

MUCH as the Western World was indebted for its knowledge of India to the expedition of Alexander, it was only a small portion of that vast continent which he explored. His operations did not extend beyond the modern province of

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Lahore, and the countries on the banks of the Indus from Moultan to the sea. These, however, were surveyed with that degree of accuracy which I have already described; and it is a circumstance not unworthy of notice, that this district of India, which Europeans first entered, and with which they were best acquainted in ancient times, is now less known than almost any part of that continent;* neither commerce nor war, to which, in every age, geography is chiefly indebted for its improvement, having led any nation of Europe to frequent or explore it.

If an untimely death had not put a period to the reign of the Macedonian hero, India, we have reason to think, would have been more fully explored by the ancients, and the European dominion would have been established there two thousand years sooner. When Alexander invaded India, he had something more in view than a transient incursion. It was his object to annex that extensive and opulent country to his empire; and though the refractory spirit of his army obliged him, at that time, to suspend the prosecution of his plan, he was far from relinquishing it. To exhibit a general view of the measures which he adopted for this purpose, and to point out their propriety and probable success, is not foreign from the subject of this Disquisition, and will convey a more just idea than is usually entertained, of the original genius and

* Rennell's Mem. 144.

extent of political wisdom which distinguished this illustrious man.

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WHEN Alexander became master of the Persian empire, he early perceived, that with all the power of his hereditary dominions, reinforced by the troops which the ascendant he had acquired over the various states of Greece might enable him to raise there, he could not hope to retain in subjection territories so extensive and populous; that, to render his authority secure and permanent, it must be established in the affection of the nations which he had subdued, and maintained by their arms; and that, in order to acquire this advantage, all distinctions between the victors and the vanquished must be abolished, and his European and Asiatic subjects must be incorporated and become one people, by obeying the same laws, and by adopting the same manners, institutions, and discipline.

LIBERAL as this plan of policy was, and well adapted to accomplish what he had in view, nothing could be more repugnant to the ideas and prejudices of his countrymen. The Greeks had such an high opinion of the pre-eminence to which they were raised by civilization and science, that they seem hardly to have acknowledged the rest of mankind to be of the same species with themselves. To every other people they gave the degrading appellation of Barbarians, and, in consequence of their own boasted superiority, they asserted a right of dominion over

SECT. I. them, in the same manner (to use their own expression) as the soul has over the body, and men have over irrational animals. Extravagant as this pretension may now appear, it found admission, to the disgrace of ancient philosophy, into all the schools. Aristotle, full of this opinion, in support of which he employs arguments more subtle than solid,* advised Alexander to govern the Greeks like subjects, and the Barbarians as slaves; to consider the former as companions, the latter as creatures of an inferior nature.† But the sentiments of the pupil were more enlarged than those of his master, and his experience in governing men taught the monarch what the speculative science of the philosopher did not discover. Soon after the victory at Arbela, Alexander himself, and, by his persuasion, many of his officers, assumed the Persian dress, and conformed to several of their customs. At the same time he encouraged the Persian nobles to imitate the manners of the Macedonians, to learn the Greek language, and to acquire a relish for the beauties of the elegant writers in that tongue, which were then universally studied and admired. In order to render the union more complete, he resolved to marry one of the daughters of Darius, and chose wives for a hundred of his principal officers in the most illustrious Persian families. Their nuptials were celebrated

* Aristot. Polit. i. c. 3—7.

† Plut. de Fortuna Alex. Orat. i. p. 302. vol. vii. edit. Reiske. Strabo, lib. i. p. 116. A.

with great pomp and festivity, and with high exultation of the conquered people. In imitation of them, above ten thousand Macedonians, of inferior rank, married Persian women, to each of whom Alexander gave nuptial presents, as a testimony of his approbation of their conduct.*

BUT assiduously as Alexander laboured to unite his European and Asiatic subjects by the most indissoluble ties, he did not trust entirely to the success of that measure for the security of his new conquests: In every province which he subdued, he made choice of proper stations, where he built and fortified cities, in which he placed garrisons composed partly of such of the natives as conformed to the Grecian manners and discipline, and partly of such of his European subjects as were worn out with the fatigues of service, and wished for repose and a permanent establishment. These cities were numerous, and served not only as a chain of posts to keep open the communication between the different provinces of his dominions, but as places of strength to overawe and curb the conquered people. Thirty thousand of his new subjects, who had been disciplined in these cities, and armed after the European fashion, appeared before Alexander in Susa, and were formed by him into that compact solid body of infantry, known by the name of the Phalanx, which constituted the strength of a

* Arrian. lib. vii. c. 4. Plut. de Fort. Alex. p. 304. See NOTE VIII.

