

Notes and Comments.

NEAR the principal door of our churches there is usually a notice-board intimating the names of the Minister and of the "Church Officer." It would be interesting to learn why the latter is not given the time-honoured designation of Beadle. The office is an ancient and honourable one, and the holder is entitled to be styled correctly. The *First Book of Discipline* states that every University is to have "ane Beddale," a word which has been latinised into Bedellus, and in that form is still familiar in the Universities. In Cathedrals and Collegiate Churches the Beadle carried a wand or staff which denoted his office, in the manner of ushers at a coronation who are known as Gold-Sticks-in-Waiting and who carry a white wand or staff.

The Beadle should be decently robed in a black stuff gown with a square velvet collar at the back. A gown with red trimmings is more suitable for use in Universities than in church. An ebonised staff or wand about five feet long with a silver tip adds much to the dignified appearance of the Beadle as he conducts the Ministers and Choir to and from their places.

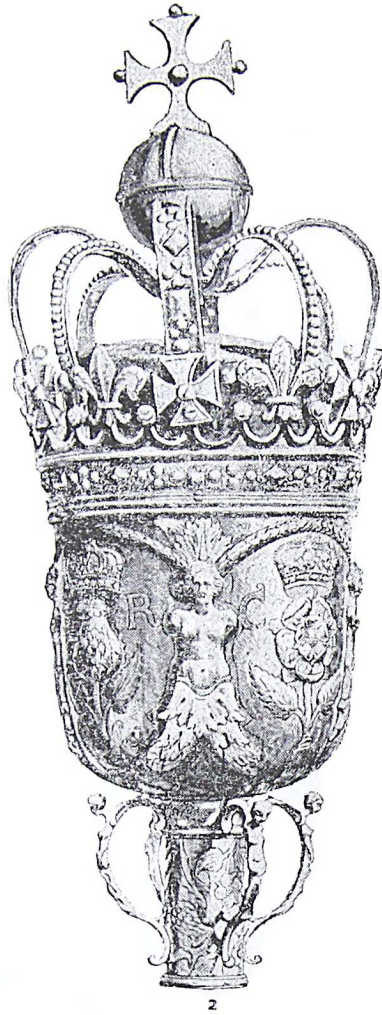
The terms mace, wand and staff are sometimes used indiscriminately, but there is a clear distinction between them which should not be disregarded. A mace is carried by a macer in honour of the high official in Church or State before whom it is carried; a wand or staff, on the other hand, denotes the office of the one who bears it.

A mace was originally a heavy club or bludgeon which a mediaeval cleric carried into battle with the troops, as he was forbidden to shed blood. In the 15th Century ceremonial maces of fine artistic craftsmanship came into fashion, and of this class the University of St Andrews possesses three examples, and the University of Glasgow possesses one. These four maces are all of a rich, gothic, ecclesiastical character. The most elaborate of these is Bishop Kennedy's mace, which was made in Paris in 1461 for St Salvator's College. It is claimed that both as regards antiquity and in the magnificence of their design they excel the finest of English specimens.

At a later period maces of a different and more secular type were made for the honour of certain officials holding important public positions. Of this class is the mace of the Speaker of the House of Commons, which is dated 1649. The mace carried before the Lord High Commissioner at the General Assembly is of the same type. It is known officially as the mace of the Lord President of the Court of Session, and bears the London hall-mark 1667. There is some reason to think that it belonged formerly either to the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, or more probably to the Lord Chancellor who presided over the Scots Parliament.

A scholarly and well illustrated account of Scottish Maces by A. J. S. Brook, F.S.A., Scot., will be found in the Proceedings of the Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland, 1891-92, from which the illustration has been reproduced by kind permission.

