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Book Review of *To Secure These Blessings*

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TO SECURE THESE BLESSINGS

By SAUL K. PADOVER. New York: Washington Square Press, 1962.

In making available this attractively presented edition of the debates of the Constitutional Convention, Mr. Padover fulfills a need which has existed for some time. The most outstanding feature is the new arrangement of Madison's highly readable minutes by subject matter, rather than chronologically (though under each main heading, historical sequence is observed), which makes this the first lawyer-oriented volume in the field. Thus presented, it is susceptible of both narrative and selective reading and is a convenient reference volume. The casual reviewer of day to day Supreme Court decisions will be afforded considerable insight here; the lawyer or student who reinforces his private arguments with allusions to legislative intent will find it most illuminating.

From the viewpoint of a less-modest age, to witness the all-too-rare spectacle of honest and intelligent men hammering out such a noble piece of legislative work is something of a privilege. These proceedings have the flavor of lofty drama, and Madison's austere elegant prose is excellently adapted to the subject matter.

Whatever else may be said of these journals, they are convincing evidence that anyone who has been exposed only to the oversimplifications of history courses can not fully appreciate the wisdom of these framers and their capacity (some 60 percent were lawyers) for keen legal analysis. Not even one who has accepted it as an article of faith could help but be impressed by the courageous candor they display here.

This forthrightness was one result of the wise policy of secret debate adopted early in the proceedings; another was to preclude any pretentious attempts at mere cleverness or rhetorical virtuosity. Although both wit and eloquence abound, the object of these men was clearly to solve and to persuade, not to perform.

It is interesting to note that no one talent prevailed here. Each of the great architects who stood out in the debates—Madison, Hamilton, Wilson, Gerry, Pinkney, Morris, Mason and Randolph—advanced some impressively-reasoned proposals which were fought long and hard for before final acceptance or rejection.

The journals often bring to light some interesting facts about the leading theorists which constitute real revelations. They were distinguished by an erudition remarkable for their time and for statesmen in any time. Most revealing is the fact that they were above all historians, debating in detail the fortunes of practically every nation from the earliest times.

They were characterized by that almost clairvoyant sense of their cosmic significance as architects of a new order which myth attributes to them. As the author says about Mr. Wilson:

He considered himself as acting and responsible for the welfare of millions of people not immediately represented in this house.

or about Mr. Madison:

He observed that it was more than probable that we were now digesting a plan which in its operation would decide forever the fate of republican government.

These gentlemen were at home with a casual but urbanely unpretentious eloquence which forces the reader to regard the utterances of even the great modern statesmen with sympathetic embarrassment. In legal lucidity their discussion of the document being framed is equal to any of the great judicial opinions since written in interpretation of it.

Also graphically revealed by the delegates' debates are the doubts as to their authority, which lingered to the convention's end, and the persistent spectre of ultimate failure to agree upon anything, which eventually became the transcendent problem. For instance, there is Mason, in desperate exasperation, swearing that he will bury his bones in Philadelphia rather than expose the country to such a fate, and the sub-

sequent irony of Mason's refusal, in agonizing conviction, to sign the finished document.

Much as these men have been eulogized in tasteless oratory, a reading of these journals makes it hard to see how the Olympian cast since given to the events could be avoided. At any rate, the impression is unavoidable that one seeking reaffirmation of a faith in the republic's idealistic beginnings will find it here.

Incidental criticism would include a reference to the cryptic quality of the sporadic editor's notes, which could have been enlarged into a very worth-while device, and a word of commendation for the truly optimal use of illustrations. While the index of delegates is a fine idea, it should be supplemented by a general index, a need which is almost but not quite satisfied by the unique table of contents meant to replace it.

RICHARD CROUCH