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Macedonian army. But in order to secure entire authority over this new corps, as well as to render it more effective, he appointed that every officer in it intrusted with command, either superior or subaltern, should be European. As the ingenuity of mankind naturally has recourse in similar situations to the same expedients, the European powers, who now in their Indian territories employ numerous bodies of the natives in their service, have, in forming the establishment of these troops, adopted the same maxims; and, probably without knowing it, have modelled their battalions of Sepoys upon the same principles as Alexander did his phalanx of Persians.

THE farther Alexander pushed his conquests from the banks of the Euphrates, which may be considered as the centre of his dominions, he found it necessary to build and to fortify a greater number of cities. Several of these to the east and south of the Caspian Sea, are mentioned by ancient authors; and in India itself he founded two cities on the banks of the Hydaspes, and a third on the Acesines, both navigable rivers, which, after uniting their streams, fall into the Indus.* From the choice of such situations it is obvious that he intended, by means of these cities, to keep open a communication with India, not only by land, but by sea. It was chiefly with a view to the latter of these objects, (as I have already observed), that he examined the navigation of

the Indus with so much attention. With the same view, on his return to Susa, he in person surveyed the course of the Euphrates and Tigris, and gave directions to remove the cataracts or dams, which the ancient monarchs of Persia, induced by a peculiar precept of their religion, which enjoined them to guard with the utmost care against defiling any of the elements, had constructed near the mouths of these rivers, in order to shut out their subjects from any access to the ocean.* By opening the navigation in this manner, he proposed, that the valuable commodities of India should be conveyed from the Persian Gulf into the interior parts of his Asiatic dominions, while by the Arabian Gulf they should be carried to Alexandria, and distributed to the rest of the world.

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GRAND and extensive as these schemes were, the precautions employed, and the arrangements made for carrying them into execution, were so various and so proper, that Alexander had good reason to entertain sanguine hopes of their proving successful. At the time when the mutinous spirit of his soldiers obliged him to relinquish his operations in India, he was not thirty years of age complete. At this enterprising period of life, a Prince of a spirit so active, persevering, and indefatigable, must have soon found means to resume a favourite measure on which he had

* Arrian. lib. vi. c. 7. Strabo, lib. xvi. p. 1074, &c. See
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been long intent. If he had invaded India a second time, he would not, as formerly, have been obliged to force his way through hostile and unexplored regions, opposed at every step by nations and tribes of Barbarians whose names had never reached Greece. All Asia, from the shores of the Ionian Sea to the banks of the Hyphasis, would then have been subject to his dominion; and through that immense stretch of country he had established such a chain of cities, or fortified stations,* that his armies might have continued their march with safety, and have found a regular succession of magazines provided for their subsistence. Nor would it have been difficult for him to bring into the field forces sufficient to have achieved the conquest of a country so populous and extensive as India. Having armed and disciplined his subjects in the East like Europeans, they would have been ambitious to imitate and to equal their instructors, and Alexander might have drawn recruits, not from his scanty domains in Macedonia and Greece, but from the vast regions of Asia, which, in every age, has covered the earth, and astonished mankind with its numerous armies. When at the head of such a formidable power he had reached the confines of India, he might have entered it under circumstances very different from those in his first expedition. He had secured a firm footing there, partly by means of the garrisons that he left in the three cities which he had built and fortified,

and partly by his alliance with Taxiles and Porus. SECT.
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 These two Indian Princes, won by Alexander's humanity and beneficence, which, as they were virtues seldom displayed in the ancient mode of carrying on war, excited of course an higher degree of admiration and gratitude, had continued steady in their attachment to the Macedonians. Reinforced by their troops, and guided by their information as well as by the experience which he had acquired in his former campaigns, Alexander must have made rapid progress in a country, where every invader, from his time to the present age, has proved successful.

