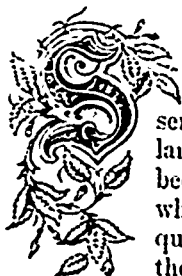


THE PRESBYTERIAN.

JULY, 1866.



SEVERAL very important discussions have taken place in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Much attention has been drawn to those especially which were raised on the question, as to the repeal of the Declaratory Act on Innovations of 1865, and on the recent strictures on the Confession of Faith, by Principal Tulloch and others. In the course of the debate on the former of these questions, the powers of Kirk Session were referred to, Dr. Pirie holding that their functions were simply executory, with no power to originate any measure, and that, in fact, the Members of Session could scarcely be said to constitute a Church Court at all, being merely assistants to the Minister. Dr. Pirie would ignore the existence of Kirk Sessions altogether, and maintains that what we have hitherto held as references to Kirk Sessions in the Book of Discipline, really refer to Presbyteries. He says :

“ Passing on to consider what was the law upon the subject, he was rather inclined to agree with Dr. Lee, that a Presbyterian Church was not necessarily a Church with Presbyteries. The Church previously was governed sometimes by Superintendents, sometimes by Ministers, sometimes by Visitors, and sometimes by all three together, and at that time, there was no such Court in existence as a Kirk-Session. Two or three elders of the parish met, not as a Court, but as assistants to the Ministers—and sometimes as it would seem as Censors of them—but of themselves they had no authority. “ In the tenth section of the seventh chapter of the Second Book of Discipline, are the words ‘ the first kind and sort of Assemblies, although they be within particular Congregations, yet they exercise the power, authority and jurisdiction of the Kirk with mutual consent, and therefore, bear sometimes the name of the Kirk.’ He called these Presbyteries by the name of the Kirk.”

Before proceeding farther in our quotations, it may be as well to notice the last

sentence quoted, which is the speaker's own. He quietly adopts the title of *Presbyteries* to the Courts spoken of, not only without authority from the law he has just quoted, but, as it humbly appears to us, in direct contradiction to it, a contradiction all the stronger from his next quotation :

“ He asked the Assembly to mark what followed :—‘ When we speak of the elders of the particular Congregations, we mean not that every particular parish Kirk can, or may have their ain particular elderships, especially to landward, but we think three or four, mae or fewer particular Kirks may have ane common eldership to them all, to judge their ecclesiastical causes.’ He maintained that was not a Kirk-Session, but a Presbytery.”

This may be ingenious, but it is certainly very far from being convincing. What power is there in words if the Church Court described in one of the quotations as “ the first kind and sort of Assemblies ” be not Kirk-Sessions? For Dr. Pirie to insist that because two or more Kirk-Sessions are allowed to unite for particular purposes, therefore they are no Kirk-Sessions at all, is simply to shut his eyes to the facts concerning the actions and doings of Kirk-Sessions which are known to every Scotchman who has come to mature years. Has the Doctor forgotten that before the enactment of the Poor Law now in operation in Scotland, there was not a large town in the country which had not its united Kirk-Sessions, for the purpose of attending to the claims of the parochial poor, a course adopted for the purpose of guarding against imposition; and yet it could scarcely be maintained, that the united Kirk-Session had by this step changed from a lower into a higher Church Court. And what was done in this case for the management of the poor, that is the junction of two or more parishes, appears to have been authorized in the Book of Discipline, to be done by them for the purpose of judging ecclesiastical causes, particularly in landward parishes