

STATE OF THE WORLD AT THE CHRISTIAN ADVENT.

Previous to our Saviour's advent the three great powers, the Assyrian, the Me'ro-Persian, and the Greek, whose histories fill so large a space in the records of antiquity, had successively fulfilled their allotted mission; and, true to prophetic intimation, a fourth more terrible still, had planted its *iron* feet upon their ruins. Imperial Rome was then in the zenith of her glory. Her dominions embraced the whole civilized world. The first Cæsar after his triumph over the Gauls, had led his victorious legions across the Rubicon to obtain an easier, an equally signal, but for himself and for the republic, a more fatal triumph, over the liberties of his country. The authority of his successor was acknowledged from the ocean on the West to the Euphrates on the East; was bounded by the Danube on the North, and on the South by the ranges of Mount Atlas, and the sandy deserts of Sahara. Not only were external enemies subdued, but civil commotion was for a season suspended. Immediately before the birth of our Saviour, the temple of Janus at Rome, kept open only during war, was closed for the first time in the space of two centuries and a half. The angry elements of national discord had been hushed into a profound, an universal calm, as if to welcome with circumstances of more solemn and awful dignity the auspicious arrival of the Prince of Peace.

———The meek-eyed Peace,
All crowned with olive green came softly sliding,
Down through the turning sphere;
His ready harbinger,
With turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing,
And waving wide her myrtle wand,
She strikes a universal peace through sea and land.*

This was an age proverbial for its eminent scholars, and its distinguished philosophers; their scientific researches, and the pure system of morals which some of them inculcated; the progress of the arts, the prevalence of knowledge, and the high state of advancement which society, viewed in its more salient aspects, presented. The sublime ethics of Cicero,—the unrivalled productions of Virgil, Horace, and Juvenal,—the inimitable pages of Livy,—will probably be studied with interest and delight by the remotest generation. At no single epoch of ancient history can we anywhere discover a brighter array of learning and talent, of taste and genius, than that which adorned the Empire and city of Rome in her "Augustan age."

As the prophetic periods verged to their termination, the seed of Abraham were awaiting with eager anxiety the appearance of the promised Messiah. But among Gentile nations also at this time there was a general expectation of the coming of some great and remarkable personage. The poet Virgil has embodied in his

* Milton's Hymn on the Nativity—a production quite on a par with his great epic in merit, though much less known.