BUT this and all his other splendid schemes were terminated at once by his untimely death. In consequence of that, however, events took place, which illustrate and confirm the justness of the preceding speculations and conjectures by evidence the most striking and satisfactory. When that great empire, which the superior genius of Alexander had kept united and in subjection, no longer felt his superintending controul, it broke into pieces, and its various provinces were seized by his principal officers, and parcelled out among them. From ambition, emulation, and personal animosity, they soon turned their arms against one another; and as several of the leaders were equally eminent for political abilities and for military skill, the contest was maintained long, and carried on with frequent vicissitudes of fortune. Amidst the various convulsions and revolutions

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which these occasioned, it was found that the measures of Alexander for the preservation of his conquests had been concerted with such sagacity, that, upon the final restoration of tranquillity, the Macedonian dominion continued to be established in every part of Asia, and not one province had shaken off the yoke. Even India, the most remote of Alexander's conquests, quietly submitted to Pytho the son of Agenor, and afterwards to Seleucus, who successively obtained dominion over that part of Asia. Porus and Taxiles, notwithstanding the death of their benefactor, neither declined submission to the authority of the Macedonians, nor made any attempt to recover independence.

DURING the contests for power and superiority among the successors of Alexander, Seleucus, who in every effort of enterprising ambition was inferior to none of them, having rendered himself master of all the provinces of the Persian empire comprehended under the name of Upper Asia, considered those countries of India which had been subdued by Alexander, as belonging to that portion of the Macedonian empire of which he was now the sovereign. Seleucus, like all the officers formed under Alexander, entertained such high ideas of the advantages which might be derived from a commercial intercourse with India, as induced him to march into that country, partly with a view of establishing his own authority there, and partly in order to curb Sandracottus, who having lately acquired the sovereignty of the

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Prasij, a powerful nation on the banks of the Ganges, threatened to attack the Macedonians, whose Indian territories bordered on his dominions. Unfortunately no account of this expedition, which seems to have been splendid and successful, has reached our times. All we know of it is, that he advanced considerably beyond the utmost boundary of Alexander's progress in India,* and would probably have proceeded much farther, if he had not been constrained to stop short in his career, in order to oppose Antigonus, who was preparing to invade his dominions at the head of a formidable army. Before he began his march towards the Euphrates, he concluded a treaty with Sandracottus; in consequence of which, that monarch quietly retained the kingdom he had acquired. But the powers and possessions of the Macedonians seem to have remained unimpaired during the reign of Seleucus, which terminated forty-two years after the death of Alexander.

WITH a view of cultivating a friendly intercourse with Sandracottus, Seleucus made choice of Megasthenes, an officer who, from his having accompanied Alexander in his expedition into India, had some knowledge of the state of the country, and the manners of its inhabitants, and sent him as his ambassador to Palibothra.† In this famous capital of the Prasij, situated on the

* See NOTE XII.

† Strabo, lib. ii. p. 121, &c. Arrian. Hist. Ind. passim.

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banks of the Ganges, Megasthenes resided several years, and was probably the first European who ever beheld that mighty river, far superior to any of the ancient continent in magnitude,* and no less distinguished by the fertility of the countries through which it flows. This journey of Megasthenes to Palibothra made Europeans acquainted with a large extent of country, of which they had not hitherto any knowledge; for Alexander did not advance farther towards the south-east than that part of the river Hydraotes or Raûvee, where the modern city of Lahore is situated; and Palibothra, the site of which, as it is a capital position in the geography of Ancient India, I have investigated with the utmost attention, appears to me the same with that of the modern city of Allahabad, at the confluence of the two great rivers, Jumna and Ganges.† As the road from Lahore to Allahabad runs through some of the most cultivated and opulent provinces of India, the more the country was explored, the idea of its value rose higher. Accordingly, what Megasthenes observed during his progress to Palibothra, and his residence there, made such an impression upon his own mind, as induced him to publish an ample account of India, in order to make his countrymen more thoroughly acquainted with its importance. From his writings the ancients seem to have derived almost all their knowledge of the interior state of India; and from comparing the three most ample accounts of it, by Diodorus Si-

* See NOTE XIII.

