

The Papers of James Madison. Edited by WILLIAM T. HUTCHINSON and WILLIAM M. E. RACHAL. Volume 1: 16 March 1751-16 December 1779. Volume 2: 20 March 1780-23 February 1781. JEAN SCHNEIDER, RALPH L. KETCHAM, ROBERT L. SCRIBNER, and DONALD O. DEWEY, Editorial

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Nature was not kind to James Madison. He was always easy to overlook in a crowd. His manner was diffident; he lacked the personal attributes that make up a leader of men. Most of his contemporaries saw only his five-foot six-inch stature and called him, patronizingly, "Little Jemmy." Posterity has accepted the assessment. When it has compared him to his contemporaries—Jefferson, Hamilton, John Adams, Washington—it has usually been invidiously.

Scholars began to render a fairer appraisal only a quarter of a century ago. Edward McNall Burns and Irving Brant, followed by others, examining his record during the Revolutionary and Constitutional periods, made clear his pre-eminence among the Founding Fathers of the nation. Only now is the picture of the faltering fourth Chief Executive beginning to be eclipsed in the popular mind by the picture of the constructive statesman of American union.

It is thus not only appropriate, but happy, that in the midst of the current rage to collect, edit, and embalm in handsome paper-and-ink form the literary remains of great Americans, James Madison is not being overlooked.

These papers in published form are especially welcome to anyone seriously interested in Madison and his period because in the past they have been so hard to come by. The generous statesman himself gave away many to kinsfolk, friends, and autograph collectors; after his death his widow and stepson, in need of funds, scattered what was left. The last and only important attempt to assemble his writings was made by Gaillard Hunt, working according to the relatively slack editorial standards of half a century ago. Nor was the net Hunt cast while collecting wide enough to satisfy our demands today. The nine volumes of his edition of the *Writings of Madison* contained, it has been estimated, only one-sixth of the extant documents known to have been written by Madison.

The vast and demanding project, of which the present two volumes are the first fruit, has required many years, considerable sums, and the complete attention of a half dozen scholars and editors. It began a quarter of a century ago at the University of Virginia, when John Cook Wyllie and Francis L. Berkeley, Jr., members of that institution's library staff, began to make an inventory of Madison's writings. It started to move faster about a decade ago under the impetus of encouragement from the National Historical Publications Commission and the example of Julian P. Boyd's editing of the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. It gained greater

momentum when the late Leonard D. White indicated an interest in editing the papers, and because of him the University of Chicago entered an alliance with the University of Virginia to sponsor the project. In 1956 a headquarters office was established on the Chicago campus and another office opened in Charlottesville. With the aid of "liberal subventions" from the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation work proceeded at full speed.

Volumes I and II, appropriately dedicated to the memory of Leonard White, suggest how much we are going to be in the debt of the sponsors, the benefactors, the editorial staff headed by William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal, the owners and administrators of some 250 manuscript collections, as well as scores of scholars and public men who have given advice and assistance. And, as in the case of most of the admirable collections of great men's papers that have been appearing in recent years, compliments are due the publishers. The University of Chicago Press has turned the scholars' and editors' work into handsome and eminently practical modern examples of the ancient art of bookmaking.

In appraising any publication of the writings of a public figure, the question must at once be asked what philosophy, what standards guided the editors in their work. The years since World War II have seen the development of a set of practices so exacting that work (like Gaillard Hunt's) done early in the present century and considered highly exemplary at the time now seems careless and capricious.

Within these latterday tenets, two distinct philosophies seem to have evolved. One is best exemplified by the editing of the *Papers of Alexander Hamilton* by Harold Syrett and Jacob E. Cooke. This philosophy deliberately restricts itself to the presentation of a complete and accurate text of all writing known without question to have been done by Hamilton. The text is annotated only by information about the location of the manuscript and by a minimum of identification of names, places, and things mentioned in it and by spare comment on the circumstances under which it was written. Boyd's *Papers of Jefferson*, on the other hand, is far more ambitious and all-encompassing. This philosophy reproduces many documents and much material by other hands which are believed to have affected Jefferson's thoughts and actions. The texts are supported often by "editorial notes" so thorough that they are small essays on aspects of Jefferson's life and times.

Between these two extremes, Messrs. Hutchinson and Rachal have steered a middle course, inclining more to the second but without quite duplicating Boyd's exhaustiveness. "The present edition," they state, "includes all extant writings of Madison which appear to have been wholly

or in large degree the product of his mind." Omitted are some papers in his own handwriting—notes on reading or lectures devoid of personal comment and clerk-like copies of records of legislative proceedings "in no way reflecting his own thought." Included are speeches and contemporaneous accounts of conversations recorded by others. Included also are "letters and other papers, addressed to him and known to have received his careful attention." (I, p. xxxiii)

On the whole these standards seem to have been sensibly conceived and, in the first two volumes at least, intelligently applied. At several points I could not help feeling that the editors had allowed their desire to be thorough to carry them too far, as when they reproduce and annotate 1778 minutes of the Virginia Council of State and 1780 papers of the Continental Congress Board of Admiralty that Madison did not write and that record matters in which his involvement was slight. If this spirit should prevail in the assembling of material for the years during which Madison served as Secretary of State and President, the prospect is frightening; but the editors have promised a more rigorous selection policy for the years 1801 to 1817 at least.

Normally the first chapters of a man's biography—and even more so, the first volumes of his papers—are very fragmentary and not very satisfactory to read. These first two volumes, covering the first thirty years of Madison's life, are no exception. They carry him from his birth at the home of his maternal grandmother in King George County, Virginia, through his education at the Donald Robertson School in King and Queen County and on his father's plantation at Montpelier, his undergraduate days at the College of New Jersey at Princeton, his local service in the Revolutionary cause in Orange County, Virginia, his participation in the Virginia Constitutional Convention and the General Assembly at Williamsburg, ending with his service in the Continental Congress at Philadelphia and the ratification of the Articles of Confederation.

The image of young Madison that emerges conforms to that presented by his recent biographers; in particular, Irving Brant. He is a shy youth, a conscientious student, a scholar in embryo. He shows no literary flair. The doggerel he writes as a Princeton student lacks any distinction. He is an uninspired letter writer, expressing himself matter-of-factly, without wit or lift. Indeed, the considerable number of letters he received from his college friend William Bradford (who at the time of his death in 1795 was United States Attorney General) make by all odds the best reading in these volumes.

Madison's letters do show a consistent and ever-increasing concern for the welfare of all the American colonies and the Revolutionary cause. The

committee reports and the records of congressional debates reproduced here reflect his absorption in such problems as the navigation of the Mississippi, the disposition of western lands, the treatment of the states which do not pull their own weight in the loose union, the ever-nagging problems of finance and revenue—all foreshadowing the nationalist that Madison was to become. On the last point, his observations on money, written in 1779-80 but not published until 1791 (I, pp. 302-309), are especially significant.

These two volumes, like the first thirty years of the man whose career they document, are a highly promising beginning.

The New York Times Book Review

RAYMOND WALTERS, JR.