

PREFACE

This book had a very personal origin, but I hope its interest may be more than personal. Although Maryland was not my home, I have felt I had my roots there. Under King William the first of my people commanded rangers on Potomac, and the province had become a state before they left it moving west. Wanting to know them better, I found I could do so only by rediscovering the society wherein they lived.

The present work is not, however, a description of colonial society in Maryland, nor am I now apt to write one, for that task is large, and life is short. Forced to choose some aspect of it, I asked what element was most dynamic and creative. Probably, in this particular scene, the gentry, for it was they who converted a frontier settlement into a mature social organism. If so, then a rather significant question, which we may ask the existing records, is how this vital class happened to arise. What produced it on these shores? And how did it maintain itself?

Now gentility is no more than the evidence of wealth well used: without material possessions it cannot arise, nor can it long survive their loss. Our problem thus becomes an economic one, and we must ask whence came these fortunes and how they were augmented.

The answer, like most answers, is a multiple one. Some capital was brought in by the settlers. Land was had on easy terms. Servants and slaves were brought to work the land. The bay and ocean offered opportunities of trade. The native iron was unearthed and smelted. The law became a lucrative profession. And office holding revealed its profits to the holder. Indeed the answer in a word was diversification. "Planting," as Dr. Charles Carroll remarked in 1751, "will not do without some other Business or Professions. . . ."

The present essay is an inquiry into one such source of private wealth, the profits of office. However I had first to single out the more lucrative offices themselves and trace their often complicated histories. It seemed also well to learn who held such places and how these persons were related, so that the social meaning of the profits might be surmised. For the offices were less important