Jefferson's Literary Commonplace Book

Thomas Jefferson ; Douglas L Wilson

Thomas Jefferson. As a law student and young lawyer in the 1760s, Thomas Jefferson began writing abstracts of English common law reports. Even after abandoning his law practice, he continued to rely on his legal commonplace book to document the legal, historical, and philosophical reading that helped shape his new role as a statesman. Indeed, he made entries in the notebook in preparation for his mission to France, as president of the United States, and near the end of his life. This authoritative volume is the first to contain the complete text of Jefferson's notebook.
Commonplace books (or commonplaces) are a way to compile knowledge, usually by writing information into books. They have been kept from antiquity, and were kept particularly during the Renaissance and in the nineteenth century. Such books are essentially scrapbooks filled with items of every kind: recipes, quotes, letters, poems, tables of weights and measures, proverbs, prayers, legal formulas. Commonplaces are used by readers, writers, students, and scholars as an aid for remembering useful concepts.