

BOOK III.

DISCIPLINE.

CHAPTER I.—NATURE AND OBJECT.

1. Discipline is the exercise of that spiritual authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed in His Church. Its objects are the rebuke of offences, the removal of scandals, the vindication of the Divine honour, the promotion of the purity and edification of the Church, and the spiritual good of the members.

2. An offence, the object of discipline, is anything in the principles or practice of a member of the Church which is contrary to the word of God, the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of the Westminster Assembly. Hence, nothing is to be regarded as just cause of discipline which cannot be shown to be condemned by Scripture or by the established regulations and practice of the Church, founded on Scripture; or unless involving those evils which discipline is intended to prevent.

3. Offences may be personal or general, private or public. *Personal offences* are violations of the Divine law, considered in the special relation of injury or wrong done to individuals; *general offences* are heresies or immoralities having no such relation, or as considered apart from it. *Private offences* are those which are known to only one or a few persons; *public offences* are those which are notorious.

CHAPTER II.

Of the parties in cases of process.

1. Process against an offender shall not be commenced unless some person undertakes to make out the charge; or unless a *fama clamosa* is so loudly proclaiming the scandal that a Church Court finds it necessary, for the honour of religion, to investigate the matter.

2. In the case of personal offences, the injured party cannot become a prosecutor without having previously tried the means of reconciliation and of reclaiming the offender, required by Christ, Matt. xviii, 15, 16; nor can those to whom private offences are known become accusers, without having previously used private means to remove the scandal.

3. In the case of general offences a Church court may commence process either at the instance of an individual or individuals who appear as accusers, and undertake to substantiate the charge, or at their own instance on the existence of a *fama*. In the latter case the previous steps required in case of personal offences are not obligatory; yet, with the view of reclaiming an offender by tender treatment, a judicatory should use private means by a Committee or a friendly conference to bring him to a proper sense of his guilt, before commencing process.