As a newly elected legislator, Madison was so shy that he even asked Henry to move the motion on the one thing he really felt strongly about – religious toleration. This proved to have been a mistake, as Henry let his cause down.

Little of the news passing between Madison and his best correspondent, William Bradford, is more than second hand information, and an excessive proportion of both volumes is filled by public and official documents. Much of the best material is supplied by the editors themselves. Their comment on the religious toleration bill carries the story to its conclusion in 1786 and credits Madison rather than Jefferson with the main responsibility. Their note on the conflict of western land claims and its bearing on the ratification of the Articles of Confederation is an admirably clear exposition of that vexed problem which students could well be recommended to read to get the matter straight.

A close reading offers a few hints on internal dissension in Virginia, which by 1778 was violent enough to cause serious disquiet to the state government. (There may well be room for further research on this, a subject that seems to be linked with Madison's intriguing remark to Pendleton in the profound gloom of the winter of 1780, that "two million guineas properly applied" would not only "diffuse vigor and satisfaction throughout the whole military departments" but that it would also have "another good effect. It would reconcile the army and every body else to our republican forms of government." (II, 166)).

Madison's powers of analysis of public problems begin to develop after a few years' experience, and one of the few papers of genuine original interest is his essay on Money, written in the winter 1779–80. In this he shows his clarity of thought and an independence of judgment that led him to challenge the accepted views on the causes of the depreciation of the currency – but not publicly, be it noted. He did not publish it until 1791. Madison's scepticism of paper money as a means of finance developed through the subsequent years and shows repeatedly in the second volume; the formation of these views is of some significance for his attitude to state legislative policies in the post-war period.

The editorial standards are impeccable. As an example, when Madison, in old age, observes that in Virginia before the Revolution elections were held septennially as in England, the editors correct him by pointing out that the Septennial Act did not extend to Virginia. Madison was probably led into this error by Hening's Statutes, which record the two attempts to enact a septennial law in the 1760s but do not note that these measures were disallowed by the Privy Council. The reader, in fact, is in very safe hands.

The great value of the present edition is prospective. The Introduction notes that Gaillard Hunt's edition, running to nine volumes and appearing from 1900 to 1910, completed the publication of about 1,020 of Madison's own papers and of 49 addressed to him. These are, however, only one sixth of his extant papers; and there remain no fewer than fifteen thousand in-letters. Since Madison spent so much of his life away from home, these letters, preserved in the Madison papers in the Library of Congress, are rich with information about the domestic history of Virginia, as well as containing more familiar material of national interest. If some of these remarks express a sense of disappointment, it is sure to be swept away by the forthcoming volumes.

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