

THESE HARD TIMES.

Extracts from a Sermon delivered at Batavia, New York, by the Rev. James A. Bolles, from the following Text:

"Say not thou, what is the cause that the former days were better than these; for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this."—Ecclesiastes vi. 10.

*** There are some individuals who, in looking back, for instance, upon the Augustinian period of Roman Literature, in contemplating the history of some statesman or hero, or celebrated man—his virtuous magnified and increased by that "distance which lends enchantment to the view," his faults and vices all stricken out of existence by the same magic wand—fancy under these delusive influences that those days were better than these. But what are the facts? When we investigate deeper and listen to the voice of impartial history, what appears to have been the actual condition of the world? We have a summary statement of its condition, an outline of the degraded state of man in the first chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans—written at the very time when Rome was in the zenith of her fancied splendour, bearing in the confident manner in which it is related to the very people who could have contradicted it, the unquestionable marks of truth, and sustained by the concurrent testimony of Heathen writers. We talk of murder now. But think of thousands annually slaughtered in our cities, as Gibbon informs us was the case in the cities of Rome, at the time of their gladiatorial games. Think of four hundred Senators and six hundred knights, all engaged in mortal combat merely to gratify the depraved appetite of some blood-thirsty Nero. Would the world endure such a spectacle now? In the catalogue of vices mentioned by St. Paul, there are some which we dare not name, and so disgusting and unnatural are they that we can scarcely believe them possible, and yet in the writings of Cicero, it is related of Cotta, one of the most distinguished men of the day, that he not only freely and willingly acknowledged to the Romans that he practiced such enormities, but he quoted the example and authority of the Philosophers in vindication of his practice. On this point I have no time to enlarge; but read the first chap. of the Ep. to the Romans, and as a commentary upon that chapter, read the masterly work of "Leland on the necessity of Divine Revelation," and then tell me, whether "the former days were better than these."

But suppose we come down to a later period, and take for illustration the middle or dark ages. When we read the history—the debasing superstitions of the Church—the hoarding of relics, the erection of monasteries, the pilgrimages to the tombs of Martyrs, the mummeries which were introduced into the service of Religion, the wild and romantic expedition of the crusades, the tyranny and ambition of Popes and Princes, the deplorable ignorance of the Clergy, the vain disquisitions and absurd reasonings about abstract and incomprehensible truths, and the ridiculous sophisms which prevailed; when these facts are brought to our notice, we are almost tempted to believe that the world had then gone backward in the career of improvement, and that Christianity had failed in the accomplishment of its great and glorious objects. But such a conclusion would be hasty and unwise; for although that period was indeed dark, as compared with the present, yet no attentive reader of the history can fail to perceive the advancing steps of ci-

vilization and Christianity. Then the Christian Church, which before had been tried in the furnace of external violence and persecution, was subject to the severer test of inward corruption and error, and coming out from both unharmed as to the essential elements of her character and the principal doctrines of her faith, the mightiest demonstration possible has given to the world that the "gates of hell cannot prevail against her." Then was laid the foundation of all those Schools and Universities which now adorn the towns and cities of Europe; then was manifested the weakness of the human intellect in attempting to explain mysterious truths, and in becoming involved in the subtleties of scholastic speculation; and thus the way was prepared for the inductive philosophy of Bacon. Then for the first time in the history of the world, the female character was elevated to its proper rank in society, and "the present civilization of Europe," says the American Encyclopædia, "is in a great degree the result of the crusades." And let it not be supposed, that no improvements were at that time made in the useful arts; for then originated the gothic architecture in all its grandeur and magnificence; then was invented the clock, now so necessary and common; the optical instruments which have brought to light the wonders of astronomy; the mariner's compass, (so soon followed by the discovery of the New World,) and the art of printing, which may be regarded as constituting the dawn of the Reformation. In many other respects we could go on and show that the very follies and superstitions, which now excite our disgust and astonishment, were indeed a great and wonderful improvement upon the heathen idolatries which they superceded, and which were overthrown in the onward march of the true religion. Enough, however, has been said to prove that even then, it would have been most unwise to inquire "what is the cause that the former days were better than these."

