

CLAIMS OF FOREIGN MISSIONS.

Before the close of the late session of the United Presbyterian Theological Hall, Edinburgh, Dr. Sommerville and Mr. McGill called the attention of the students very pointedly to the claims of Foreign Missions. Many of the observations made are equally applicable to our own students and young ministers:—

“There are many considerations that call us, not indeed to multiply the number of our missions, but to strengthen and expand those we have undertaken. The certain alternative in regard to them is progress or decline, and our progress at home depends not a little on our advance abroad. In these days, much more than in those of our fathers, the Lord's prayer will become a form in the lips of men who have not the Lord's work in their hands. That is a prayer for missionary progress; and when God answers it, He does so on the condition that the success He grants be made the vantage ground on which we should anew prepare for a more strenuous aggression on the kingdom of darkness.

These observations connect themselves impressively with the dearth of men with which we seemed lately to be threatened. For is it not true, Gentlemen! that the Christian public, and the world itself, will justly judge a Church much more severely now than it would half a century ago, if it cannot find a supply of missionaries? The Church is now more alive to its relation to the heathen. Its foreign treasury is now more full. The day has been when vast populations were open only to the missionaries of Mammon, whom it was never difficult to obtain, but shut against the missionaries of the Cross; but now the wall of China is levelled, and all the gates of India are open; and a missionary has cut his way from the Cape to the Zambesi, and found a path across all Africa from east to west, and even if he should fail to reach the Nile, as alas! he may, his African grave will tell us that, to heroic Christian souls, the darkest recesses of the world are open, and wait for the missionary's coming. Is there any more affecting incident in missionary history than this, that a heathen man has been known to come hundreds of miles from an uncivilised land to a missionary station in quest of a missionary, and has been sent back to his desolate home weeping that his journey was in vain? Such a man is a representative man, searching for Him who is the ‘Desire of all nations;’ and his demand and his tears should touch our hearts as the cry of the man of Macedonia touched the heart of Paul. Surely these are not

the times when the Church should experience a want of men to go up and possess the land, and to reap the plenteous harvest; and I cannot cast away the hope that our want of agents will be supplied, if we ask them from the Lord of the harvest. It is true, at this distance of time from the awakening of the missionary spirit in the general Church seventy years ago, there may exist tendencies to reaction and decay. It has indeed been observed, that in almost all denominations the number of candidates for the sacred office has declined. In this respect, I believe, a happy reaction is beginning, or rather has begun; and this reaction, it is certain, will not be impeded by the prospect of an increased number of Free Churches in this United Kingdom. I rejoice to find that the number of students in this seminary is again on the increase, and that you count one hundred and forty-one. Rejoice in your rising numbers! Never were thoroughly furnished ministers more needed at home and abroad. Be not afraid that you will not find spheres. Some years ago a certain phrase was sometimes heard, which was never known in apostolic times,—I mean ‘unoccupied preachers.’ Unoccupied preachers! why unoccupied? we would ask such preachers. There is not room for such as you in this busy and crowded world. You are a class unheard of in the Acts of the Apostles; and you have no place under the broad canopy of that great commission: ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.’

Intending fellow-labourers in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, it is not easy to tell how much, under God, the cause of Christian missions depends on you. When I think of your lengthened period of thorough training, when I think of your advantages, your numbers, your probable opportunities in that unknown and solemn future, I conclude, while all things are of God, who hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation, that yet infinite results, countless in number, connect themselves with your choice of a sphere of action; and I ask a question which indeed no man can answer, but which we all would do well to ponder: What may 140 young men, such as I address, not do for the cause of missions? Why should not some future biographer embalm, for the guidance and the joy of the Church, the life of some Brainerd, or Henry Martyn, or John Williams, that may be now seated in these benches before me? The resurrection of such men,—that is, the repetition of their lives in better days than the present,—would seem to me to realize much of what is meant in the millennial resurrection.

And now, dear brethren we close our