

INTRODUCTION.

offer themselves to the skilful in maritime affairs. However as the *Manila* ships are the only ones which have ever traversed this vast ocean, except a *French* straggler or two, which have been afterwards seized on the coast of *Mexico*, and as during near two ages, in which this trade has been carried on; the *Spaniards* have, with the greatest care, secreted all accounts of their voyages from the rest of the world; these reasons alone would authorize the insertion of those papers, and would recommend them to the inquisitive, as a very great improvement in geography, and worthy of attention from the singularity of many circumstances recited therein. I must add too, (what in my opinion is far from being the least recommendation of these materials) that the observations of the variation of the compass in that Ocean, which are inserted in the chart from these *Spanish* journals, tend greatly to compleat the general system of the magnetic variation of infinite import, to the commercial and seafaring part of mankind. These observations were, though in vain, often publicly called for by our learned country-man the late Dr. *Halley*, and to his immortal reputation they confirm, as far as they extend, the wonderful hypothesis he had entertained on this head, and very nearly correspond in their quantity, to the predictions he published above fifty years since, long before he was acquainted with any one observation made in those seas. The ascertaining the variation in that part of the world is just now too, of more than ordinary consequence, as the Editors of a new variation-chart lately published, have, for want of observations in those parts, been misled by an erroneous analogy, and have mistaken the very species of variation in those northern seas; for they make it westerly where it is easterly, and have laid it down 12° or 13° short of its real quantity.

Thus much it has been thought necessary to premise with regard to the hydrographical and geographical part of the ensuing work; which it is hoped the reader will, on perusal, find much ampler and more important than this slight sketch can well indicate. But as there are hereafter occasionally interspersed some accounts of *Spanish* transactions, and many observations on the disposition of the *American Spaniards*, and on the condition of the countries.