

anti-spiritual system, that christians of high attainments and sincere piety should be led to adopt it. The whole history of the system in the past—the absurdities connected with it in the first three centuries—the wickedness of the Anabaptists of Munster—the tragical end of the “Celestial Republic” of John of Leyden—the extravagances of the “Fifth Monarchy men” in the days of Cromwell, should be a warning to those who, though they may disclaim all such results, yet embrace a system which has so commonly in the past led to such ruinous consequences.

In connexion with the spiritual character of the christian Church, as exhibited in the movements and discussions of the present age, may be mentioned its diffusive or aggressive character. The present is the great missionary age. Its symbol is in the words of the seer, “I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation and tongue and people.”* There have been other ages in which there have been missionary operations, but none in which they have been carried on so extensively and so systematically. The present is the age in which the missionary enterprise is first regarded as *belonging essentially to the character of the Church*—when it has been shown to be her chief duty, and a principal end for which she has been instituted, to evangelize the nations. So that now any Church, that is not engaged in one way or another in extending the gospel, is regarded as neglecting an important part of her obligations. In connexion with these discussions, and particularly with the discussion of the Voluntary principle, the duty of contributing to the support and extension of ordinances, has received greater prominence than before, so that the present day is characterized by a liberality for religious objects, such as has never been exhibited in any former age. It was only at the close of the last century that the great modern missionary movement may be said to have commenced, and yet now there is scarcely a portion of the world that has not been refreshed with its influences. The missionaries of the Cross are to be found among the islands that gem the Southern Pacific, in the sultry air of Hindostan and the cinnamon groves of Ceylon, amid the ruins of Athens and the desolations of Jerusalem, in the scorched plains of Africa and the everlasting snows of Greenland, in the prairies of America and amid the streets and lanes of the crowded city, and everywhere the gospel is found the power of God unto salvation, until we begin to anticipate the era

When Christ shall have dominion
O'er river, sea and shore,
Far as the eagle's pinion
Or dove's light wing can soar.

But the progress of the Church is still onward. Its goal in this age is its starting point in the next. Its present attainments form but the stage from which it takes a higher ascent. “Forgetting those things that are behind she reaches forth unto those things that are before.” What then is to be her next step. It is always hazardous to attempt to predict the future, yet from the examination of causes now in operation we may be able to form some general idea of what may be the distinguishing feature of the next age, and we would express our belief, judging from the preparatory work going on, that the visible union of Christ's followers will be a distinguishing feature of the coming era. For this we see in the present day abundance of preparation—we see the subject discussed by the press and from the pulpit—we see the

* Rev. xiv. 6.