

Selections.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NATIONAL CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

We make the following extracts from an interesting article in a recent number of *Frazier's Magazine*, entitled "Edinburgh during the General Assembly."

DELEGATES TO THE ASSEMBLY.

"The General Assembly consists of about three hundred and sixty members, of whom rather more than two hundred are clergymen. It is a representative body, made up of lay and clerical delegates from each presbytery, and of delegates from the 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 ministers like attending the Assembly, each minister has thus the opportunity of being a member of it only once in five years; but the same lay elders, 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. We have heard of one excellent and venerable elder who has been a member of every Assembly for the last fifty-eight years.

THE QUEEN REPRESENTED BY A COMMISSIONER.

"The Queen of England is represented in the meetings of the Assembly by a High Commissioner, almost always a Scotch nobleman. He is addressed as "Your Grace" during his fortnight of vice-royalty; the national anthem is played wherever he goes, and the streets are pervaded by his footmen in royal liveries. The day before that appointed for the meeting of the General Assembly, he takes up his quarters at Holyrood, where he maintains some faint echoes of its old royal times. He is allowed £2,000 to defray the expenses of his position, but it is well known that several Commissioners who did things in true royal style have spent some thousand pounds additional during their few days of office. Herald pursuivants, beef-eaters, pages and attendants without number, throng the courts of Holyrood and the precincts of the Assembly Hall, and furnish a cheap and highly-appreciated exhibition to the ragged urchins of the Conongate. It is a curious position that the Commissioner holds in the Assembly. Representing his royal mistress, he is present to signify the protection and countenance of the State afforded to the church, but he is permitted to take no part in the deliberations of a church which acknowledges no temporal head. He is present, but not in any way assisting in the proceedings; observing, but not interfering. It is understood that under certain circumstances he might interfere, but it would be very difficult to define these circumstances. Once in the stormy days before the secession of 1843, the Commissioner was appealed to, but he took care to make a general reply, which signified nothing whatever.

THE COMMISSIONER'S FIRST LEVEE.

"Let us suppose that the day appointed for the meeting of the Assembly has come at last. It is ushered in with a great ringing of bells, and his Grace the Lord High Commissioner—we give him all his honors—holds his first levee. By ten o'clock in the morning great crowds are thronging the usually quiet precincts of Holyrood. Going with the crowd, we are carried up stairs to the picture-gallery, a long and narrow chamber, of antique aspect, hung round with faded portraits. The levee is very numerously attended. Members of Assembly, magistrates, judges and barristers, military men—in short, every person of the least standing in Edinburgh and its neighbourhood—all go to pay their devoirs to the representative of royalty.

"On entering the picture gallery we perceived the High Commissioner, a tall, bald old man, arrayed in uniform, attended by his chaplain and purse bearer, in court-dresses, and by a couple of pages, boys of twelve or thirteen, in red coats, white breeches, cocked hats, and swords. The demand for hair powder on the part of all the officials at Holyrood must certainly tend to raise the price of that commodity. Each person who is presented passes before his Grace, with a profound bow of greater or less awkwardness; and it is amusing, after one has passed the ordeal, to notice the awestricken faces of some of the country ministers, in fearful expectation of what lies before them.

"It is recorded that a number of years since, the University of Glasgow prepared an address of congratulation to the Earl of Errol, the Commissioner of that day, and intrusted the presentation of it to the Principal. On entering the presence-room the eye of that gentleman was unawakened by a dazzling group of the magistrates of Edinburgh, presiding at a most

imposing array. The Bailie—was powdered and decorated above his fellows, and the dawdled Principal at once felt that this must be the Commissioner, and approaching the Bailie with great reverence he proceeded to read his address. The worthy magistrate was thunderstruck beyond the power of speech, and it was not till the Principal had made an end of speaking that he became aware of his mistake.

"We understand that from eight hundred to one thousand individuals are usually presented at the first levee, and about three hundred of these, selected at the discretion of the purse-bearer, receive invitations to dinner at the Palace in the evening. The Commissioner has a large dinner party every day, but the party on the first day of the Assembly is much the most numerous.

PROCESSION TO THE HIGH CHURCH.

"The levee being over, the Commissioner goes in state to attend divine services in the High Church of Edinburgh, the scene of Jenny Geddes's exploits. The procession is really an imposing one. The streets were lined with cavalry; and as we looked at the really fine animals which most of the troopers bestrode, we could not but own a wish to the our nails, to think such horses ate their tails. A tremendous crowd occupied the foot pavement; and every window of the tall black houses along the line was crammed with hum in faces. The sheriffs, bailies, and judges, all arrayed in their robes, occupied the foremost carriages; the Commissioner came last, in a carriage drawn by six horses, preceded by a troop of cavalry. All the heraldic resources of Scotland were of course employed to add dignity to the affair; and as the parade swept slowly past, amid the jubilant strains of two fine military bands, it was evident that the sight afforded unmingled satisfaction to the thousands who witnessed it. Arrived at the High Church, his Grace was received by the Sheriff of Midlothian, and conducted to a throne erected under a massive canopy, in the front of the gallery facing the pulpit. The front pews of the two side galleries were occupied by the magistrates 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 General Assembly: this year Dr. Bell, minister of Linlithgow, a clergyman whose dignity of appearance and manner well fit him for such a position.

"Whoever goes to the High Church on the opening day of the Assembly, will certainly hear a sermon characterized by good sense, good taste, and great affection for the Kirk, but will seldom find anything very striking either in matter or manner. There are exceptional cases now and then, when such a man as Chalmers, a great preacher as well as politician, is the Moderator. We remember well the eloquent discourse he preached in that capacity; and likewise the astonishment he excited in some of our English friends (who had not heard him preach before, and were unprepared for his oddities of accent) when he gave out his text, "He that is unjust let him be unjust still: and he that is fully, let him be fully still."

"Services being concluded in the High Church, there is a great rush to the Assembly Hall, which is within three hundred yards; and every corner of it is speedily thronged.

THE ASSEMBLY HALL.

"Its first aspect is extremely imposing. It is a gothic building, with a very handsome gabled roof which somewhat offends the eye by its over-fulness. The intention in this deviation from the canons of Gothic architecture, was to render voices speaking from any point in the wall more easily heard. 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 neighbourhood. A little interest with the purse-bearer (who is a much greater man than the Commissioner,) will procure an order of admission to the Throne-Gallery, which can accommodate forty or fifty persons.

"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, or Attorney General of the church, in gown and wig; the law-agent or solicitor

of the church, in a gown; and also a few of the old experienced members of Assembly who have attended for many years, and who, it must be confessed, exercise an episcopal rule over the proceedings of the house not quite consistent with the idea of Presbyterian purity.

OPENING OF THE SESSIONS.

"The Assembly having met, the Moderator rises in his place, and begins in prayer, with prayer. He then addresses the Assembly, thanks its 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 thus proposed, that the Assembly almost invariably agrees unanimously in their recommendation. Having been elected, the new Moderator is introduced by the officials of the Court, arrayed in full court dress and canonicals. The new Moderator 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, and the hope entertained by the court that all its proceedings may be conducted with such propriety as may warrant his Grace in reporting favourably of them to his royal mistress. The Commissioner then briefly addresses the Assembly. We should mention that the style employed both by Moderator and Commissioner in addressing the Assembly is, "Right Reverend and Right Honorable." 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.

"The ceremonial of opening being thus ended, the Assembly proceeds to do the work before it. There is always a great deal to do, and not much time to do in. The period for which the court is allowed to be sitting is fixed by law. The Assembly always begins on Thursday, and must end upon the Monday week after.

MORE LEVEES BY THE QUEEN'S COMMISSIONER.

"The Commissioner holds two or three levees during the sitting of the Assembly. There is one to which all the judges and barristers go, and another upon the Queen's birthday, the 24th of May, to which all who go are expected to appear in court dress. His Grace has a dinner party at the palace every evening, except that of her Majesty's birth day, upon which the Commissioner's wife, or some female relation (if he is unmarried) has an evening party. Gentlemen only are invited to dinner, in numbers varying (after the first day), from fifty to one hundred. The dinners are of the handsomest kind, and if contract being (as unhappily the records of the Court of session can tell) for "every luxury of the season." It is an established institution that there shall always be green peas on the first day of the Assembly; and there is a tradition that the costly dish was once entirely devoured by a country minister, quite unaware that it had been provided for the use of the Commissioner and his most distinguished guests only. The Commissioner sits on one side of the table, midway between its ends; the Moderator, who dines with him every day, sits opposite. When Dr. Chalmers was Moderator, he procured the abolition of this Sunday dinner. The toasts after dinner are all given in the shortest possible form by the Commissioner himself, with the exception of the health of the Commissioner's wife, which is proposed by the Moderator. The last toast is always "Prosperity of the Church of Scotland," and directly after it, the Commissioner rises and the party breaks up. There are no speeches. When Lord Mansfield was Commissioner, his entertainments were on the most magnificent scale. His drawing room was attended by about sixteen hundred persons, and champagne and burgundy flowed at his table in a way which his successor in office has not attempted to emulate.

THE MODERATOR SPENDING A THOUSAND DOLLARS.

"The moderator has apartments provided for him at Berry's Hotel, in the west end of Edinburgh. Every morning, at 9 A.M., he has a breakfast party, which is attended by from one hundred to one hundred and fifty ladies and gentlemen. The scene is a gay one. The tables are set out with hot house plants sent by the neighboring families. The room is a very lofty and handsome one. The ladies are dressed in their most becoming attire, and radiant with their happiest temper. The entertainment is brief: beginning very punctually at nine o'clock, it is over long before ten. The moderator is allowed £200 (one thousand dollars),