

PREFACE.

I HAVE undertaken, in the ensuing enquiries, the developement of a system of great and general interest, but which many circumstances have combined to render intricate and obscure. This examination consists in several detached sketches of those parts of the early political history of Maryland which have relation with the establishment and the progressive operations of the LAND-OFFICE; in the exhibition of original documents relative to the same subject, and in a selection of examples of the various modes and forms of proceeding in land affairs; accompanied by such recitals, illustrations, and remarks, as have appeared the best calculated to convey a kind of knowledge very rare among the citizens of Maryland. That I have executed this task in the best manner that my talents and opportunities would permit will, I presume, be readily believed; for, in a production admitting so little of embellishment, I must necessarily have depended for any degree of approbation and success upon its real utility. I have known, as well from the nature of this work as from the countenance which they have given to it by anticipation, that it is to undergo the scrutiny of professional gentlemen, capable of detecting errors in statement or in reasoning. I have also been persuaded that it would attract the notice of an enlightened legislature, or, at least, of individuals of that legislature, and other public functionaries, more or less acquainted with the subject of which I have been treating; and I have believed that it would not fail to engage the perusal of that respectable description of citizens for whose use it is professedly designed. From the testimony and suffrage of such readers, and not from any pretensions of my own, I have been aware that the book must take its character, and stand or fall in the public estimation. Although, therefore, the kindness of a large and respectable list of subscribers may have secured me from absolute loss, it is certain that my prospect of recompense for the time and labour devoted to this arduous enquiry must depend on the degree of sanction and approbation that my work may receive from those who are the best qualified to determine on its merit. In regard to applause, independent of its effect in the point of interest, my expectations are limited to the credit of having applied myself with diligence to the study of those matters which appertain to the office I was called to administer; a pursuit which certainly tends to the advantage and reputation of the government in which that office holds its place: but this hope, though humble, has had its effect, in prompting me to the utmost exertion of my capacity to shew that I had not merely skimmed the surface of the land-office system, but had dived to its origin and elements, in order to rescue from oblivion a species of knowledge which has hitherto, so far as it was not already buried in records out of use, and not likely to tempt inspection, been dependent on the lives and memories of two or three individuals. I have, then, in a word, done my best to render this compilation worthy of the public expectation, and patronage; and, if I have failed, it is not for want of effort, but of ability.

But, that I may not seem to rest too confidently upon the merit of this performance, without admitting its imperfections and claiming allowance for the novelty and difficulty of the undertaking, I must be indulged in a more particular account of the inducements that led to it, and of the impediments which have been experienced in bringing the work to its present form: and, here, I must repeat, what was stated in my prospec-