

P R E F A C E.

IN fulfilling the engagement which I had come under to the Public with respect to the History of America, it was my intention not to have published any part of the work until the whole was completed. The present state of the British Colonies has induced me to alter that resolution. While they are engaged in civil war with Great Britain, inquiries and speculations concerning their ancient forms of policy and laws, which exist no longer, cannot be interesting: The attention and expectation of mankind are now turned towards their future condition. In whatever manner this unhappy contest may terminate, a new order of things must arise in North America, and its affairs will assume another aspect. I wait with the solicitude of a good citizen, until the ferment subside, and regular government be re-established, and then I shall return to this part of my work, in which I

had made some progress. That, together with the history of Portuguese America, and of the settlements made by the several nations of Europe in the West-India Islands, will complete my plan.

The three volumes which I now publish contain an account of the discovery of the New World, and of the progress of the Spanish arms and colonies there. This is not only the most splendid portion of the American story, but so much detached, as by itself to form a perfect whole, remarkable for the unity of the subject. As the principles and maxims of the Spaniards in planting colonies, which have been adopted in some measure by every nation, are unfolded in this part of my work ; it will serve as a proper introduction to the history of all the European establishments in America, and convey such information concerning this important article of policy, as may be deemed no less interesting than curious.

In describing the achievements and institutions of the Spaniards in the New World, I have departed, in many instances, from the accounts of preceding historians, and have often related facts which seem to have

been unknown to them. It is a duty I owe the Public to mention the sources from which I have derived such intelligence as justifies me either in placing transactions in a new light, or in forming any new opinion with respect to their causes and effects. This duty I perform with greater satisfaction, as it will afford an opportunity of expressing my gratitude to those benefactors who have honoured me with their countenance and aid in my researches.

As it was from Spain that I had to expect the most important information, with regard to this part of my work, I considered it as a very fortunate circumstance for me, when Lord Grantham, to whom I had the honour of being personally known, and with whose liberality of sentiment, and disposition to oblige, I was well acquainted, was appointed ambassador to the court of Madrid. Upon applying to him, I met with such a reception as satisfied me that his endeavours would be employed in the most proper manner, in order to obtain the gratification of my wishes ; and I am perfectly sensible, that what progress I have made in my inquiries among the Spaniards, ought

to be ascribed chiefly to their knowing how much His Lordship interested himself in my success.

But did I owe nothing more to Lord Grantham, than the advantages which I have derived from his attention in engaging Mr. Waddilove, the chaplain of his embassy, to take the conduct of my literary inquiries in Spain, the obligations I lie under to him would be very great. During five years that gentleman has carried on researches for my behoof, with such activity, perseverance, and knowledge of the subject, to which his attention was turned, as have filled me with no less astonishment than satisfaction. He procured for me the greater part of the Spanish books which I have consulted; and as many of them were printed early in the sixteenth century, and are become extremely rare, the collecting of these was such an occupation as alone required much time and assiduity. To his friendly attention I am indebted for copies of several valuable manuscripts, containing facts and details which I might have searched for in vain in works that have been made public. Encouraged by the inviting good-will with which Mr.

Waddilove conferred his favours, I transmitted to him a set of queries, with respect both to the customs and policy of the native Americans, and the nature of several institutions in the Spanish settlements, framed in such a manner that a Spaniard might answer them without disclosing any thing that was improper to be communicated to a foreigner. He translated these into Spanish, and obtained, from various persons who had resided in most of the Spanish colonies, such replies as have afforded me much instruction.

Notwithstanding those peculiar advantages with which my inquiries were carried on in Spain, it is with regret I am obliged to add, that their success must be ascribed to the beneficence of individuals, not to any communication by public authority. By a singular arrangement of Philip II., the records of the Spanish monarchy are deposited in the *Archivo* of Simancas, near Valladolid, at the distance of a hundred and twenty miles from the seat of government, and the supreme courts of justice. The papers relative to America, and chiefly to that early period of its history towards which my at-