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culus, Strabo, and Arrian, they appear manifestly, from their near resemblance, to be a transcript of his words. But, unfortunately, Megasthenes was so fond of the marvellous, that he mingled with the truths which he related many extravagant fictions; and to him may be traced up the fabulous tales of men with ears so large that they could wrap themselves up in them, of others with a single eye, without mouths, without noses, with long feet, and toes turned backwards; of people only three spans in height, of wild men with heads in the shape of a wedge, of ants as large as foxes that dug up gold, and many other things no less wonderful.* The extracts from his narrative which have been transmitted to us by Strabo, Arrian, and other writers, seem not to be entitled to credit, unless when they are supported by internal evidence, and confirmed by the testimony of other ancient authors, or when they coincide with the experience of modern times. His account, however, of the dimensions and geography of India, is curious and accurate. His description of the power and opulence of the Prasij perfectly resembles that which might have been given of some of the greater states in the modern Indostan, before the establishment of the Mahomedan or European power in India, and is consonant to the accounts which Alexander had received concerning that people. He was informed, as has been already mentioned, that they were prepared to oppose him on the banks of the Gan-

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* Strabo, lib. xx. 1032. A. 1037. C.

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ges, with an army consisting of twenty thousand cavalry, two hundred thousand infantry, and two thousand armed chariots;* and Megasthenes relates, that he had an audience of Sandracottus in a place where he was encamped with an army of four hundred thousand men.† The enormous dimensions which he assigns to Palibothra, of no less than ten miles in length, and two in breadth, and surrounded by walls in which there were five hundred and seventy towers, and sixty-four gates, would probably have been ranked by Europeans among the wonders which he delighted to relate, if they were not now well acquainted with the rambling manner in which the cities of India were built, and did not know with certainty, that both in former and in the present times, it might boast of cities still more extensive.‡

THIS embassy of Megasthenes to Sandracottus, and another of Diamachus to his son and successor Allitrochidas, are the last transactions of the Syrian monarch with India, of which we have any account.¶ Nor can we either fix with accuracy the time, or describe the manner in which their possessions in India were wrested from them. It is probable that they were obliged to abandon that country soon after the death of Seleucus.§

BUT though the great monarchs of Syria lost, about this period, those provinces in India which

* Diod. Sicul. lib. xvii. p. 232. Q. Curt. lib. ix. c. 2.

† Strabo, lib. xv. p. 1035. C. ‡ Rennell, Mem. 49, 50.

¶ See NOTE XV. § Justin. lib. xv. c. 4.



had been subject to their dominion, the Greeks in a smaller kingdom, composed of some fragments of Alexander's empire, still maintained an intercourse with India, and even made some considerable acquisition of territory there. This was the kingdom of Bactria, originally subject to Seleucus, but wrested from his son or grandson, and rendered an independent state, about sixty-nine years after the death of Alexander. Concerning the transactions of this kingdom, we must rest satisfied with gleaning a few imperfect hints in ancient authors. From them we learn, that its commerce with India was great; that the conquests of the Bactrian kings in that country were more extensive than those of Alexander himself; and particularly, that they recovered possession of the district near the mouth of the Indus, which he had subdued.* Each of the six princes who reigned in Bactria carried on military operations in India with such success, that they penetrated far into the interior part of the country, and, proud of the conquests which they had made, as well as of the extensive dominions over which they reigned, some of them assumed the lofty title of *Great King*, which distinguished the Persian monarchs in the days of their highest splendour. But we should not have known how long this kingdom of Bactria subsisted, or in what manner it terminated, if M. de Guignes had not called in the historians of China to supply the defects

* Strabo, lib. xi. 785. D. lib. xv. 1006. B. Justin. lib. xli, c. 4. Bayer, Hist. Regni Græcor. Bactriani, passim.

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FROM this time until the close of the fifteenth century, when the Portuguese, by doubling the Cape of Good Hope, opened a new communication with the East, and carried their victorious arms into every part of India, no European power acquired territory, or established its dominion there. During this long period, of more than sixteen hundred years, all schemes of conquest in India seem to have been totally relinquished, and nothing more was aimed at by any nation, than to secure an intercourse of trade with that opulent country.

IT was in Egypt that the seat of this intercourse was established; and it is not without surprise that we observe how soon and how regularly the commerce with the East came to be carried

* Mem. de Literat. tom. xxv. p. 17, &c.

