

AN
HISTORICAL DISQUISITION

CONCERNING

ANCIENT INDIA.

SECTION I.

*Intercourse with India, from the earliest Times until the
Conquest of Egypt by the Romans.*

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I.



WHOEVER attempts to trace the operations of men in remote times, and to mark the various steps of their progress in any line of exertion, will soon have the mortification to find, that the period of authentic history is extremely limited. It is little more than three thousand years since the Books of Moses, the most ancient and only genuine record of what passed in the early ages of the world, were composed. Herodotus, the most ancient Heathen historian whose works have reached us, flourished a thousand years later. If we push our inquiries concerning any point beyond the era where written history commences, we enter upon the region of conjecture, of fable, and of uncertainty. Upon that ground I will neither venture myself, nor endeavour to conduct my readers. In my researches concerning the

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THE original station allotted to man by his Creator, was in the mild and fertile regions of the East. There the human race began its career of improvement; and from the remains of sciences which were anciently cultivated, as well as of arts which were anciently exercised in India, we may conclude it to be one of the first countries in which men made any considerable progress in that career. The wisdom of the East was early celebrated,* and its productions were early in request among distant nations.† The intercourse, however, between different countries was carried on at first entirely by land. As the people of the East appear soon to have acquired complete dominion over the useful animals,‡ they could early

* 1 Kings, iv. 30. † Gen. xxxvii. 25.

‡ Gen. xii. 16. xxiv. 10, 11.

undertake the long and toilsome journeys which it was necessary to make, in order to maintain this intercourse ; and by the provident bounty of Heaven they were furnished with a beast of burden, without whose aid it would have been impossible to accomplish them. The camel, by its persevering strength, by its moderation in the use of food, and the singularity of its internal structure, which enables it to lay in a stock of water sufficient for several days, put it in their power to convey bulky commodities through those deserts which must be traversed by all who travel from any of the countries west of the Euphrates towards India. Trade was carried on in this manner, particularly by the nations near to the Arabian Gulf, from the earliest period to which historical information reaches. Distant journeys, however, would be undertaken at first only occasionally, and by a few adventurers. But by degrees, from attention to their mutual safety and comfort, numerous bodies of merchants assembled at stated times, and forming a temporary association, (known afterwards by the name of a Caravan), governed by officers of their own choice, and subject to regulations of which experience had taught them the utility, they performed journeys of such extent and duration, as appear astonishing to nations not accustomed to this mode of carrying on commerce.

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BUT, notwithstanding every improvement that could be made in the manner of conveying the productions of one country to another by land,

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the inconveniencies which attended it were obvious and unavoidable. It was often dangerous; always expensive, and tedious, and fatiguing. A method of communication more easy and expeditious was sought, and the ingenuity of man gradually discovered, that the rivers, the arms of the sea, and even the ocean itself, were destined to open and facilitate intercourse with the various regions of the earth, between which they appear, at first view, to be placed as insuperable barriers. Navigation, however, and ship-building, (as I have observed in another work),* are arts so nice and complicated, that they require the talents as well as experience of many successive ages, to bring them to any degree of perfection. From the raft or canoe, which first served to carry a savage over the river that obstructed him in the chase, to the construction of a vessel capable of conveying a numerous crew, or a considerable cargo of goods, to a distant coast, the progress of improvement is immense. Many efforts would be made, many experiments would be tried, and much labour as well as ingenuity would be employed, before this arduous and important undertaking could be accomplished.

EVEN after some improvement was made in ship-building, the intercourse of nations with each other by sea was far from being extensive. From the accounts of the earliest historians we learn, that navigation made its first efforts in the Medi-

* Hist. of America, vol. i. p. 2.

terranean and the Arabian Gulf, and in them the first active operations of commerce were carried on. From an attentive inspection of the position and form of these two great inland seas, these accounts appear to be highly probable. These seas lay open the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and spreading to a great extent along the coasts of the most fertile and most early civilized countries in each, seem to have been destined by nature to facilitate their communication with one another. We find, accordingly, that the first voyages of the Egyptians and Phœnicians, the most ancient navigators mentioned in history, were made in the Mediterranean. Their trade, however, was not long confined to the countries bordering upon it. By acquiring early possession of ports on the Arabian Gulf, they extended the sphere of their commerce, and are represented as the first people of the West who opened a communication by sea with India.

