

cess are very much dependent upon the amount of interest and zeal with which it is prosecuted. How the numerous absentees from our Church courts, not prevented from attending by some Providential hindrance, can honour [their responsibilities and satisfy their consciences with reference to the performance of this work is a secret we cannot divine. Clearly they should have none of the honour of office if they will do none of the work belonging to it; they should not have a word to say against the Church even when she takes a false step, seeing they treacherously withhold their presence and their vote by which the error might have been avoided or modified; and yet it is, generally speaking, the absentees who are the first to complain of the Church's procedure. But besides all this, by the absence of any considerable number of members, for *that* and not a small non-attendance is really the extent of it, the capacity of the Church is hampered and circumscribed, her moral strength in giving decisions is impaired, her influence throughout the several congregations under her jurisdiction is weakened.

The forms in which this flagrant evil presents itself to our minds are indeed so numerous that we can scarcely enumerate them. It is exceedingly discouraging to those Ministers and Elders who are willing to spend and be spent in the Church's service. It awakens damaging doubts and suspicions in the minds of those who are instrumental in forming and carrying measures, as to the favour and support their measures will receive. It must be extremely unsatisfactory to those who have causes before the courts to find them undertaken, managed and decided by a fraction of the membership. Suppose, for example, that a judgment is required to be given upon a report of one of our important Schemes, whether affecting the sustentation of the Church or her missionary usefulness, and the judgment is proposed and passed in a thin house, as unfortunately is not unlikely. If unanimous, so far well; but the managers of that Scheme lack the assurance of the moral countenance and backing, if we must not say committal, of a large number of Ministers and Elders on whose advocacy in their respective congregations and sections of the country the success of the scheme and the encouragement of its conductors materially depend. If a division takes place and the result shows even a considerable majority affirming a judgment which is to direct the managers throughout the year, then of course they have in this case still less comfort and confidence in their labours. Again, suppose an inferior court to be in difficulty as to the most proper course to pursue in certain circumstances, and the members refer the matter to the supreme judicatory for advice; or suppose an individual Minister or Elder to appeal from a judgment by which he considers himself aggrieved; whatever the

ultimate decision may be, whether for or against, clearly it will be valued more or less according to the composition of the court which gives it. The advice of a large body inspires confidence and provides a strong defence. The sentence of a body greatly reduced in numbers, compared with what it should be, may occasion misgivings of a very pernicious description. Even when a decision is unfavourable, it is much more satisfactory to have it from the Church at large than from a section of the Church.

Looking more particularly to the attendance at meetings of our Supreme Court, it cannot be expected that the laws enacted will stand long without the concurrence and sanction of the Church at large; better have no laws at all than such as by the remissness of a majority of the law-makers may be disrespected and broken. It cannot but happen that decisions will be past and recorded inconsistent with one another, since even the present fractional attendance varies in its constituency from year to year. How many excellent schemes appear as dead letters on our minutes? How many excellent laws have fallen into desuetude? How many excellent resolutions have been utterly fruitless? not altogether, but to a great extent, because they have not had the presence and the power of numbers from the beginning to enforce them. To do anything well, wisely and thoroughly as a Church, we desiderate more and more the regular, faithful and conscientious attendance of all members of our Ecclesiastical courts. Every decision of the Supreme Court should as much as possible be an expression of the mind of the Church, not of a portion of it. It is by such an expression that consistency will be best maintained, that the Church's work will be most faithfully and successfully performed, and that the confidence of our people in the Church's procedure will be commanded and increased. Our position demands this much; the genius of our Presbyterian system demands it; the dearest interests of the Redeemer's kingdom demand it; and the vows solemnly imposed upon Ministers and Elders demand it, for how else can they with truth and conscientiousness fulfil their promise to give submission to the discipline and government of the Church, and "never endeavour directly or indirectly the prejudice or subversion of the same,—they who are appointed for the very purpose of exercising discipline and maintaining government!"

We know of no Minister or Elder who throughout a long period of years has given so noble an example of faithful and devoted attendance upon Church Courts as Dr. Hill of Glasgow University, and very weighty therefore is the counsel which he gave to the junior members of the Presbytery of Glasgow a few weeks ago when, on the occasion of a warm debate arising out of recent decisions in the

General Assembly, decisions which by many are considered injudicious and hurtful, he expressed himself to the following effect:—

"He thought very important lessons might be learned from what had taken place; and as a very old man now, whose career must be drawing to an end, he would avail himself of this opportunity to give some advice to his brethren in the Church, for, if the Church would only attend to the power which it had to exert, he did not think a case like that of Fortingall could occur again. The case of Fortingall was decided by a very small house, there being present not more than one-third of the members, while the number voting in the majority was only 70. Had only 10 more been present, the decision, he was satisfied, would have been given the other way; and, had the whole of the members been present, he believed, from all that he had learned, that a decision the opposite way would have been carried by an overwhelming majority. Now it was very painful to think that so many members and elders failed to appear and give an opinion on this very extraordinary case, and they were very much to blame for it. He would, therefore, impress upon his younger brethren to learn the responsibility attaching to them when they went as Commissioners to the General Assembly."

The latter part of this extract suggests the remark that the mere fact of having one's name on the roll of members present is a poor way of discharging the duty we are so anxious to see well performed. Not only should members make their appearance, but also beforehand shape their arrangements so that they can attend every diet of the session. Yet how much time is lost and how much trouble occasioned by irregular and fitful attendance at the several diets! It may be easy to push matters through a thin house, but it is painfully unsatisfactory.

We are not writing at random. We have given this subject much consideration. If we know our own hearts, we are actuated by no other wish, next to that which prompts us to look to the glory of God, but the fervent wish that our beloved Zion may prosper in all her schemes and interests. We appeal to the last three meetings of the Supreme Court, at each of which a great deal of business was transacted, for proof that our observations are not uncalled-for, and, though we might draw illustrations of what has been already advanced from the body of the minutes, we confine our attention to a comparison of the membership and the attendance in each of those years. Had the full number of representative Elders been elected, there should have been in 1856 at least 162 members of Synod; actually there were 147; of these only 60 or 13 less than the half were present. In 1857 there should have been at least 176; actually there were 151, of whom 80 or 5 more than the half were present. In 1858 there should have been at least 176; actually there were 160, of whom 65 or 15 less than the half were present. We hope there will be a large increase in the attendance this year.