† See NOTE XVI. by Microsoft®

on by that channel in which the sagacity of Alexander destined it to flow. Ptolemy, the son of Lagus, as soon as he took possession of Egypt, established the seat of government in Alexandria. By some exertions of authority, and many acts of liberality, but chiefly by the fame of his mild and equal administration, he drew such a number of inhabitants to this favourite residence, that it soon became a populous and wealthy city. As Ptolemy deserved and had possessed the confidence of Alexander more perfectly than any of his officers, he knew well that his chief object in founding Alexandria was to secure the advantages arising from the trade with India. A long and prosperous reign was favourable to the prosecution of that object; and though ancient authors have not enabled us to trace the steps which the first Ptolemy took for this purpose, we have a striking evidence of his extraordinary attention to naval affairs, in his erecting a light-house on the island of Pharos, at the mouth of the harbour of Alexandria,* a work of such magnificence as to be reckoned one of the seven wonders of the world. With respect to the commercial arrangements of his son Ptolemy Philadelphus, we have more perfect information. In order to bring the trade with India, (which began to revive at Tyre, its ancient station), to centre in Alexandria,† he set about forming a canal, an hundred cubits in breadth, and thirty cubits in depth, between Ar-

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* Strabo, lib. xvii. p. 1140. C.

† Ibid. lib. xvi. 1089. A.

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since on the Red Sea, not far from the situation of the modern Suez, and the Peleusica or eastern branch of the Nile, by means of which the productions of India might have been conveyed to that capital wholly by water. But either on account of some danger apprehended from completing it, that work was never finished; or from the slow and dangerous navigation towards the northern extremity of the Red Sea, this canal was found to be of so little use, that in order to facilitate the communication with India, he built a city on the west coast of that sea, almost under the Tropic, to which he gave the name of Berenice.* This new city soon became the staple of the trade with India.† From Berenice the goods were transported by land to Coptos, a city three miles distant from the Nile, but which had a communication with that river by a navigable canal, of which there are still some remains,‡ and thence carried down the stream to Alexandria. The distance between Berenice and Coptos was, according to Pliny, two hundred and fifty-eight Roman miles, and the road lay through the desert of Thebais, almost entirely destitute of water. But the attention of a powerful monarch made provision for supplying this want, by searching for springs; and wherever these were found he built inns, or more probably in the eastern style caravanseras, for the accommodation of merchants.§

* Strabo, lib. xvii. 1156. D. Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. vi. c. 29.

† See NOTE XVII.

‡ D'Anville, Mem. de l'Égypte, p. 21.

§ Strabo, lib. xvii. p. 1157. D. 1169.

In this channel the intercourse between the East and West continued to be carried on during two hundred and fifty years, as long as Egypt remained an independent kingdom.

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THE ships destined for India took their departure from Berenice, and sailing, according to the ancient mode of navigation, along the Arabian shore to the promontory Syagrus, (now Cape Rasalgate), held their course along the coast of Persia, either directly to Pattala, (now Tatta), at the head of the Lower Delta of the Indus, or to some other emporium on the west coast of India. To this part of India, which Alexander had visited and subdued, the commerce under the protection of the Egyptian monarchs seems to have been confined for a considerable time. Afterwards a more convenient course was followed, and from Cape Rasalgate vessels sailed in a direct course to Zizerus. This, according to M. de Montesquieu,* was the kingdom of Sigertis, on the sea-coast adjacent to the mouth of the Indus, conquered by the Greek monarchs of Bactria: according to Major Rennell,† it was a port on the northern part of the Malabar Coast. Ancient authors have not conveyed such information as will enable us to pronounce with certainty which of these two opposite opinions is best founded. Nor can we point out with accuracy, what were the other ports in India which the merchants

* L'Esprit des Loix, lib. xxi. c. 7.

† Introduct. p. xxxvii.

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from Berenice frequented, when that trade was first opened. As they sailed in vessels of small burden, which crept timidly along the coast, it is probable that their voyages were circumscribed within very narrow limits, and that, under the Ptolemies, no considerable progress was made in the discovery of India.*

FROM this monopoly of the commerce by sea between the East and West, which Egypt long enjoyed, it derived that extraordinary degree of opulence and power for which it was conspicuous. In modern times, acquainted with the vigilant and enterprising activity of commercial rivalry, there is hardly any circumstance in ancient story which appears more surprising, than that the sovereigns of Egypt should have been permitted to engross this lucrative trade without competition, or any attempt to wrest it out of their hands; especially as the powerful monarchs of Syria might, from the Persian Gulf, have carried on an intercourse with the same parts of India, by a shorter and safer course of navigation. Different considerations seem to have induced them so tamely to relinquish all the obvious advantages of this commerce. The Kings of Egypt, by their attention to maritime affairs, had formed a powerful fleet, which gave them such decided command of the sea, that they could have crushed with ease any rival in trade. No commercial intercourse seems ever to have been

carried on by sea between Persia and India. The Persians had such an insuperable aversion to that element, or were so much afraid of foreign invasion, that their monarchs (as I have already observed) obstructed the navigation of the great rivers which gave access to the interior parts of the country, by artificial works. As their subjects, however, were no less desirous than the people around them to possess the valuable productions and elegant manufactures of India, these were conveyed to all the parts of their extensive dominions by land carriage. The commodities destined for the supply of the northern provinces, were transported on camels from the banks of the Indus to those of the Oxus, down the stream of which they were carried to the Caspian Sea, and distributed, partly by land carriage, and partly by navigable rivers, through the different countries, bounded on one hand by the Caspian, and on the other by the Euxine Sea.* The commodities of India intended for the southern and interior provinces, proceeded by land from the Caspian Gates to some of the great rivers, by which they were circulated through every part of the country. This was the ancient mode of intercourse with India, while the Persian empire was governed by its native Princes; and it has been observed in every age, that when any branch of commerce has got into a certain channel, although it may be neither the most proper nor the most commodious one, it requires long time,

* Strabo, lib. xii. 776. D. Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. vi. c. 17.

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To all these reasons for suffering the monarchs of Egypt to continue in the undisturbed possession of the trade with India by sea, another may be added. Many of the ancients, by an error in geography extremely unaccountable, and in which they persisted, notwithstanding repeated opportunities of obtaining more accurate information, believed the Caspian Sea to be a branch of the great Northern Ocean; and the Kings of Syria might hope by that means to open a communication with Europe, and to circulate through it the valuable productions of the East, without intruding into those seas, the navigation of which the Egyptian monarchs seemed to consider as their exclusive right. This idea had been early formed by the Greeks, when they became masters of Asia. Seleucus Nicator, the first and most sagacious of the Syrian Kings, at the time when he was assassinated, entertained thoughts of forming a junction between the Caspian and Euxine Seas by a canal;† and if this could have been effected, his subjects, besides the extension of their trade in Europe, might have supplied all the countries in the north of Asia, on the coast of the Euxine Sea, as well as many of those which stretch eastward from the Caspian, with the productions of India. As those countries, though now thinly inhabited by a miserable race of men,

* See NOTE XIX. † Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. vi. c. 11.

destitute of industry and of wealth, were in ancient times extremely populous, and filled with great and opulent cities, this must have been considered as a branch of commerce of such magnitude and value, as to render the securing of it an object worthy the attention of the most powerful monarch.

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BUT while the monarchs of Egypt and Syria laboured with emulation and ardour to secure to their subjects all the advantages of the Indian trade, a power arose in the West which proved fatal to both. The Romans, by the vigour of their military institutions, and the wisdom of their political conduct, having rendered themselves masters of all Italy and Sicily, soon overturned the rival republic of Carthage, subjected Macedonia and Greece, extended their dominion over Syria, and at last turned their victorious arms against Egypt, the only kingdom remaining of those established by the successors of Alexander the Great. After a series of events which belong not to the subject of this Disquisition, Egypt was annexed to the Roman empire, and reduced into the form of a Roman province by Augustus. Aware of its great importance, he, with that provident sagacity which distinguishes his character, not only reserved it as one of the provinces subject immediately to imperial authority, but by various precautions, well known to every scholar, provided for its security. This extraordinary solicitude seems to have proceeded not only from considering Egypt as one of the chief granaries

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on which the capital depended for subsistence, but as the seat of that lucrative commerce which had enabled its ancient monarchs to amass such enormous wealth as excited the admiration and envy of other princes, and produced, when brought into the treasury of the empire, a considerable alteration, both in the value of property and the state of manners, in Rome itself.