

It is interesting to note the historical developement of our present Church form. We may derive wisdom from such an investigation, and be led to see that the Providence of God more than the forethought or devices of man has to do with moulding the visible institutions of the Church. It will, too, teach us the necessity of a large and liberal spirit in our Church legislation, which, while firmly holding by the great leading principles of God's Word, will not advance the orderly and external arrangements of the Church into the place of foundations or pillars.

It is an error for any one to suppose that our present system or "police" was devised by some master mind, complete in all its parts at once. We, it is true, have been so long familiar with it, that it is difficult for us to imagine that it did not always exist, or that it did not spring full fledged at the Reformation, as the Phoenix of primitive practice, from the ashes of the Apostolical Church. To the government of the Church by Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General (delegated) Assemblies, we have pledged our faith and declared it to be in perfect accordance with the Scriptures—and so it is. We can scarcely conceive of a church state to be complete, or to have attained its full bloom in which any of the links in this ecclesiastical chain are wanting. This feeling is natural to our habits. We have grown up and been educated under its influence; but if we look into the matter, we shall find that there are many modifications of this system equally suitable for the church, and that historically, our church has assumed the shape in which we find it, in some measure from accidental causes.

It appears from undoubted Records that the first National or General Assembly which convened at Edinburgh, on December 26th, 1560, "wherein there were not above twelve ministers, but sundrie Ruleing Elders commissioners to the number of thirty" was, as its name imports, a Synod of the whole governors of the Church. For several years it continued to possess this character; nor does there appear to have been either Presbyteries or Provincial Synods intermediate between it and the Kirk Sessions. Not until the *Fifth Assembly*, in 1562, do we find that Provincial Synods were constituted with judicial and disciplinary jurisdiction; and these Courts were besides evidently formed after the model and in the place of the Episcopal Diocesan Councils which formerly existed in the Church of Rome. This is shown by the form of the Record which says: "Ordnained that Superintendents indict their Synodal Convention "twice in the year, viz., in the months of April and October, on such days as "they shall think good, to consult upon the common affairs of the dioceie." Such is the Act by which and the circumstances in which the present Provincial Synods were called into the "police" of the Church of Scotland, and from which they derive their character of general Conventions. The next Assembly established the order of appeal in cases where parties conceived themselves to be wronged by a Kirk Session, to the Superintendent and the Synodal Convention, "from which again it shall be lawful to appeal to the General Assembly "immediately following." An "Act" of Assembly of the next year (1563) also reveals to us the way, in which this Supreme Court was at this time constituted. It runs thus:—"It was ordained that every Superintendent within "his own jurisdiction should cause warn the shires, towns and parish Kirks to "send their commissioner to the Assembly in time coming; and that the Superintendents attend the assembly the first day under a penalty of 40s. to the "poor." Such, too, was the primitive and brotherly mode in which business was conducted in these Councils of the Church, that not until the *seventh Assembly* was it "agreed that a Moderator should be appointed for avoiding confusion in reasoning." The meeting of the ministers in Provincial and General Assembly was, it would appear, first acknowledged and allowed by the estates.