

PREFACE.

AT a time when Malta makes so conspicuous a figure on the political scene of Europe, in the midst of the numerous governments overturned by the most astonishing revolution which has hitherto been recorded in the annals of history, I have been induced to believe that it would be both useful and entertaining to comprise in one single work every thing most deserving notice relative to that celebrated island, now become an object of universal attention ; to add all those circumstances which timidity and a mistaken idea of politics have hitherto concealed in all the modern histories of Malta ; to throw a light on those events which have been misrepresented by premeditated malice, or ill explained through inattention ; and to lay before the world all that has been passed over in silence, either from a degree of ignorance scarcely pardonable in an author, or from motives of self-interest still more culpable. For this purpose, I find it necessary to divide my work into two parts :—the first of which will include the geographical description of the island, together

with the different monuments of the arts still remaining, the government, administration, natural history, trade, and finances; the second will contain the history of the knights of Malta from the time of their departure from Rhodes to the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The authors who have supplied the most curious information on the subjects contained in the first part of this History, are *Abela, Ciantar, Houël, La Borde, and Boccone*: but their works are now become extremely scarce. I have comprised in a single volume the most interesting particulars (independent of the history of the knights) given by those authors, and have added several others which have either escaped their notice or did not enter into the plans of their respective works.

The second part contains a brief account of the knights for the first two centuries after the institution of the order; in which I merely take notice of some of the most striking features in their history, in order to describe with accuracy the interesting circumstances which preceded and accompanied the surrender of Malta to the French. This appears to me still

more necessary, since all the authors who have treated of this unhappy event have either expressed themselves with an indecent virulence, disgusting to a reader of taste, or given way to a decided spirit of party offensive to all lovers of truth.

I have therefore added to the particulars taken from the works quoted in the following catalogue, others which have been communicated to me by persons of the most respectable characters and the strictest veracity, who were themselves witnesses of most of the facts related in this History, and whose names I extremely regret that I am not permitted at present to make public.

A principal part of my design in the following work has been, to give to the world an exact relation of the cruel catastrophe of Malta, unfold the guilt and atrocious injustice of the most dangerous government hitherto known; and prove, that the order of Malta has for years past distinguished itself for piety and military exploits in as illustrious a manner as during the most renowned ages of ancient chivalry.

This order has therefore surely a right to resume a post hitherto so honourably filled, but of which it has been deprived by the reign of tyranny;—that reign which overturned all those religious, civil, and military institutions, which had ever comforted the afflicted, and assured the tranquillity and happiness of mankind.