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IN that account of the progress of navigation and discovery which I prefixed to the History of America, I considered with attention the maritime operations of the Egyptians and Phœnicians : a brief review of them here, as far as they relate to their connexion with India, is all that is requisite for illustrating the subject of my present inquiries. With respect to the former of these people, the information which history affords is slender, and of doubtful authority. The fertile soil and mild climate of Egypt produced the necessaries and comforts of life in such profusion,

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THE enterprising ambition of Sesostriis, disdaining the restraints imposed upon it by these contracted ideas of his subjects, prompted him to render the Egyptians a commercial people; and in the course of his reign he so completely accomplished this, that (if we may give credit to some historians) he was able to fit out a fleet of four hundred ships in the Arabian Gulf, which conquered all the countries stretching along the Erythræan Sea to India. At the same time his army, led by himself, marched through Asia, and subjected to his dominion every part of it as far as to the banks of the Ganges; and crossing that river, advanced to the Eastern Ocean.† But these efforts produced no permanent effect, and appear to have been so contrary to the genius and habits of the Egyptians, that, on the death of Sesostriis, they resumed their ancient maxims, and many ages elapsed before the commercial connexion of Egypt with India came to be of

* Diodor. Sicul. lib. i. p. 78. edit. Wesselingi. Amst. 1746.
Strab. Geog. lib. xvii. p. 1142. A. edit. Casaub. Amst. 1707.

† Diod. Sic. lib. i. p. 64.

such importance as to merit any notice in this
disquisition.*

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THE history of the early maritime operations of Phœnicia is not involved in the same obscurity with those of Egypt. Every circumstance in the character and situation of the Phœnicians was favourable to the commercial spirit. The territory which they possessed was neither large nor fertile. It was from commerce only that they could derive either opulence or power. Accordingly, the trade carried on by the Phœnicians of Sidon and Tyre was extensive and adventurous; and, both in their manners and policy, they resemble the great commercial states of modern times, more than any people in the ancient world. Among the various branches of their commerce, that with India may be regarded as one of the most considerable and most lucrative. As by their situation on the Mediterranean, and the imperfect state of navigation, they could not attempt to open a direct communication with India by sea; the enterprising spirit of commerce prompted them to wrest from the Idumæans some commodious harbours towards the bottom of the Arabian Gulf. From these they held a regular intercourse with India on the one hand, and with the eastern and southern coasts of Africa on the other. The distance, however, from the Arabian Gulf to Tyre was considerable, and rendered the conveyance of goods to it by land

* See NOTE I. at the end of the Volume.

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carriage so tedious and expensive, that it became necessary for them to take possession of Rhinocolura, the nearest port in the Mediterranean to the Arabian Gulf. Thither all the commodities brought from India were conveyed over land by a route much shorter, and more practicable, than that by which the productions of the East were carried at a subsequent period from the opposite shore of the Arabian Gulf to the Nile.* At Rhinocolura they were re-shipped, and transported by an easy navigation to Tyre, and distributed through the world. This, as it is the earliest route of communication with India of which we have any authentic description, had so many advantages over any ever known before the modern discovery of a new course of navigation to the East, that the Phœnicians could supply other nations with the productions of India in greater abundance, and at a cheaper rate, than any people of antiquity. To this circumstance, which, for a considerable time, secured to them a monopoly of that trade, was owing, not only the extraordinary wealth of individuals, which rendered the “merchants of Tyre princes, and her traffickers the honourable of the earth,”† but the extensive power of the state itself, which first taught mankind to conceive what vast resources a commercial people possess, and what great exertions they are capable of making.‡

* Diod. Sic. lib. i. p. 70. Strab. lib. xvi. p. 1128. A.

† Isaiah, xxiii. 8.

‡ See NOTE II.

