

# THE PRESBYTERIAN.

APRIL, 1867.

The lamented death of Mr. Greenshields having taken place so near the day of publication, we feel that any formal notice of his life and services would be most imperfect if written so hurriedly as it would necessarily be if prepared for publication in the present issue. Next month we trust to have a biographical notice prepared.



**M**OST important subject has been brought before the readers of the Presbyterian in a letter published in last number. It is one of the utmost interest to all members of the Church, and to all her well wishers, and deserves the most serious consideration that can be given to it. The remedy to be applied must be sought for, and we trust suggestions will be made by those whose attention our remarks may call to the subject. The falling off and decay in congregations is a most difficult question to deal with, but it is one which must force itself upon our Church Courts. The evils referred to are not always to be laid at the door of the clergyman, nor must they always be attributed to the people. Cases have occurred in some of which the one and in others the other was blameable. In every case it is the duty of the Presbytery to enquire into the matter, ascertain the grievances complained of, make a strict and searching, although friendly investigation, find out how the alienation has arisen, and what grounds of complaint exist. By so doing, by mediating between the parties, and by kindly offices before the coldness or misunderstanding has acquired strength and bitterness, those unfortunate divisions in congregations which have done so much harm in every Church would in almost all cases be avoided.

But are the Presbyteries in a position to do this work? Have they retained the

necessary powers for dealing with, counseling, or it may be rebuking both ministers and congregations, should such a step become their duty? Theoretically the powers of Presbyteries are what they have always been. Are they so practically? Is it not the fact that members of Presbytery not only set at nought the rules of Presbytery, but also neglect, not through ignorance but designedly, the injunctions of Synod? These questions are not mere rhetorical flourishes, they are sad and melancholy truths which cannot be denied, but which are evident to every man who has watched the course of events. Presbyterian in name, many are falling into the worst evils of independency, without obtaining any of what are considered to be its benefits. Presbyteries meet at stated times or by special call, go through the business absolutely necessary to be done, and separate with no thought of devising measures for the general good, or holding friendly consultations as to the state of their respective charges, or in any way *interfering*, as it would no doubt be called, with one another. Nor are systematic Presbyterian visitations thought of. A great deal is said about this or that posture as not being new, section and clause for it produced from the Directory, and authority quoted for reading prayers, and having informal liturgies, whatever that may mean, and for wearing purple cloaks and frippery of that sort in the pulpit, a place in which the *man* with his outward trappings and parti-coloured hoods should be put out of sight and only God's messenger suffered to appear. But in Canada we need sorely to go back to the old laws and study in them those which command that Presbyteries shall take spiritual oversight of the charges within their bounds, not to tyrannize over them, but to watch and tend them, to see that the flock are cared for and nourished, to see that the pastor is not starving amidst the abundance around him.