tention was directed, are so numerous, that they alone, according to one account, fill the largest apartment in the Archivo ; and, according to another, they compose eight hundred and seventy-three large bundles. Conscious of possessing, in some degree, the industry which belongs to an historian, the prospect of such a treasure excited my most ardent curiosity. But the prospect of it is all that I have enjoyed. Spain, with an excess of caution, has uniformly thrown a veil over her transactions in America. From strangers they are concealed with peculiar solicitude. Even to her own subjects the Archivo of Simancas is not opened without a particular order from the crown ; and, after obtaining that, papers cannot be copied, without paying fees of office so exorbitant, that the expense exceeds what it would be proper to bestow, when the gratification of literary curiosity is the only object. It is to be hoped, that the Spaniards will at last discover this system of concealment to be no less impolitic than illiberal. From what I have experienced in the course of my inquiries, I am satisfied, that upon a more minute scrutiny into their early opera-

tions in the New World, however reprehensible the actions of individuals may appear, the conduct of the nation will be placed in a more favourable light.

In other parts of Europe very different sentiments prevail. Having searched, without success, in Spain, for a letter of Cortes to Charles V. written soon after he landed in the Mexican Empire, which has not hitherto been published; it occurred to me, that as the Emperor was setting out for Germany at the time when the messengers from Cortes arrived in Europe, the letter with which they were intrusted might possibly be preserved in the Imperial library of Vienna. I communicated this idea to Sir Robert Murray Keith, with whom I have long had the honour to live in friendship, and I had soon the pleasure to learn, that upon his application Her Imperial Majesty had been graciously pleased to issue an order, that not only a copy of that letter (if it were found), but of any other papers in the library which could throw light upon the History of America, should be transmitted to me. The letter from Cortes is not in the Imperial library; but an authentic

copy, attested by a notary, of the letter written by the magistrates of the colony planted by him at Vera Cruz, which I have mentioned, Vol: ii. p. 143., having been found, it was transcribed, and sent to me. As this letter is no less curious, and as little known as that which was the object of my inquiries, I have given some account, in its proper place, of what is most worthy of notice in it. Together with it, I received a copy of a letter from Cortes, containing a long account of his expedition to Honduras, with respect to which I did not think it necessary to enter into any particular detail; and likewise those curious Mexican paintings, which I have described, vol. iii. p. 23.

My inquiries at St. Petersburg were carried on with equal facility and success. In examining into the nearest communication between our continent and that of America, it became of consequence to obtain authentic information concerning the discoveries of the Russians in their navigation from Kamchatka towards the coast of America. Accurate relations of their first voyage, in 1741, have been published by Muller and

Gmelin. Several foreign authors have entertained an opinion that the court of Russia studiously conceals the progress which has been made by more recent navigators, and suffers the Public to be amused with false accounts of their route. Such conduct appeared to me unsuitable to those liberal sentiments, and that patronage of science, for which the present sovereign of Russia is eminent; nor could I discern any political reason, that might render it improper to apply for information concerning the late attempts of the Russians to open a communication between Asia and America. My ingenious countryman, Dr. Rogerson, first physician to the Empress, presented my request to Her Imperial Majesty, who not only disclaimed any idea of concealment, but instantly ordered the journal of Captain Krenitzin, who conducted the only voyage of discovery made by public authority since the year 1741, to be translated, and his original chart to be copied for my use. By consulting them, I have been enabled to give a more accurate view of the progress and extent of the Russian discove-

ries, than has hitherto been communicated to the Public.

From other quarters I have received information of great utility and importance. M. le Chevalier de Pinto, the minister from Portugal to the court of Great Britain, who commanded for several years at Matagrosso, a settlement of the Portuguese in the interior part of Brazil, where the Indians are numerous, and their original manners little altered by intercourse with Europeans, was pleased to send me very full answers to some queries concerning the character and institutions of the natives of America, which his polite reception of an application made to him in my name encouraged me to propose. These satisfied me, that he had contemplated with a discerning attention the curious objects which his situation presented to his view, and I have often followed him as one of my best-instructed guides.

M. Suard, to whose elegant translation of the History of the Reign of Charles V. I owe the favourable reception of that work on the continent, procured me answers to the same queries from M. de Bougainville,

who had opportunities of observing the Indians both of North and South America, and from M. Godin le Jeune, who resided fifteen years among Indians in Quito, and twenty years in Cayenne. The latter are more valuable from having been examined by M. de la Condamine, who, a few weeks before his death, made some short additions to them, which may be considered as the last effort of that attention to science which occupied a long life.

