

mediocrity of our fortunes, which are consequently in a safer situation. In a word, we are not considered enough to be plundered (a).

That class of the Roman people who were called Plebeians had no aversion to the worst of their emperors; for since they had no longer any share of empire themselves, nor were any more employed in wars, they became the most contemptible and degenerate people in the world; they looked upon commerce and the sciences as only proper for slaves, and the distributions of corn which they received made them neglect the cultivation of their lands: they had been familiarized to public games and splendid spectacles, and since they had no longer any tribunes to obey, or magistrates to elect, those gratifications, which they were only permitted to enjoy, became necessary to them, and their indolence and inactivity stimulated their relish of those indulgencies.

Caligula, Nero, Commodus, Caracalla, were lamented by the people for their very folly; for whatever these loved, the others were as madly fond of, in their turn, and not only contributed their whole power, but even devoted their own persons to those pleasures; they lavished all the riches of the empire with the greatest prodigality, and when these were exhausted, the people, without the least emotion, beheld all the great families pillaged. They enjoyed the fruits of tyranny without the least intermixture of uneasiness, because their low obscurity was

(a) The duke of Braganza had an immense estate in Portugal; and when he first revolted, the king of Spain was congratulated by his nobility, for the rich confiscation he was to derive from that event.