

will defer to the end of the work all notices of natural history, which require to be treated in detail, and all articles that could not enter into the body of the history, and which may nevertheless afford interesting knowledge: such as what regards commerce, manufactures, plants and animals, medicine, &c.

As for the body of the history itself, I shall observe the same order that I followed in writing the history of the island of St. Domingo, with which apparently the public was not displeased. I shall omit nothing essential, but I shall avoid useless details. I know that the nature of the work requires what other histories would not suffer. Things quite uninteresting in themselves, please when they come from a remote country, yet I am not blind to the necessity of selection and limit.

In this manner a complete knowledge may be acquired of each region of the New World;—of its condition when first discovered; what can be known of the history of its first inhabitants; the important transactions since the entrance of Europeans; of its most curious matters;—and the reader will be able to form a judgment on those who have previously written about it. Thus the history of the New World will be no longer in danger of perishing by its own abundance. What is really worthy of a reader's curiosity will not be smothered in things, to say the best, utterly useless, nor embarrassed in contradictions; and it will be easy to make a just discernment between the authors of relations and travels, who alone deserve the discredit which they have drawn on all, and those writers, who, by their sincerity and efforts to acquire information, are entitled to be regarded as safe guides, and witnesses beyond reproach.

In fine, it was time to render this service to the public, while we have still certain rules of criticism to distinguish lawful and authentic documents from the prodigious number of writings thrown off at hazard, most of which so disfigure truth as to render her no longer distinguishable, and which would undoubtedly destroy all traces of it, if the inundation were allowed to go unchecked. Never, in fact, has the *cacoethes scribendi* gone further than in this matter. Who can number the relations, memoirs, voyages, particular and general histories, produced by curiosity to see and eagerness to tell what has been seen, or what men would fain pass off as seen? But a ray of light is still left, by the help of which we can disentangle truth from this monstrous heap of fables, which have almost eclipsed it; and most of which, although supported by pleasing style, and the pernicious seasoning of satire, libertinage, and