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11123. HISTORY . Ä

OF THE
HOUSE OF AUSTRIA,

FROM THE
Foundation of the Monarchy
BY RHODOLPH OF HAPSBURGH,
TO THE DEATH OF
LEOPOLD THE SECOND:
1218 to 1792.

BY WILLIAM COXE, F.R.S. F.A.S.
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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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P R E F A C E.

As no regular and connected History of the HOUSE of AUSTRIA has ever been printed in any language, this work will at least possess the merit of novelty.

Although I have employed a longer time, and far more assiduity, than on any preceding publication, and can boast of more ample stores than have been usually possessed by the historian; yet, when I reflect on the length of the period, the quantity of materials, and the interesting nature of the events, I feel more diffidence and anxiety than I have ever before experienced, and throw myself on the candour and indulgence of the Public.

The house of Austria has long been the subject of my contemplations. During my travels in Switzerland, the character and exploits of Rhodolph of Hapsburgh, and the deeds of his immediate descendants, naturally arrested my attention. While resident at Vienna, the subject pressed more strongly on my mind; and from the rich stores of the imperial library, and other sources of information, I collected abundant materials for biographical memoirs of the great founder of this illustrious family. Other travels, and other publications, suspended this design; and I changed it for the historical and political state of Europe, in which the house of Austria was intended to form a conspicuous figure. This plan was, however, relinquished, for reasons which I have mentioned in the preface to the Memoirs of Sir Robert Walpole: but my collections for the Austrian History still continued to augment, particularly during two subsequent visits to Vienna. New literary pursuits still suspended, without diverting, my

design ; and the papers, to which I obtained access, while I was compiling the *Memoirs of Sir Robert and Lord Walpole*, swelled the mass of materials, and threw a new and interesting light on the modern period of the Austrian annals. At length I found leisure to turn my whole attention to a work, which I had been unwilling to relinquish, though unable to complete ; and the result of my labours is the book now offered to the reader.

The following history presents the spectacle of a family rapidly rising from the possession of dominions, which form scarcely a speck in the map of Europe, to a stupendous height of power and splendour, equal, if not superior, to any preceding dynasty. Like the Danube of its native mountains, at first an inconsiderable rill, obscurely winding amidst rocks and precipices, then swelling its volume by the accumulation of tributary streams, carrying plenty and fertility to numerous nations, and, finally, pouring its mighty waters, by a hundred mouths, into the Euxine sea. The members of this family present every possible variety of character, and every species of merit or acquirement : cultivators or protectors of letters and science ; the distinguished heroes and statesmen of almost every age ; its ministers and warriors the patterns and admiration of their contemporaries. The period of its history comprises a space of six centuries, from the earliest dawn to the meridian of modern science ; from the age of feudal barbarism to the full splendour of European civilisation.

To this family does Europe owe its preservation. In this house has Providence placed the barrier which arrested the progress of the Mahometan hordes, and prevented the banner of the crescent from floating in triumph over the Christian world. United with the Catholic church by interest, no less than by passion and prejudice, its chiefs were, for a short time, the great opposers of truth, and the oppressors of civil and religious liberty. But adversity taught more tolerant and liberal principles ; and, as Austria first saved Europe from Mahometan barbarism, she has since formed the great bulwark of public freedom, and the great counterpoise to France, in the political balance. At all times, and in all circumstances, Austria has been pre-eminent in peace as in arms ; the court of Vienna has