

ed to me the most perspicuous, and the best calculated to display the progress of the land office system from its simple beginnings to the regular, but complicated, form which it has ultimately assumed. I had originally promised no more, in respect to the ancient practice, than a bare exhibition of the conditions of plantation, and other documents, upon which it rested. Finding myself, however, enabled to comment and reason upon the design and effect of those authorities, I extended my plan, so as to present a connected history, as well as a detailed exemplification, of that practice. As to the matters purely historical which have been introduced, it will not be supposed that I lay much stress upon them, as adding to the interest, or at least to the utility, of the work. They were in some degree necessary to my design, and I was willing by the aid of those notices, trivial as they are, to give a little spirit and variety to a dull subject. It is with the same view that, instead of a continued recital, which would have been infinitely less laborious, I have arranged my enquiries under distinct heads, and applied to each the particular remarks which it required. The division of the work into two books, destined, severally, to the examination of the ancient and modern practice, was prompted by a similar motive, and, by this kind of distribution I flatter myself that I have done something to accommodate and repay that class of subscribers whose encouragement flowed more from good-will than from any interest in the professed subject of the work. These gentlemen, if the book contains any thing of entertainment, or general information, will by this arrangement be enabled to discover it, without wading through those documents and recitals which are foreign to their pursuits.

As to the style of what may be called composition, in this mixed performance, it would not be worth noticing except for the purpose of averting a criticism upon the familiarity and apparent egotism which may perhaps be found to characterize it. On this point I will only say that what may look like egotism has proceeded, in reality, from a very different sentiment. This book is presented merely as a compilation; and, in the introductory and connecting discourses, in which the compiler has to speak in his own person, I have not thought myself entitled to use the formal style of an author, but, speaking also as a public officer, I have pursued that unstudied mode of expression which I should use if called upon, in that character, to explain the proceedings of my office. So many things, moreover, are advanced upon my own observation or opinion, and the weight attached to them is so directly referable to the source from which they proceed, that it would have been difficult to keep myself, in any degree, out of view, and therefore I have not attempted it.

In regard to the matter of this compilation, I have fulfilled, I believe, literally, all that was promised in my prospectus, except in the article of *conveyance*, concerning which I have only inserted a few laws, without attempting any comment upon them, and have omitted the *forms*, which would have swelled the book to an inconvenient size, and increased the expence (already far beyond my original calculation) so as to leave no chance of remuneration for my labour. I have substituted what appeared more to the purpose, and this, with the further consideration that I have greatly exceeded the number of pages proposed, will, I trust, be accepted as an equivalent.

I regret much that the errors of the press in this book are so numerous, and that they so frequently fall upon words of importance, and appear still more frequently in the essential article of punctuation. I am desirous to relieve the printers from any responsibility on this score, and must therefore state that it has arisen from the circumstance of the manuscript's having been prepared under a full expectation that the publication would take place at my place of residence, and under my own inspection, and consequently prepared with a less minute exactness than it otherwise would have been. All the attention of several gentlemen in Baltimore, who, with unwearied kindness, have supplied my place in superintending the publication, has not been sufficient to prevent a considerable number