***The Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series*, Volume 4, *1811-1812*.** Edited by J. C. A. Stagg *et al.* (University Press of Virginia, 1999. Pp. 720. $65.00.)

With the present volume, this magnificent series inches eight more months into James Madison's first term. If Madison's biographers had not told us that his presidency was a difficult, draining time for him from the outset, earlier volumes of the *Presidential Series* could leave one with quite a different impression. Madison seems comfortable in the office, almost enjoying it. Hindsight shows that the foreign policy situation was deteriorating from the beginning, but at the time, neither Madison nor anyone else knew that the adjustments to the failed embargo of the previous administration were going nowhere. There was still room to try policies, hope for success, and spend time on the other interesting things that came across a president's desk. Although Madison does not seem to have had much vanity in him, he must have derived at least some satisfaction from finally sitting behind that desk after years of being only the most important supporting player in a number of different casts. He was at the center now, and no one could fairly say he had not earned the honor: no one in America, with the possible exceptions of Jefferson and Adams, could equal Madison's experience in public affairs, and those two had already had their turns. So that side of the job seemed unlikely to overwhelm him, and there was plenty of time to indulge his many interests: to discuss sheep with Richard Peters and John Jackson, progress on the capitol city with architect Benjamin Latrobe, books with Thomas Cooper, and the Floridas (how to get them) with Jefferson.

With this volume, however, we are in what would prove to be the last months before the outbreak of war, and the tone changes. Though Madison would try, when the moment came, to create a picture of a patient, long-suffering administration forced to war when all other options had been rejected by Britain, the sense one gets from almost all the correspondence in this volume is that the nation was moving inexorably toward war, and Madison knew it. Other matters occupy him, too, certainly: right on the eve of his final presentation of matters to Congress, there were many who pulled at his time and concentration: Latrobe (regularly, usually on bills to be paid, but this time on rust in the White House roof), George Logan (pleading for peace, of course), Jonathan Dayton (on, of all things, the latter's hemorrhoids), and Elizabeth Reed Cooprew of Portsmouth (on "Departed Spirits" calling to her of their being murdered at the John Druman tavern–"perhaps you think I am Derang'd," she said, to which Madison quite sensibly noted, "Query if insane" [339-40]–what aides let through to their bosses in those days is remarkable). And, of course, there

was the never-ending run of letters of introduction from, or for, job-seekers, a flow increased by the military situation.

But the coming of war is the paramount concern in this volume. It must be said that a careful reading of the correspondence only complicates efforts to understand how Madison perceived events. He seems genuinely perplexed by what he sees to be the mulish inflexibility of the British government, a perplexity created in large part by his refusal to take seriously the British view that since nothing was a greater threat than Napoleon, crushing him through control of the seas was essential, however much that might jeopardize relations with neutral powers. How inexplicable British policy was to Madison is underlined by his reception of the news of the assassination of Prime Minister Spencer Percival. Maybe (Madison hoped) the demise of "the Great Champion & Bigot with respect to the Orders in Council" (493), together with Congress's war declaration, might change the British government's course, as if the whole policy were the result of the obstinacy of a single individual.

And yet there is nothing in the correspondence to support the longstanding notion that Madison was duped by Napoleon into war with Britain. France's repeal of the Berlin and Milan Decrees, the president told minister to France Joel Barlow in November 1811, had given the government reason enough to demand that Britain make concessions as well, but French actions left much room for suspicion: "The manner in which the F. Govt. has managed the repeal of the decrees, and evaded a correction of other outrages, has mingled with the conciliatory tendency of the repeal, as much of irritation and disgust as possible. And these sentiments are not a little strengthened by the sarcastic comments on that management, with which we are constantly pelted in our discussions with the B. Govt., and for which the F. Govt. ought to be ashamed to furnish the occasion" (20). And yet in late May 1812, at a time when he knew that the French had intercepted and burned two American vessels bound for Spain, Madison would write to Jefferson—Jefferson's supporters will note the constancy of his correspondence with his old friend; his opponents will not be surprised to find him adroitly distancing himself from responsibility—that though the French were not doing enough to lift suspicion, "It is understood that the B. & M. Decrees are not in force agst. the U. S. and no contravention of them can be established agst. her. On the contrary positive cases rebut the allegation" (415). Perhaps his expressed concerns in the same letter about the extreme difficulty of fighting a "triangular war" against both Britain and France provide at least a partial explanation. Madison had reason to believe that fighting Britain alone was going to be difficult enough. Although he was getting optimistic projections from General Henry Dearborn about a Canadian campaign, he also had plenty of antiwar petitions on hand from

New Englanders to remind him that he would not be bringing a united country to war. Madison's proclamation of a day of "public Humiliation and Prayer" (581), which closes the volume, was undoubtedly heartfelt.

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