Let us come, therefore, to our own time and nation. Can we now say in reference to any former period of our national existence, that "the former days were better than these?" No one doubts that the present is a time of pecuniary trouble and political darkness. But is it not true of every period, that it has its peculiar difficulties and trials? Should we not expect in every situation a checkered scene, a mixture of good and evil, a dispensation of chastisement as well as blessing, of judgement as well as mercy? Was there ever a nation elevated to such a height of prosperity as to be loaded with unqualified happiness in every department of its interests? And who will pretend to say that the troubles and disasters of the present time, are greater than any which have occurred before, or that they are not really blessings in disguise? Who will pretend to say that they are not essentially necessary to the permanency and stability of our Institutions? Because in some respects, God is frustrating the councils of our wise men and making our "divines mad," are we hastily to conclude that He has therefore forgotten to be gracious, and has cast us off for ever? What was the American Revolution but a period of fearful perplexity and trembling, and yet who can doubt that in its grand results, it was a vast improvement upon the previous state? Have we not reason to believe that the hurricane and the storm are as much required in the moral and political as they are in the physical world? or if not as much required, that they often produce the same purifying effects? As wise and

sober minded men, can we regard the plenty or the scarcity of money as the only true index of national prosperity? At such a time as this, can we not be animated with hope by higher and better considerations than any which "filthy lucre" is able to suggest? Let us turn our attention then to some of these better considerations, these more animating and encouraging views of our actual condition and prospects. We are sometimes told of our degradation in the eyes of European money lenders, in consequence of the "repudiation of State debts," and we acknowledge that if these great States should "repudiate their debts," and disown and dishonor their bonds, we should deserve to be degraded to the lowest level of infamy and reproach; but this has not and will not be done, and never did we occupy a more elevated position among the nations of the earth than that which we now enjoy. We are sometimes told that the boasted Tree of Liberty which our Fathers planted has been blasted by the lightnings of heaven, and that already it is beginning to totter to its fall; but this is the language of idle and fulsome declamation, for never were the principles of civil freedom held in more sacred veneration, and never were they better regulated for the happiness of us all. We are sometimes told that even our altars are in danger, and that the holy and perpetual fire which has been kindled upon them is destined speedily to go out; but let us not be alarmed at the suggestion, for never has the incense burned more brightly; never has Christianity taken a deeper root or shed more richly her inestimable blessings upon man. Never has so many been united in the bonds of heavenly charity, for the purpose of diffusing religion and happiness over the face of the earth, and no matter what the trouble or the calamity to which human nature is exposed, there is some remedy devised either to prevent or alleviate the pressure. It is of no consequence at all that a new impulse has been given to the cause of general education, and such an impulse as was never felt before, and that even now, while I am speaking, this nation above all others, for the interest which she has taken in this holy cause, is lifting her head in honor to the skies? Ah! brethren, do we not know that instead of looking at former times as better than our own, we have many reasons to regard the present as peculiarly the harbinger of better things to come and as laden with the "first fruits" of the harvest of future glory? And although it is written that God will "overturn, and overturn, and overturn, exalting him that is low and abasing him that is high, removing the diadem and taking off the crown" from many heads, still we can no more doubt that every change is over-ruled for good, than we can doubt the truth, that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

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Chatham 30th August, 1841.

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Chatham, May 23, 1841

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ROYAL HOTEL.

G. LAYTON begs leave most respectfully to announce to the inhabitants of Chatham and the Public generally, that he has taken the above named Premises of Mrs. MARTIN, and will be prepared to enter thereon by the first of next month, when he will be happy to accommodate Travellers as usual, and a few private Boarders; and hopes by strict attention to the comfort of those who may favour him with their commands, to merit a share of that patronage so liberally bestowed on his predecessor.

Chatham, October 25, 1841

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500 Sides SOLE LEATHER,

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Chatham, 21st June, 1841.

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CARD.

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BEN. MILLER.

S. J. FROST.

Chatham, April 6, 1841.

NOTICE.

The Creditors on the Estate of WILLIAM ROBINSON, an Absconding Debtor, whose claims have been proved to the satisfaction of the Trustees, will receive a Dividend on their respective claims on or after the first day of March next, at the Office of Gilmoar, Rankin & Co., Douglastown.

RICHARD HUTCHISON, } Trustees.

ALEXANDER FOSTER. }

Newcastle, 24th January, 1842.

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