

"This morning two gentlemen who were calling on papa were lamenting the degeneracy of the times.

"One was an old general, and he said,—

"‘We have no heroes now—not a great soldier left. Since Marlborough died not an Englishman has appeared who is fit to be more than a general of division. There is neither the brain to conceive great plans, nor the will to execute them, nor the dash which so often changes reverses into victories.’

"My great-uncle, a Fellow of Brazenose, took up the wail. ‘No, indeed,’ he said; ‘the ages of gold and iron and brass are over; the golden days of Elizabeth and Shakespeare, and the scattered Armada, the iron of the Revolution (for rough as they were, these men were iron); the brass of the Restoration; and now we have nothing to do but to beat out the dust and shavings into tinsel and wire.’

"‘We have plenty of wood at least for gallows,’ interposed my brother Harry. ‘Cart-loads of men are taken every week to Tyburn. I saw one myself yesterday.’

"‘For what crimes?’ asked the general.

"‘One for stealing a few yards of ribbon; another for forging a draught for £50,’ said Harry.

"‘Ah,’ sighed the general, ‘we have not even energy left to commit great crimes?’

"‘Then,’ resumed my great-uncle, ‘what authors or artists have we worth the name? Pope, Swift, and Addison, Wren and Kneller,—all are gone. We have not amongst us a man who can make an epic march, or a satire bite, or a cathedral stand, or picture or a statue live. Imitators of imitations, we live at the fag-end of time, without great thinkers, or great thoughts, or great deeds to inspire either.’

"‘There is a little bookseller called Richardson, who, the ladies say, writes like an angel,’ observed my brother Harry; ‘and Fielding at all events is a gentleman, and knows something of men and manners.’

"‘And pretty men and manners they are from what I hear,’ was my great-uncle’s dolorous response. ‘But what are these at best? Not worth the name of literature; frippery for a lady’s