

PREFACE.

My original design was to be the biographer of the most eminent Magistrates who have presided in Westminster Hall. This was not completed by writing the LIVES OF THE CHANCELLORS, for many of our most important and interesting legal worthies never held the Great Seal. Some of them—as LORD COKE and LORD HALE—had not the offer of it, from the preference naturally given to mediocrity; and others—as LORD HOLT and LORD MANSFIELD—resolutely refused the offer, because they preferred the functions of a Common Law Judge. I should not, therefore, have contributed my proposed share of honor to the deceased, or of instruction to the rising generation, without adding the LIVES OF THE CHIEF JUSTICES.

I confess, likewise, that I was eager to trace the history of those who had illustrated the department of English jurisprudence to which, while at the bar, I chiefly addicted myself. I may not be altogether unqualified for the task, as I have been long familiar with their characters, and I am entitled to speak with some little confidence of their decisions.

However, I cannot venture to draw the CHIEF JUSTICES at full length in a consecutive series. The CHANCEL-