

mirably adapted to the condition of man, as guilty and depraved; in short, to prove that the works of God display His glory—that the inspiration and authority of Scripture must be acknowledged by all who understand the laws of evidence—that none are so prejudiced and credulous as the infidel—and that he is not worthy the name of a philosopher who refuses to admit the reasonableness of the “obedience of faith,” and the “excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Among the signs of the times may also be reckoned the *diversified operations of benevolence*. From the Reformation to the Revolution was a period of extraordinary excitement. Religion was then studied with unwonted ardour, and the errors and superstitions of the day were openly confronted with the disclosures of revelation. In that fierce struggle of opinions, none were suffered to be neutral or indifferent, but every man found it necessary to choose his party, and abide by his decision at all risks. The termination of the contest restored peace and outward prosperity, but was followed by an abatement of fervor. As if exhausted by its unusual efforts, the Church sank into a state of decrepitude and listlessness. Comparative inactivity in the cause of God was the result. Although the obligations of Christians to diffuse the blessings of the Gospel were not to any great extent denied, they were too generally neglected, or, at least, very partially recognized and acted upon. Individuals and churches were satisfied if they attended to the necessities of their immediate neighbourhoods; but the enlarged scale of benevolence adopted in more modern times, and the system of union and co-operation which has been so eminently blessed, were equally untried. But few public institutions existed, and even those were in the majority

of instances designed rather to relieve the temporal than the spiritual wants of men. Bible and tract societies were not then in being. No Sunday schools had been formed, nor any plans concerted for the universal education of the people. Missionary exertions were altogether unknown, save among the United Brethren, whose disinterested and self-denying labours cannot be too much admired, and in the cumbrous and somewhat indirect operations of the two chartered societies, “for promoting Christian Knowledge,” and “for propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts.” With these exceptions, an ominous silence had long and extensively pervaded the Church. It was not the healthy stillness of repose: it was a lethargy of the soul—a wintry torpor—a languid and dying life.

But that silence was at length broken. The preaching of Whitefield and Wesley constituted a new era in the history of religion in this country. The movement it occasioned, though perhaps tinged with enthusiasm at first, ultimately produced the happiest effects. New life was infused into the dull and inert mass. Christianity received a quickening impulse, and was taught to feel and put forth its strength. Influenced by the vivifying energies of the Spirit of grace, and animated by the truths and promises of the Gospel, Christians could not long remain inactive. On every hand was the cry heard, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” And those who purposed to do good soon learned to plan and to perform. Inquiry was set on foot; societies were established; and they have increased and multiplied with astonishing rapidity, and prospered in a manner far exceeding even the sanguine expectations of their projectors. What a change has been witnessed in the moral scenery of the world during