

THE HOME AND FOREIGN RECORD.

JULY, 1861.

PROGRESS OF THE MISSIONARY SPIRIT IN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES.

WE have been much interested recently in reading the first debate in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on the subject of Foreign Missions. This memorable debate took place in the spring of 1798, while the nations of Europe were in the throes of revolution, responsive to the influences which emanated from France. While civil institutions, hoary and venerable with age, were crumbling away and disappearing on every side, the Churches also felt the shock and in many cases awoke to a new and deeper sense of duty. The London Missionary Society had then just entered on its beneficent career, and its example and the tidings of the success attending its missions in the South Seas stirred others to enter upon the same glorious work.

The Church of Scotland was at that time bound in the grave-clothes of a godless moderation. The most influential of her ministers were easy-living, theatre-going men who had as much regard for true religion as Hume or Burns, and who could boast that they knew nothing of that "occult quality called *grace*." But there was a faithful minority who loved the truth and struggled nobly for its maintenance and diffusion. The "Evangelical party" was making itself felt even in the Assembly, and the struggle was beginning which culminated in the great disruption of 1843.

The debate to which we refer was occasioned by the introduction of several overtures on the subject of Missions to the Heathen. The Rev. Mr. Hamilton, of Glandsmuir, a thorough-going Moderate, began his address thus:—

"I should blush to rise in this venerable Assembly for the purpose of opposing so beneficent a design in its first aspect as the present, did not mature reflection convince me that its principles, (the cause of missions) are not really good, but merely specious. I cannot otherwise consider the enthusiasm on this subject than as the effect of sanguine and illusive views, the more dangerous because the object is plausible." He next proceeded to develop his theory of missions: "To spread the knowledge of the gospel among barbarous and heathen nations seems to me highly preposterous, as it anticipates, nay reverses, the order of nature. Men must be polished and refined in manners before they can be properly enlightened in religious truth. Philosophy and learning must, in the nature of things, take the precedence." Warming with his argument against the "enthusiasm" of the friends of missions, he insisted that the heathen could be in no such danger as to render such efforts necessary to save them—"that the gracious declaration of Scripture ought to liberate from groundless anxiety the minds of those who stated in such moving terms the condition of the heathen." Not content with this, the Moderate orator took still higher ground, and maintained that the heathen are a great deal better without the gospel than they would be with it: "when told that a man is saved not by good works, but by faith, the wild inhab-