

THE PRESBYTERIAN.

OCTOBER, 1867.



ONE of the first steps taken by our reforming forefathers in Scotland was the originating of a plan of general education for the whole people left in ignorance by the Romish Church, which was displaced by the entrance of a purer light. In the first Book of Policy, published in 1560, it was laid down that "every several Kirk, should have one schoolmaster appointed" and in the second Book of Policy or Discipline in 1578, the matter was again urged. Many schools were erected in consequence, but it was not till 1616 that an act was passed by the Privy Council directing that a school should be established in every parish, with a schoolmaster to be paid by the parishioners. This act was ratified by the Scotch Parliament in 1633. In 1646 provision was made for the maintenance of schoolmasters, an act rescinded at the Restoration, but embodied after the Revolution in the act of 1696, the proper Parochial School Act, by which heritors were bound to establish a school and provide for a schoolmaster where that had not been already done. In 1803 a supplementary act was passed for dividing large and straggling parishes, and for appointing two or more schoolmasters. Besides these parochial schools there were schools of the Education Committee and of the Society for propagating Christian Knowledge, connected with the Church of Scotland, and burgh, private and denominational schools, many of the private schools being partly endowed, and under the direct supervision of the Presbytery within whose bounds they were situated.

Up to the time of the secession in 1843 no complaint was made of any hardship being experienced by any class, from the fact of the schools being largely under the supervision of the Church of Scotland. An occasional murmur from some of the advo-

cates of the severance of secular from religious teaching was sometimes met with, but so little sympathy did their opinions meet with from the people of Scotland, that, practically, it might be said through unanimity existed. After that period, however, the more violent of the seceders, and who it may be said in passing had been most violent in support of the claims of the church of Scotland before they withdrew from communion with her, insisted that the control and oversight of these schools should be taken out of the hands of Presbyteries and the grossest exaggerations were made use of to shew the necessity for this step being taken. These misstatements have not been without their effect, and in spite of the undoubted proofs of the general diffusion of a sound and useful education throughout Scotland, figures, based on the most erroneous data, have been employed to prove that the credit hitherto claimed by the Scotch has been founded upon illusion. One method employed, is to assume the age at which children should be at school, as being from five to fifteen—ten years, the schools meant being the parish and elementary schools. The slightest reflection will show the fallacy of this calculation, as in these schools, the attendance in which is mainly composed of those whose parents are of the least wealthy part of the population, it is evidently entirely out of the question that pupils can remain for ten years, those who intend to pursue their studies farther being removed to more advanced schools, and the children of the more wealthy are many of them sent to boarding schools and institutions not included in the returns of the schools now under review. Taking this into consideration, then, it is satisfactory to find by the Report of the "Commissioners appointed to inquire into the schools in Scotland" a synopsis of which is given in the North British Review for June last, that there is 1 in every 6.5 of the whole population on the roll of some school and 1 in 7.9