

ASSEMBLIES, SYNODS AND PRESBYTERIES.

There is something truly ecclesiastical in these designations of the Councils of the Seniors and Ministers of our Church. These are old names, having come to us from remote antiquity, and there is a fine flavour of wisdom, gravity and integrity about them. They conjure up ideas of the Fathers in the ancient garb of *Clerks*, learned in all the art of Greek, Roman and Hebrew sages, giants in the scholastic theology of the middle ages, masters of the inspired Word of God; having no fear of man before their eyes, but greatly fearing God and realising by a most simple faith His presence in the World and in the Church. Such are our conceptions of the Synods of Apostolical and of Reformation times; and the names by which they are known are hallowed to us as Symbols of the great and shadowy past. These terms have their own literal and classical significations, and were once common names for all sorts of convocations, but with us they are become quite technical, and the Church claims them as her own. They belong almost exclusively to the terminology of Presbyterianism. A Congregationalist speaks of his Church meeting, an Episcopalian of his Bishop, but a Presbyterian of the famous Assemblies of his Church. These, in his mind, have, for the most part, been the bulwarks as well as the nurseries of liberty. To a Presbyterian, the idea of priestly tyranny or corruption is never associated with the Councils of his Church. He knows that they have ever been dreaded by Tyrants, and that they have ever asserted the claims of private judgment in opposition to the statutes of parliament and the decrees of Kings and Prelates.

In Scotland, the General Assembly is a representative body, delegated by the several Presbyteries of the Church in the proportion of one minister to every four or six of their congregations with a less number of elders. The Synod is a convention, *en masse*, of the ministers, with their elders of a certain number of contiguous Presbyteries. The Presbytery, again, is a meeting of the ministers with an equal number of elders within a given district. This description applies also to the Church Courts of the Presbyterian Churches of Ireland and of the United States. The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the Church in England, and several of the smaller Presbyterian communities, have, however, contented themselves with an undelegated Synod—a general convocation of all the ministers with a representative elder from each Session—as their Supreme Court. This too is the practice of our own Church, and while we are comparatively few in number, it is the best that can be adopted.

Our Reformers, at the head of whom stands John Knox, were evidently desirous to model the National Church of Scotland after the form of the Protestant Church of France. The government of this church, even at an early period, was disposed entirely in accordance with the representative system. It was composed of Assemblies, one subordinate to the other, all constituted by way of election and delegation; the Consistories or Sessions, under the jurisdiction of the Conferences or Presbyteries; the Conferences under that of the Provincial Synods, and the Provincial Synods under that of the National Synod. The Consistories were composed of pastors and elders elected by the people; the Conferences were formed of deputies nominated by the Consistories; the Provincial Synods of deputies nominated by the Conferences, and the National Synod of Representatives designated by the Provincial Synods. The Consistories met every week; the Conferences every three months; the Provincial Synods every year, and the National Synod every three years. Such was the thoroughly representative form of the Church of the Huguenots. A similar constitution to this was aimed at in Scotland, and was, in the course of events and after many struggles, accomplished with some important modifications.