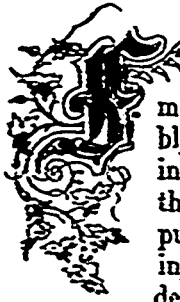


# THE PRESBYTERIAN.

SEPTEMBER, 1865.



FOR the first time in many years, the late meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in Edinburgh, has commanded the undivided attention of the public, and has left the meetings of the other large religious denominations, which were held

about the same time, completely in the shade. Not only were the subjects discussed of absorbing interest, but the power brought to bear upon them, the eloquence of the speakers, and the force of the arguments—all were of the highest order, and very creditable to the Established Church. And the interest in the debates was not confined to Scotland, for they were regularly reported for and published in that great public index, the *London Times*, a compliment not often paid to our church courts. The proposed changes in the public services of the Church, the reading of a liturgy, set forms of prayer, the introduction of organs, the postures of the worshippers, and other matters, were brought prominently forward, and in connection with these, came up a matter of very great importance to the Church, viz., the power of kirk sessions to deal with such changes, by introduction and continuance, without authority other than their own will, and without interference of Presbyteries, so long as they keep within the limits of the law.

It is on this subject that we wish to say a few words. The powers exercised by the kirk sessions are considerable in themselves and of great importance to the Church. When a minister has a session of good elders—active intelligent men, of known piety, such as can always be found, fortunately, in every congregation, he is always safe in acting on their advice. It is a bad sign of a congregation, when it has no session, this is unfortunately the case with no less than one hundred and nine

congregations in the Parent Church, and it is almost equally unfortunate when the members of sessions are persons of no weight or influence in the congregation, as is very often the case in this country.

Kirk sessions are, of course, not immaculate. They have faults and failings as others have. We do not admire, for instance, the system which long prevailed, but is now nearly exploded, we trust, of making delinquents do penance on a "cuttie stool." And, it may be that, in many parishes, elders have an over keen scent after evil doers, and provoke criticism by too narrowly watching for the peccadilloes of their neighbourhood—making themselves the austere censors of the morals of the country side. But notwithstanding all that can be advanced against them, every one must admit that their rule has been, on the whole, excellent.

Some ministers seem to set their faces against sessions altogether, and never have meetings of these courts unless they cannot help it. Such men look upon sessions much in the same light as corrupt politicians look on parliaments. They would rather do without them. They prefer the "one man power" system, and like to rule their congregations as popish priests do their flocks. We do not need to tell our readers that such ministers are the least successful labourers in our Church, just as our most successful ministers are those who have a hearty desire to act with their sessions, and who take care to have, as elders, the right sort of men. The Rev. Norman M'Leod, D.D., of the Barony parish in Glasgow, gave, in the course of the debate on Innovations, an account of his own court of session and deacons, and it was most refreshing to read of the harmonious working of these courts in, what we look upon, as a model congregation in the Parent Church. It is contended, and we think correctly, that kirk sessions have ample powers to bring the service of the Church more into harmony with the age we