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THE SIGNS AND DUTIES OF THE TIMES.

BY AN ENGLISH MINISTER.

To the Editors of the *Colonial Protestant*.

GENTLEMEN,

Some years ago, I was requested to prepare an Address to a Religious Society, on a Jubilee occasion, the Society having been in existence fifty years. Perhaps a few extracts from that Address may be deemed in accordance with the objects for which the *Colonial Protestant* is published, and may be not unseasonable at the present juncture. If, after perusal, you think so, they are quite at your service.—Yours respectfully,

AN ENGLISH MINISTER.

April, 1848.

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THE *extensive diffusion of knowledge* is one of the most observable signs of the times. An *inextinguishable thirst for information* marks the present era. To the lower classes of the community the means of education have been most extensively furnished by public and private benevolence; and the opportunities thus afforded have been well improved. Meanwhile, a similar stimulus, though not perhaps equally powerful, has been felt by the middle and higher orders. In consequence, knowledge

is more equally distributed than at any former period of the world's history. It has ceased to be the portion of an insignificant minority, and is becoming the general property of the people. And there is no lack of good for the mind. Never has the art of printing been made so available to the general weal. Periodical publications, of which immense numbers are regularly issued—and larger works, multiplied beyond example, and embracing the entire range of things knowable—are provided for the public taste; and yet the demand increases with the supply. The direction which the human mind has lately taken in its thoughts and inquiries deserves also especial notice. While the few are still seen to linger in the enchanted scenes of classic ground, or to expend their time and energies in antiquarian research, the many have learned to prefer the useful to the curious. Men and things are better studied; the laws of nature are more minutely investigated; the powers and resources with which man is furnished by those laws have been largely developed. We have explored the inmost recesses of the creation, and brought