THE Jews, by their vicinity to Tyre, had such an opportunity of observing the wealth which flowed into that city from the lucrative commerce carried on by the Phœnicians from their settlements on the Arabian Gulf, as incited them to aim at obtaining some share of it. This they effected under the prosperous reigns of David and Solomon, partly by the conquests which they made of a small district in the land of Edom, that gave them possession of the harbours of Elath and Esiongeber on the Red Sea, and partly by the friendship of Hiram, King of Tyre, who enabled Solomon to fit out fleets, which, under the direction of Phœnician pilots, sailed to Tarshish and Ophir.* In what region of the earth we should search for these famous ports which furnished the navy of Solomon with the various commodities enumerated by the sacred historians, is an inquiry that has long exercised the industry of learned men. They were early supposed to be situated in some part of India, and the Jews were held to be one of the nations which traded with that country. But the opinion more generally adopted is, that Solomon's fleets, after passing the Straits of Babelmandeb, held their course along the south-west coast of Africa, as far as the kingdom of Sofala, a country celebrated for its rich mines of gold and silver, (from which it has been denominated the Golden Sofala by Oriental writers),† and abounding in all the

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* 1 Kings, ix. 26. x. 22.

† Notices des MSS. du Roi, tom. ii. p. 40.

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other articles which composed the cargoes of the Jewish ships. This opinion, which the accurate researches of M. D'Anville rendered highly probable,* seems now to be established with the utmost certainty by a late learned traveller; who, by his knowledge of the monsoons in the Arabian Gulf, and his attention to the ancient mode of navigation, both in that sea and along the African coast, has not only accounted for the extraordinary length of time which the fleets of Solomon took in going and returning, but has shewn, from circumstances mentioned concerning the voyage, that it was not made to any place in India.† The Jews, then, we may conclude, have no title to be reckoned among the nations which carried on intercourse with India by sea; and if, from deference to the sentiments of some respectable authors, their claim were to be admitted, we know with certainty, that the commercial effort which they made in the reign of Solomon was merely a transient one, and that they quickly returned to their former state of unsocial seclusion from the rest of mankind.

FROM collecting the scanty information which history affords, concerning the most early attempts to open a commercial intercourse with India, I now proceed, with more certainty and greater confidence, to trace the progress of com-

* Dissert. sur le Pays d'Ophir, Mem. de Literat. tom. xxx. p. 83, &c.

† Bruce's Travels, book ii. ch. 4.

munication with that country, under the guidance of authors who recorded events nearer to their own times, and with respect to which they had received more full and accurate intelligence.

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THE first establishment of any foreign power in India which can be ascertained by evidence meriting any degree of credit, is that of the Persians; and even of this we have only a very general and doubtful account. Darius, the son of Hystaspes, though raised to the throne of Persia by chance or by artifice, possessed such active and enterprising talents as rendered him worthy of that high station. He examined the different provinces of his kingdom more diligently than any of his predecessors, and explored regions of Asia formerly little known.* Having subjected to his dominion many of the countries which stretched south-east from the Caspian Sea towards the river Oxus, his curiosity was excited to acquire a more extensive and accurate knowledge of India, on which they bordered. With this view he appointed Scylax of Caryandra to take the command of a squadron fitted out at Caspatyrus, in the country of Pactya, (the modern Pehkely), towards the upper part of the navigable course of the river Indus, and to fall down its stream until he should reach the ocean. This Scylax performed, though it should seem with much difficulty, and notwithstanding many obstacles; for he spent no less than two years

* Herodot. lib. iv. c. 44.

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and six months in conducting his squadron from the place where he embarked, to the Arabian Gulf.* The account which he gave of the populousness, fertility, and high cultivation of that region of India through which his course lay, rendered Darius impatient to become master of a country so valuable. This he soon accomplished; and though his conquests in India seem not to have extended beyond the district watered by the Indus, we are led to form an high idea of its opulence, as well as of the number of its inhabitants, in ancient times, when we learn that the tribute which he levied from it was near a third part of the whole revenue of the Persian monarchy.† But neither this voyage of Scylax, nor the conquests of Darius, to which it gave rise, diffused any general knowledge of India. The Greeks, who were the only enlightened race of men at that time in Europe, paid but little attention to the transactions of the people whom they considered as Barbarians, especially in countries far remote from their own; and Scylax had embellished the narrative of his voyage with so many circumstances manifestly fabulous,‡ that he seems to have met with the just punishment to which persons who have a notorious propensity to what is marvellous are often subjected, of being listened to with distrust, even when they relate what is exactly true.

