

JUNE, 1876.

THE FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY of the Church of Scotland met in Edinburgh, on the 20th of December 1560, "To consult upon those things which are to forward God's glory, and the weil of His Kirk, in this realme." It consisted of forty members. Six of these, only, were ministers: but they were men of towering ability and deep piety, eminently qualified for the great work given them to do. John Knox was one of them, and, from year to year, the old hero of the Scottish Reformation continued to "sit and deliberate" till the time of his death in 1572.

The Assembly is commonly supposed to include a like number of ministers and laymen on its roll: but this is not an absolute rule. In point of fact the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland so far departs from this practice as that the clerical element prevails over the lay in the proportion of nearly two thirds of the former to one third of the latter. But in most other assemblies, the Free Church, for example, the Irish Presbyterian Church, and the Presbyterian Churches of the United States, provision is made for equality in this respect.

There was less formality, not to speak of pomp and circumstance, in those days than now. It is even said that the first seven meetings of the General Assembly were held without a president or moderator, and when increasing numbers and business led to the appointment, this highest official in the church was not invariably a minister. In at least one notable instance a layman was raised to that dignity, in the person of the celebrated George Buchanan, who was called to the Moderator's Chair in the year 1567. For a while, it was customary to hold two and sometimes three meetings of the Assembly in each year. And though the time was when the General Assembly of the Kirk was suppressed during the

long period of forty years at a stretch, Presbyterianism still survived, and, by reason of its trials, was thrown into more intense and vigorous action than before.

It is now a long established rule that the Assembly of the Established Church commences its proceedings on the first Thursday after the fifteenth of May in each year, and that of the Free Church at the same time. The former is composed of nearly four hundred representatives, and the latter, of nearly five hundred. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland was first constituted in 1840, when the General Synod and the Secession Synod became united. This Assembly now embraces five Synods and thirty-seven Presbyteries, having about six hundred ministers on its roll. It holds its annual meetings in the beginning of June. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States was first formed in 1787, with four Synods. The northern branch of this Church is by far the largest Presbyterian organization in the world, having six hundred members in its Supreme Court, representing thirty-six Synods and one hundred and seventy-three Presbyteries, and counting 4706 ministers on its roll. It meets annually on the third Thursday of May.

The United Presbyterian Church, which arose in Scotland out of the union of the Secession and Relief Churches, in 1847, instead of an Assembly, is governed by a general Synod, composed of all the ministers having charges, with an elder from each session. The number of congregations being about five hundred and seventy, the constituency of the Supreme Court of this body is much larger than that of any of the others above-named. Its annual meetings are held in Edinburgh usually about ten days in advance of the General Assemblies.