

CHRISTIAN MISSIONS.

It is our intention to devote a portion of each number of the *Harbinger* to the illustration of principles and the detail of facts connected with the propagation of the gospel,—an intention which, we doubt not, will be hailed with satisfaction by all our readers. In the history of modern Christian Missions, we have reached a point from which we can look backward, and in the retrospect, observe much that is distinctly indicative of the approbation and blessing of the Most High,—much that is fitted to inspire us with confidence as to His concurrence and cooperation with his people in this labour of love,—much that is calculated to admonish and instruct us as to the spirit in which and the means by which, this work may be most effectually carried on,—much to assure us that our most sanguine expectations fall far short of the actual amount of glory to God and of good to man, arising from the humble, faithful, persevering, and successful labours of those who are gone forth, and are yet to go, as the messengers of the Churches and the glory of Christ to heathen lands.

It is a subordinate, indeed, but yet substantial cause of thankfulness to God, that we are now exempted from the necessity of much of that argumentative discussion in which the originators of modern missionary effort were compelled to engage, and in which, of course, so much mental energy was necessarily expended. They were often put on their defence, as to the correctness of their representations of heathen intellect and morals; and many were the shafts of ridicule, and scorn, and contumelious invective with which they were assailed by such as loved to theorize on the dignity of human nature, and by partial and superficial views of unchristianized communities, to sustain the reasonings and fortify the conclusions of a false philosophy.

Those reasonings are now at an end. These conclusions have been effectually overthrown. None but the wilfully ignorant, or determinately infidel, would ever dream now of questioning the accuracy of the most appalling pictures that were ever drawn of the actual condition of the heathen. It would now be a work of supererogation to demonstrate that heathenism in all its forms—even the mildest and most mitigated,—is, in its nature, opposed to every just conception of the character and claims of God, and in its influence on man, degrading, demoralizing and destructive. It would argue a moral hardihood—a hopeless insusceptibility of conviction on any subject capable of demonstration or of proof, were any *now* to deny that the heathen stand in need of Christianity, or to assert that the zeal of the Church of Christ for their evangelization is misdirected or gratuitous. The least intelligent enemies of the gospel themselves, if retaining the slightest residue of ingenuity or candour, must confess that, apart altogether from the ultimate objects at which Christian philanthropy supremely

aims,—the temporal evils, the intellectual depression, the moral pollutions, the social disorders, the inhuman cruelties, arising out of sanctioned, supported and hitherto perpetuated by heathen superstition, justly at least the efforts that are made to propagate the enlightening and sanctifying doctrines of the Cross.

Nor are we only spared the toil and trouble of defending against the allegations of the unbeliever, those representations of the heathen world, on the truth of which any appeal to the benevolence of Christians must ultimately rest; but, what is still more gratifying, and still more demands our thankfulness to God, is the almost entire cessation of controversy in the Church itself as to the practicability, or even the positive duty of evangelizing the heathen world. The doctrines of Divine sovereignty and Christian accountability, are not now practically regarded as incompatible; and it would now be worse than gratuitous to demonstrate, that in attempting to evangelize the heathen, we are not infringing the prerogative of God, and are only yielding—alas! too reservedly yielding to the claims of Divine authority and of that unparalleled benevolence and condescension which constitute us first the recipients, and then the dispensers of the gospel. So far as relates to the great principle of obligation, all argument is now at an end. Much is yet to be done as to the application of the principle, but it is matter of just exultation that the principle itself is so generally, so almost universally conceded, and that the advocate of Christian Missions is now spared the painful and most irksome task of convincing Christians that they are—not only in name—but by appointment and qualification, the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the stewards of the manifold grace of God. There are other and still more substantial grounds for devout thankfulness in reference to the general subject of Christian Missions—these, however, we must leave till a future opportunity, and proceed meanwhile to survey, very rapidly and succinctly, the results of missionary labour in some particular section of the field, committed for cultivation to the Church of Christ. We begin with

BRITISH INDIA.

Next to the British American and Australian Colonies of Great Britain, of which we shall yet have occasion and opportunity to say much, no country more imperatively demands the benevolent attention of British Christians. Believing as we do, that the affairs of men are universally controlled and overruled by God for purposes and on principles ever worthy of himself, we might, in the absence of any explicit declaration of his will, have safely concluded that in conferring such an extensive territory on Great Britain, and subjecting to her authority and rule so many millions of our race, he intended something far beyond what secular ambition and sordid avarice can desire or enjoy.

Thirty years have nearly elapsed since the impolitic, unjust, and anti-christian restrictions placed on missionaries and missionary movements in our Indian possessions were removed. The elders of our