

the primary object of their conveyance, was the extinction of the war debt. We may be permitted, however, to quote the opinions of certain men, deriving importance and faith in the proportions of the confidence reposed in their judgment and integrity. Mr. Benton, in 1826, introduced a bill in relation to this subject: "first to sell off the best land, for prices adapted to their value; and secondly, contemplating a plan for the gratuitous donation of the remainder." In ascertaining the history of the public territory, he traces it to three sources—"cessions from particular States, and purchases from France and Spain." The cessions from the States were made, he states, for the declared object of paying off the debt of the revolution; and then to erect "sovereign States;"—Both these objects, inconsistent with His Excellency's ideas of an unqualified surrender of them as a source of general revenue. Mr. Benton further proceeds: In both cases the federal government was nothing but a trustee, and bound by compacts and treaties, to dispose of the lands according to the terms of the trust, including the purchases from France and Spain, within the same category with the cessions from the several States. Proceeding with him, we arrive at this statement, that "the first acts of the Congress of the Confederation, with respect to these lands, were faithfully directed to the object for which they were intended. The ordinance of '85, fixed their price, &c. and divided the certificates of the public debt into thirteen portions, according to the quotas of the States." An authority tending more conclusively to show the primary object of the cessions from the State, is relied upon by Mr. Benton, in an extract from the message of him "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen," of 1791. A provision for the sale of the vacant lands in the United States, is particularly urged, among other reasons, by the important consideration, that they are pledged, as a fund, for reimbursing the public debt. Speaking further of the cessions, Mr. Benton observes, that the lands were "to be disposed of for the common benefit of all the States, and not reserved for the use of the federal government." The opinions and authorities here quoted, conclusively establish the views entertained and subsequently expressed by the committee, as to the nature of the power of Congress over this fund, and the distinctive character of the fund itself.

The idea expressed by His Excellency, that these lands were a common fund "for paying the debts and defraying the expenses of the general government," is liable to ano-