* Herodot. lib. iv. c. 42. 44.

† Id. lib. iii. c. 90—96. See NOTE III.

‡ Philostr. Vita Apoll. lib. iii. c. 47. and Note 3d of Olearius Tzetzet. Chiliad. vii. vers. 630. *Microsoft*®

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ABOUT an hundred and sixty years after the reign of Darius Hystaspes, Alexander the Great undertook his expedition into India. The wild sallies of passion, the indecent excesses of intemperance, and the ostentatious displays of vanity too frequent in the conduct of this extraordinary man, have so degraded his character, that the pre-eminence of his merit, either as a conqueror, a politician, or a legislator, has seldom been justly estimated. The subject of my present inquiry leads me to consider his operations only in one light, but it will enable me to exhibit a striking view of the grandeur and extent of his plans. He seems, soon after his first successes in Asia, to have formed the idea of establishing an universal monarchy, and aspired to the dominion of the sea as well as of the land. From the wonderful efforts of the Tyrians in their own defence, when left without any ally or protector, he conceived an high opinion of the resources of maritime power, and of the wealth to be derived from commerce, especially that with India, which he found engrossed by the citizens of Tyre. With a view to secure this commerce, and to establish a station for it preferable in many respects to that of Tyre, as soon as he completed the conquest of Egypt he founded a city near one of the mouths of the Nile, which he honoured with his own name; and with such admirable discernment was the situation of it chosen, that Alexandria soon became the greatest trading city in the ancient world; and, notwithstanding many successive revolutions in empire, continued, during eighteen

SECT. I. centuries, to be the chief seat of commerce with India.* Amidst the military operations to which Alexander was soon obliged to turn his attention, the desire of acquiring the lucrative commerce which the Tyrians had carried on with India, was not relinquished. Events soon occurred, that not only confirmed and added strength to this desire, but opened to him a prospect of obtaining the sovereignty of those regions which supplied the rest of mankind with so many precious commodities.

AFTER his final victory over the Persians, he was led in pursuit of the last Darius, and of Bessus, the murderer of that unfortunate monarch; to traverse that part of Asia which stretches from the Caspian Sea beyond the river Oxus. He advanced towards the east as far as Maracanda,† then a city of some note, and destined in a future period, under the modern name of Samarcand, to be the capital of an empire not inferior to his own either in extent or in power. In a progress of several months through provinces hitherto unknown to the Greeks, in a line of march often approaching near to India, and among people accustomed to much intercourse with it, he learned many things concerning the state of a country‡ that had been long the object of his thoughts and wishes,§ which increased his desire of invading it. Decisive and prompt in all his resolutions, he set out from Bactria, and cross-

* Hist. of America, vol. i. p. 21. † Arrian, iii. c. 30.

‡ Strabo, xv. p. 1021. A. § Arrian, iv. c. 15.

ed that ridge of mountains which, under various denominations, forms the Stony Girdle (if I may use an expression of the Oriental geographers) which encircles Asia, and constitutes the northern barrier of India. SECT.
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THE most practicable avenue to every country, it is obvious, must be formed by circumstances in its natural situation, such as the defiles which lead through mountains, the course of rivers, and the places where they may be passed with the greatest ease and safety. In no place of the earth is this line of approach marked and defined more conspicuously, than on the northern frontier of India; insomuch that the three great invaders of this country, Alexander, Tamerlane, and Nadir Shah, in three distant ages, and with views and talents extremely different, advanced by the same route, with very little deviation. Alexander had the merit of having first discovered the way. After passing the mountains he encamped at Alexandria Paropamisana, not far from the mountains denominated the Indian Caucasus by his historians, now known by the name of Hindoo Kho;* and having subdued or conciliated the nations seated on the north-west bank of the Indus, he crossed the river at Taxila, now Attock,† where its stream is so tranquil

* In the second edition of his Memoir, Major Rennell gives the modern names of the Hydaspes, with some variation in their orthography, *Behut* and *Ihylam*.

