

Drumy - Thompson 3728

A HISTORY OF THE LIFE AND VOYAGES OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

Venient annis
Sæcula seris, quibus Oceanus
Vincula rerum laxet, et ingens
Pateat tellus, Typhisque novos
Delegat Orbes, nec sit terris
Ultima Thule.

SENeca : Medea.

PREFACE.

BEING at Bordeaux, in the winter of 1825-6, I received a letter from Mr Alexander Everett, Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States at Madrid, informing me of a work then in the press, edited by Don Martin Fernandez de Navarrete, Secretary of the Royal Academy of History, etc., etc., containing a collection of documents relative to the voyages of Columbus, among which were many of a highly important nature, recently discovered. Mr Everett, at the same time, expressed an opinion that a version of the work into English, by one of our own country, would be peculiarly desirable. I concurred with him in the opinion; and, having for some time intended a visit to Madrid, I shortly afterwards set off for that capital, with an idea of undertaking, while there, the translation of the work.

Soon after my arrival, the publication of Mr Navarrete made its appearance. I found it to contain many documents, hitherto unknown, which threw additional lights on the discovery of the New World; and which reflected the greatest credit on the industry and activity of the learned editor. Still the whole presented rather a mass of rich materials for history, than a history itself. And invaluable as such stores may be to the laborious inquirer, the sight of disconnected papers and official documents is apt to be repulsive to the general reader, who seeks for clear and continued narrative. These circumstances made me hesitate in my proposed undertaking; yet the subject was of so interesting and national a kind, that I could not willingly abandon it.

On considering the matter more maturely, I perceived that, although there were many books, in various languages, relative to Columbus, they all contained limited and incomplete accounts of his life and voyages; while numerous valuable tracts on the subject existed only in manuscript, or in the form of letters, journals, and public monuments. It appeared to me that a history, faithfully digested from these various materials, was a desideratum in literature, and would be a more satisfactory occupation to myself, and a more ac-

ceptable work to my country, than the translation I had contemplated.

I was encouraged to undertake such a work, by the great facilities which I found within my reach at Madrid. I was resident under the roof of the American Consul, O. Rich, Esq., one of the most indefatigable bibliographers in Europe, who, for several years, had made particular researches after every document relative to the early history of America. In his extensive and curious library, I found one of the best collections extant of Spanish colonial history, containing many documents for which I might search elsewhere in vain. This he put at my absolute command, with a frankness and unreserve seldom to be met with among the possessors of such rare and valuable works; and his library has been my main resource throughout the whole of my labours.

I found also the Royal Library of Madrid, and the library of the Jesuits' College of San Isidro, two noble and extensive collections, open to access, and conducted with great order and liberality. From Don Martin Fernandez de Navarrete, who communicated various valuable and curious pieces of information, discovered in the course of his researches, I received the most obliging assistance: nor can I refrain from testifying my admiration of the self-sustained zeal of that estimable man, one of the last veterans of Spanish literature, who is almost alone, yet indefatigable in his labours, in a country where, at present, literary exertion meets with but little excitement or reward.

I must acknowledge, also, the liberality of the Duke of Veragua, the descendant and representative of Columbus, who submitted the archives of his family to my inspection, and took a personal interest in exhibiting the treasures they contained. Nor, lastly, must I omit my deep obligations to my excellent friend Don Antonio de Uguina, treasurer of the Prince Francisco, a gentleman of talents and erudition, and particularly versed in the history of his country and its dependencies. To his unwearied investigations, and silent and unavowed contributions, the world is indebted for much of the accurate information, recently imparted, on points of early colonial history. In the possession of this gentleman