

Times that gave birth to John Doe and Richard Roe. There are even in our days many worthy people who will tell you in the most solemn style of moralization that the men of the present day have no fixed principles of honor like our ancestors—that politics have degenerated into selfishness and snobocracy—that true religion has either altogether fled the earth, or is so much mixed up with error as to be no longer the Simon Pure article that prompted the burning of the Lollards and the witches of New England—that, in short, public virtue has almost wholly left the earth. At what precise period this calamity passed upon mankind the worshippers of antiquity are not quite agreed. Some say that the decay of public virtue was contemporaneous with the decline of classical literature,—others make it exist about the time the last of the Apostles suffered martyrdom. Some assert its departure at the rise of the Reformation,—others trace its last flicker about the time of the death of George III., or the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act. Be the precise period when it may, to them it is palpable and notorious that the present is a most degenerate irreligious age—that the world is not somehow as good as it used to be, and that the people who inhabit it are pigmies, intellectually and physically, with little honor, honesty or godness.

The vaunted wisdom and perfections of our ancestors will be found more imaginary than real by any one who takes the pains to inquire where-  
 \* superior wisdom consisted.  
 \* particular period were man-  
 ny, more comfortable  
 he present? When  
 \* best period called  
 is begin and end?  
 \* that undefined  
 and better Chris-

tians than their degenerate descendants of to-day? At a time when religion, or rather scholastic theology formed the principal, almost the only subject of study or of thought, and when all intellectual energy was exerted in speculation on that one topic, we might naturally expect to find people devout. We are told that the time was when a knight, whenever present at mass, held the point of his sword before him, while the Gospel was read, to signify his readiness to support it. But this warlike devotion led to more lamentable consequences, inasmuch as it led the devotee to look upon deviation from orthodoxy as a thing not to be tolerated. He first stigmatized Doubt by the odious name of *Heresy*, and then punished it as a crime. In our day, when every civilized man allows every other man to pursue his thoughts on religious and profane subjects to any extent of speculation, we can scarcely appreciate the blessing of such liberty, and are apt to forget the horrors of the stricter orthodoxy of our forefathers. Further argument on this subject may be avoided by referring to one horrible writ devised by the wisdom and enforced by the piety of our ancestors: so common as to be one of the legal forms given in elementary Books of Practice, and so long and lately cherished by our wise forefathers that a Protestant Sovereign repeatedly executed it, deliberately and literally, against harmless and obscure Baptists. Being now rarely printed, and not well known to the heterodox of our degenerate day, it will not, perhaps, be amiss to submit it for their perusal, in the hope that it may excite an awful reverence for the ages when Sheriffs enforced virtue and godliness through the land by its grim authority:

"The Queen, &c., to the Mayor and Sheriffs of London, greeting: