

THE MONTHLY RECORD



OF THE

Church of Scotland in Nova Scotia and the adjoining Provinces.

"IF I FORGET THEE, O JERUSALEM! LET MY RIGHT HAND FORGET HER CUNNING."—PSALM 137, v. 5.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

A short account of this reverend court, the supreme judicatory of our Church, may not be uninteresting to most of our readers. Its powers are something like those of the House of Lords—at once legislative and judicial. It legislates absolutely in all matters purely spiritual. It possesses absolute power to order the clergy in all ecclesiastical matters; and has the power to inflict every degree of punishment upon clergymen, from censure or temporary suspension from duty, up to deposition from the office of the holy ministry, and deprivation of their benefices. Also in any case where a people of a parish bring forward objections to the minister presented by the patron, the General Assembly decides in the last instance whether the objections have been supported by sufficient evidence, and whether they are such as ought to prevent the induction of the presence to the living.

The General Assembly consists of about three hundred and sixty members, of whom there are more than two hundred clergymen. It is a representative body, made up of lay and clerical delegates from the Presbyteries, universities and royal burghs. The delegates from each Presbytery are elected annually, one minister being sent for every five parishes, and one lay elder for every two ministers.—In Presbyteries where the clergy like attending the Assembly, each minister has the opportunity of being a member of it only once in five years; but the same lay members, who are generally noblemen or gentlemen of good position, are sent every year. The representatives of the universities and burghs are also, for the most part, the same year after year. The Queen is represented in the Assembly by a High Commissioner, almost always a Scotch nobleman.—The day before the meeting of the General Assembly, he takes up his quarters at Holywood, where he maintains some faint echo of

its old royal times. It is a curious position that the Commissioner holds in the meetings of the Assembly. Representing his royal mistress, he is present to signify the protection and countenance of the state afforded to the Church, which, however it may be misrepresented by some people, acknowledges no temporal head. He is present but not in any way assisting in the proceedings; observing not interfering. The day of meeting is ushered in with a great ringing of bells, and his Grace the Lord High Commissioner holds his first levee, which is very numerous attended. The levee being over, the Commissioner goes in state to attend divine service in the high Church of Edinburgh. The procession is really an imposing one, the route taken being varied yearly by year. Arrived at the High Church, his Grace is received in great state, and is conducted to a throne erected under a massive canopy, in the front of the gallery facing the pulpit. The front pews are occupied by the magistratos and judges, and by some of the clerical officials of the Assembly. The service on this occasion is always conducted by the Moderator of the previous Assembly. When this is concluded there is a great rush to the Assembly Hall, which is within three hundred yards; and every corner of it is speedily thronged. Its first aspect is extremely imposing. It is a gothic building, with a very handsome groined roof. All the benches are of massive oak, and have crimson cushions. The place allotted to the altar in England is occupied by a dais, elevated about six feet above the floor of the house, and enclosed by a massive railing of oak. In the centre of this platform stands the throne, surmounted by a canopy of richly carved oak. In this throne sits the Commissioner, his purse bearer on his right, and his chaplain on his left, and surrounded not only by pages, yeomen and heralds, but by an array of the beauty, rank, and fashion of the neighborhood. Immediately in front of the throne gallery, on a slightly raised platform stands the chair of the Moderator, who sits with his back towards the Commissioner.

He always wears a court-dress under full canonicals. A large table is placed before the Moderator's chair, at which sit the clerks of the Church, two clergymen in canonicals, the Procurator of the Church in gown and wig, the law agent or solicitor of the Church, in a gown, and also a few of the "leading men" of the Assembly. Among the clerical members are ministers of all ages, from the venerable patriarch with his white hair thinned by many years of care and toil, to the stripling ordained six months since. It is an affecting sight to look at so many of these men whose faithful labors in their simple spheres have mainly tended under the blessing of God, to keep Scotland in its present position as a moral and religious country.

The Assembly being met, the Moderator rises in his place, and begins its proceedings with prayer. He then addresses the Assembly, thanks the members for their kindness during his term of office, and proposes some one for his successor in the chair. The ex-moderators at a meeting for the purpose, have selected the individual proposed, and the Assembly almost invariably agree unanimously in their recommendation.—Having been elected, the new moderator, (who must be a Doctor of Divinity) is introduced by the officials of the court, arrayed in full court dress and canonicals. He takes the chair, and offers a short prayer for Divine guidance in the deliberations upon which the house is to enter. Then, having first asked the permission of the Assembly, he turns to the Commissioner, and expresses the satisfaction of the court at his presence, the affection of the Church to the throne, &c. The Commissioner then briefly addresses the Assembly expressing the attachment of the monarch to the Church of Scotland, &c. All the members of the Assembly stand during the Commissioner's address, and likewise while a letter from the sovereign is read, expressive of confidence in the Assembly's wisdom, and dismissing it to its business with a prayer for the divine blessing.