

immortal strains the sentiment of the day; and his verses have depicted with an extraordinary coincidence of accompanying circumstances, the arrival of a Prince who was to open a new and brilliant page in the book of time, restoring the innocence and felicity of the golden age. The limited intercourse between Jew and Gentile, and the marvellous ignorance of Jewish literature and traditions displayed by contemporary writers, preclude the supposition that this idea was borrowed from the Jews. We are forced to the conclusion that it was divinely impressed upon men's minds; to regard it as a supernatural precursor of an impending revolution in the laws, the manners and the religion of the world.

But if this period was, as we have observed, eminently remarkable for the prevalence of literature and art, a closer and more minute investigation of the state of society will enable us to perceive that it was corrupt through all its ramifications;—corrupt beyond parallel in history; corrupt to a degree which should confound those who vainly imagine that human learning, unsanctified by religion, can accomplish any substantial reformation in the moral nature of man. The sentiments of justice and the precepts of morality inculcated by some of the most prominent writers, who naturally attract the first attention of the student, could have had little or no influence on the great aggregate of society, for on its every phase we may see inscribed in dismal characters "the world by wisdom knew not God." It was preceded, and it was soon followed, on and beyond the borders of the *Empire*, by scenes of internecine strife; and internally by plentiful and sanguinary exhibitions of the worst passions of our fallen nature in all their darkest aspects. The Emperors were tyrannical and cruel; the governors rapacious and extortionate; the nobles were licentious and unprincipled, dissolute and extravagant. If an obnoxious Senator stood in the way of an unscrupulous aspirant to office (and of such there were many), a summary method was in most instances adopted, and ready instruments found to place him where he would forever cease from troubling; and it might be considered a freak of fortune if a distant and desolate exile were the mild lot of an orator who ventured to descant too faithfully on the depravity of the age. I need only remind the reader of the proscriptions which desolated Rome in the civil wars between Marius and Sulla, and of the numbers who fell victims to the wiles of the bloodthirsty and subtle Sejanus. To say nothing of the slaves, a numerous and unhappy class, whose lives by the cruel policy of the Roman law, were at the mercy and disposal of their masters, the lower orders of freemen were oppressed by their superiors in a measure which left them no hope for the amelioration of their condition, and were, humanly speaking, irretrievably sunk in misery, crime, and every species of degradation. The savage sports of the amphitheatre were eagerly courted, and intensely enjoyed by persons in every class, and of either sex. Such was the almost universal depravity that for many years before the accession of Severus, in the very