My inquiries were not confined to one region in America. Governor Hutchinson took the trouble of recommending the consideration of my queries to Mr. Hawley and Mr. Brainerd, two protestant missionaries employed among the Indians of the Five Nations, who favoured me with answers which discover a considerable knowledge of the people whose customs they describe. From William Smith, Esq. the ingenious historian of New York, I received some useful information. When I enter upon the History of our Colonies in North America, I shall have occasion to acknowledge how much I have been indebted to many other gentlemen of that country.

From the valuable Collection of Voyages made by Alexander Dalrymple, Esq., with whose attention to the History of Navigation and Discovery the Public is well acquainted, I have received some very rare books, particularly two large volumes of Memorials, partly manuscript and partly in print, which were presented to the court of Spain during the reigns of Philip III. and Philip IV. From these I have learned many curious particulars with respect to the interior state of the Spanish colonies, and the various schemes formed for their improvement. As this collection of Memorials formerly belonged to the Colbert Library, I have quoted them by that title.

All those books and manuscripts I have consulted with that attention which the respect due from an Author to the Public required; and by minute references to them, I have endeavoured to authenticate whatever I relate. The longer I reflect on the nature of historical composition, the more I am convinced that this scrupulous accuracy is necessary. The historian who records the events of his own time, is credited in proportion to the opinion which the Pub-

lic entertains with respect to his means of information and his veracity. He who delineates the transactions of a remote period, has no title to claim assent, unless he produces evidence in proof of his assertions. Without this, he may write an amusing tale, but cannot be said to have composed an authentic history. In those sentiments I have been confirmed by the opinion of an Author*, whom his industry, erudition, and discernment, have deservedly placed in a high rank among the most eminent historians of the age. Imboldened by a hint from him, I have published a catalogue of the Spanish books which I have consulted. This practice was frequent in the last century, and was considered as an evidence of laudable industry in an author; in the present, it may, perhaps, be deemed the effect of ostentation; but, as many of these books are unknown in Great Britain, I could not otherwise have referred to them as authorities, without encumbering the page with an insertion of their full titles. To any person who may choose to follow me in this

* Mr. Gibbon.

path of inquiry, the catalogue must be very useful.

My readers will observe, that in mentioning sums of money, I have uniformly followed the Spanish method of computing by *pesos*. In America, the *peso fuerte*, or *duro*, is the only one known; and that is always meant when any sum imported from America is mentioned. The *peso fuerte*, as well as other coins, has varied in its numerical value; but I have been advised, without attending to such minute variations, to consider it as equal to four shillings and six-pence of our money. It is to be remembered, however, that, in the sixteenth century, the effective value of a *peso*, *i. e.* the quantity of labour which it represented, or of goods which it would purchase, was five or six times as much as at present.

N. B. Since this edition was put into the press, a History of Mexico, in two volumes in quarto, translated from the Italian of the Abbé D. Francesco Saverio Clavigero, has

been published. From a person who is a native of New Spain, who has resided forty years in that country, and who is acquainted with the Mexican language, it was natural to expect much new information. Upon perusing his work, however, I find that it contains hardly any addition to the ancient History of the Mexican Empire, as related by Acosta and Herrera, but what is derived from the improbable narratives and fanciful conjectures of Torquemada and Boturini. Having copied their splendid descriptions of the high state of civilization in the Mexican Empire, M. Clavigero, in the abundance of his zeal for the honour of his native country, charges me with having mistaken some points, and with having misrepresented others, in the History of it. When an author is conscious of having exerted industry in research, and impartiality in decision, he may, without presumption, claim what praise is due to these qualities, and he cannot be insensible to any accusation that tends to weaken the force of his claim. A feeling of this kind has induced me to examine such strictures of M. Clavigero on my History of America as merited any attention, especially

as these are made by one who seemed to possess the means of obtaining accurate information; and to show that the greater part of them is destitute of any just foundation. This I have done in notes upon the passages in my History which gave rise to his criticisms.

COLLEGE OF EDINBURGH,
March 1st, 1788.