† Rennell, Mem. p. 92. See NOTE IV.

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AFTER passing the Indus, Alexander marched forward in the road which leads directly to the Ganges, and the opulent provinces to the south-east, now comprehended under the general name of Indostan. But, on the banks of the Hydaspes, known in modern times by the name of the Betah or Chelum, he was opposed by Porus, a powerful monarch of the country, at the head of a numerous army. The war with Porus, and the hostilities in which he was successively engaged with other Indian princes, led him to deviate from his original route, and to turn more towards the south-west. In carrying on these operations, Alexander marched through one of the richest and best peopled countries of India, now called the Panjab, from the five great rivers by which it is watered; and as we know that this march was performed in the rainy season, when even Indian armies cannot keep the field, it gives an high idea both of Alexander's persevering spirit, and of the extraordinary vigour and hardiness of constitution which soldiers, in ancient times, derived from the united effects of gymnastic exercise and military discipline. In every step of his progress, objects no less striking than new presented themselves to Alexander. The magnitude of the Indus,* even after he had seen the Nile, the Euphrates, and the Tigris, must have

filled him with surprise. No country he had hitherto visited was so populous and well cultivated, or abounded in so many valuable productions of nature and of art, as that part of India through which he had led his army. But when he was informed in every place, and probably with exaggerated description, how much the Indus was inferior to the Ganges, and how far all that he had hitherto beheld was surpassed in the happy regions through which that great river flows, it is not wonderful that his eagerness to view and to take possession of them should have prompted him to assemble his soldiers, and to propose that they should resume their march towards that quarter, where wealth, dominion, and fame awaited them. But they had already done so much, and had suffered so greatly, especially from incessant rains and extensive inundations, that their patience as well as strength were exhausted,* and with one voice they refused to advance farther. In this resolution they persisted with such sullen obstinacy, that Alexander, though possessed in the highest degree of every quality that gains an ascendant over the minds of military men, was obliged to yield, and to issue orders for marching back to Persia.†

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THE scene of this memorable transaction was on the banks of the Hyphasis, the modern Beyah, which was the utmost limit of Alexander's pro-

* See NOTE V.

† Arrian. v. c. 24, 25.

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gress in India. From this it is manifest, that he did not traverse the whole extent of the Panjab. Its south-west boundary is formed by a river anciently known by the name of Hysudrus, and now by that of the Setlege, to which Alexander never approached nearer than the southern bank of the Hyphasis, where he erected twelve stupendous altars, which he intended as a monument of his exploits, and which (if we may believe the biographer of Apollonius Tyanæus) were still remaining, with legible inscriptions, when that fantastic sophist visited India, three hundred and seventy-three years after Alexander's expedition.* The breadth of the Panjab, from Ludhana on the Setlege to Attock on the Indus, is computed to be two hundred and fifty-nine geographical miles, in a straight line; and Alexander's march, computed in the same manner, did not extend above two hundred miles. But, both as he advanced and returned, his troops were so spread over the country, and often acted in so many separate divisions, and all his movements were so exactly measured and delineated by men of science, whom he kept in pay for the purpose, that he acquired a very extensive and accurate knowledge of that part of India.†

WHEN, upon his return, he reached the banks of the Hydaspes, he found that the officers to

* Philostr. Vita Apollon. lib. ii. c. 43. edit. Olear. Lips. 1709.

whom he had given it in charge to build and collect as many vessels as possible, had executed his orders with such activity and success, that they had assembled a numerous fleet. As, amidst the hurry of war, and the rage of conquest, he never lost sight of his pacific and commercial schemes, the destination of this fleet was to sail down the Indus to the ocean, and from its mouth to proceed to the Persian Gulf, that a communication by sea might be opened with India and the centre of his dominions.

