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—Hard Steel succeeded them,
And stubborn as the Metal were the Men:
Truth, Modesty and Shame the World forsook;
Fraud, Avarice and Force their Places took.
Dryden.

As Ovid, almost two thousand
Years ago, took it into his
Head to divide the Duration of
the World into four successive
Ages, distinguished by the
Name of Gold, Silver, Brass
and Iron, the Learned Man to have taken his
Poetical Flights for Gospel, and fondly pre-
sume that the Age of Iron has lasted ever since.
But, were we to leave the Fables at School,
where we found it, and examine the Matter of
Fact, I fancy we should soon discover Reason
to alter our Opinions, and conclude that Time
has undergone as remarkable Changes since the
Days of that Poet, as ever it had done before:
Even he himself, had he had his Wits about
him, might have perceiv'd that an Age of
Flint began to take Place from the first Dis-
putes about the Agrarian Law; that, almost,
all Sense of Humanity was lost in the Civil
Wars of Marius and Sylla; that before it was
possible for Mens Hearts to soften again, the
great Contest between Pompey and Caesar broke
out, which, with very little Intermiſion, was
continued down to the Death of Anthony; and,
how tender he might find the Breast of Julia,
he had abundant Reason to be convinced that
Augustus, her Father, was a true Son of Deuca-
lion and Pyrrha; or, as Shakspear has it, a
very Pettit, that neither Tully's irresistible Or-
atory, nor his own enchanting Numbers could
melt y.

Nobody, I presume, will venture to assert,
that Mankind had less of the Quarry in their
Composition, during the Reigns of those most
sacred and excellent Princes, the Successors of
Octavius, down to Conſtantine; or that, even
then, the Christian Religion had taken away
their Hearts of Stone, as the Scripture expresses
it, and given them a Heart of Flesh. Witness
the long and bloody Wars between the Orto-
dox and Arians, and the innumerable Proſe-
cutions and Massacres that attended Victory on
either Side; witness the expensive and destruc-
tive, though ridiculous, Expeditions to the
Holy Land; and witness the astonishing Quar-
rels between the Emperors and Popes for the
Right of Investitures; in which so many Mil-
lions perish'd, that the Church might be rich
and great.

But, this great Point carried, the dreadful
Blade of Religion, for a while, was sheath'd;
and, as Monks gave the Law to Princes, 'tis
no Wonder that the Times wore a new Face,
and from Adamant turn'd to Lead: Weight of
Course they had, but 'twas like that of Sleep,
which oppresses the whole Body, and renders
every Faculty useless. — Then it was that Dul-
ness first deſied, and to be eminently stupid
was the first Qualification for Preferment:
The very Name of Wit was forgot, and, if
by Accident, any little Spark gleam'd through
the substantial Darkness which surrounded it,
as if by Instinct, 'twas treated as a common
Enemy, and extinguiſh'd without Mercy. —
In short, during this whole insipid Interval, an
universal Numbness and Lethargy seem'd to
have seiz'd on all Minds; the Prince slum-
ber'd on the Throne; his Nobles snor'd at his
Feet,