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THE conduct of this expedition was committed to Nearchus, an officer equal to that important trust. But as Alexander was ambitious to acquire fame of every kind, and fond of engaging in new and splendid undertakings, he himself accompanied Nearchus in his navigation down the river. The armament was indeed so great and magnificent, as deserved to be commanded by the conqueror of Asia. It was composed of an army of a hundred and twenty thousand men, and two hundred elephants, and of a fleet of near two thousand vessels, various in burden and form; * on board of which one-third of the troops embarked, while the remainder marching in two divisions, one on the right, and the other on the left of the river, accompanied them in their progress. As they advanced, the nations on each side were either compelled or persuaded to submit. Retarded by the various operations in

* See NOTE VI.

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ALEXANDER's progress in India, in this line of direction, was far more considerable than that which he made by the route we formerly traced; and when we attend to the various movements of his troops, the number of cities which they took, and the different states which they subdued, he may be said not only to have viewed, but to have explored, the countries through which he passed. This part of India has been so little frequented by Europeans in later times, that neither the position of places, nor their distances, can be ascertained with the same accuracy as in the interior provinces, or even in the Panjab. But from the researches of Major Rennell, carried on with no less discernment than industry, the distance of that place on the Hydaspes where Alexander fitted out his fleet from the ocean, cannot be less than a thousand British miles. Of this extensive region a considerable portion, particularly the Upper Delta, stretching from the capital of the ancient Malli, now Moultan, to Patala, the modern Tatta, is distinguished for its fertility and population.†

Soon after he reached the ocean, Alexander, satisfied with having accomplished this arduous

* Strabo, lib. xv. p. 1014. † Rennell, Mem. 68, &c.

undertaking, led his army by land back to Persia. The command of the fleet, with a considerable body of troops on board of it, he left to Nearchus, who, after a coasting voyage of seven months, conducted it safely up the Persian Gulf into the Euphrates.*

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IN this manner did Alexander first open the knowledge of India to the people of Europe, and an extensive district of it was surveyed with greater accuracy than could have been expected from the short time he remained in that country. Fortunately an exact account, not only of his military operations, but of every thing worthy of notice in the countries where they were carried on, was recorded in the Memoirs or Journals of three of his principal officers, Ptolemy, the son of Lagus, Aristobulus, and Nearchus. The two former have not, indeed, reached our times; but it is probable that the most important facts which they contained are preserved, as Arrian professes to have followed them as his guides in his History of the Expedition of Alexander;† a work which, though composed long after Greece had lost its liberty, and in an age when genius and taste were on the decline, is not unworthy the purest times of Attic literature.

WITH respect to the general state of India, we learn from these writers, that, in the age of Alex-

* Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. vi. c. 23. See NOTE VII.

† Arrian. lib. i. in proëmio.

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It was likewise from the Memoirs of the same officers that Europe derived its first authentic information concerning the climate, the soil, the productions, and the inhabitants of India; and in a country where the manners, the customs, and even the dress of the people, are almost as permanent and invariable as the face of nature itself, it is wonderful how exactly the descrip-

* Diod. Sicul. lib. xvii. p. 232.

† Arrian. lib. vi. c. 2.

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tions given by Alexander's officers delineate what we now behold in India, at the distance of two thousand years. The stated change of seasons, now known by the name of *Monsoons*; the periodical rains; the swelling of the rivers; the inundations which these occasion; the appearance of the country during their continuance, are particularly mentioned and described. No less accurate are the accounts which they have given of the inhabitants, their delicate and slender form, their dark complexion, their black uncurled hair, their garments of cotton, their living entirely upon vegetable food, their division into separate tribes or *casts*, the members of which never intermarry, the custom of wives burning themselves with their deceased husbands, and many other particulars, in all which they perfectly resemble the modern Hindoos. To enter into any detail with respect to these in this place would be premature; but as the subject, though curious and interesting, will lead unavoidably into discussions not well suited to the nature of an historical work, I shall reserve my ideas concerning it for an Appendix, to be annexed to this Disquisition; and hope they may contribute to throw some additional light upon the origin and nature of the commerce with India.