It is a common provision to have boards prominently displayed in church to announce to worshippers the numbers of the hymns or other acts of praise to be sung. This is, of course, additional to the intimation made orally by the Minister who is conducting the service. With such provision is it really necessary, except in the largest churches, for the hymns to be announced by the officiating Minister at all? The writer once worshipped in a London suburban church of the Presbyterian order where no such intimation was made. Each worshipper had a printed slip containing the Order of Service with the numbers of the hymns included. Each act of praise, in its proper place, was introduced simply by the organist playing over a verse or part of a verse in subdued tones, after which the congregation, without further ado, rose to their feet. The effect was most impressive and reverent, and greatly reduced the intrusion of the human voice in the service. Few churches, even in normal times, could afford the luxury of such a weekly print; but a hymn-board prominently displayed would achieve the same purpose. The experiment may be worth trying, at least in the smaller churches.



THE LORD PRESIDENT'S MACE.

(See Page 19).

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A protest should be raised against the hideous representations of that fine old Scottish emblem, the Burning Bush, which appear from time to time on some of our Church publications. Far from being "not consumed" what we see, quite often, is a bush burnt black as a cinder, suggesting neither the Divine Presence (Exodus III.) nor the perseverance of the Church. In an interesting article on the history of the emblem, published nearly fifty years ago (Transactions of the Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society, 1895), the late Dr Sprott thus draws attention to an abuse which is, unfortunately, still prevalent. "The ordinary representations of the seal, as they appear on Church papers, Communion certificates, &c., appear to be left to the tender mercies of engravers and wood-cutters, and are often not only utterly hideous, but entirely false. A scraggy bush or tree tossed by raging flames from which issue, not rays of glory but dark clouds of smoke, can only suggest the idea that the wood is being burnt as rapidly as possible." In particular, Dr Sprott points to one especially glaring instance, still often seen, in which the bush appears surrounded by the strap and buckle associated with the Order of the Garter! By far the best representation is that on the title-page of the *Book of Common Order* (1940) taken from the seal formerly used for the Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

Both in Church and State attention is being focussed upon the vital importance of giving effective training and leadership to Youth as the hope of the future. We suggest that, as a contribution to this larger purpose, more careful attention should be given to the thorough preparation of young people for the Confirmation of Baptism and Admission to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. At this critical stage in the spiritual life every endeavour should be made by those responsible to invest this step with significance and solemnity. There should be nothing perfunctory in the training and preparation of candidates, so that they may be given an intelligent and devout understanding of the essential of the Faith into which they have been baptised. This should, in a very real sense, be the culmination of the instruction given in senior Sunday School classes and in the Bible Classes, whose curricula should be carefully designed with that end in view.

Nor should pains be spared to charge with the deepest significance this beautiful rite in which the young are solemnly confirmed in the Faith. A common practice (a relic of a former generation) is to admit the candidates at a preparatory service on a week-night. Unhappily, such services are usually very poorly attended and, for that reason, are often held in a small hall or choir room. Much better to have the service of Confirmation at the ordinary morning service on the Sunday immediately prior to Communion day. This would enable the congregation to take its rightful place in this hallowed act, and its importance would receive fitting recognition in the life of the parish. The admirable "Order for the Confirmation of Baptised Persons" provided in the *Book of Common Order*, 1940, would, if followed in detail, set this important step in a quite new light in the life of many a congregation.

There is much to be said for holding a class for First Communicants only once a year. This would make the occasion a memorable one in the Church Year, and would provide a focal point for the senior Sunday School, the Bible Classes, and Youth Organisations, which should all be present at the service. Incidentally this arrangement would fortify the courage of the young, if they were able to "come forward" in an imposing company of their fellows instead of in "twos or threes" at more frequent intervals throughout the year. A public profession of faith is required by our standards, but the element of shyness and reserve in spiritual things needs to be considered with sympathy and understanding.

This reform would also, let us hope, encourage young people to take this important step at an earlier age than is commonly the custom. There is no sound reason, psychologically or spiritually, for postponing this decision to the early twenties. In the middle 'teens young folk are ready and eager to make this venture of faith and, with careful spiritual preparation, are quite capable of making a sincere, intelligent, whole-hearted decision. We lose much by postponing this act indefinitely, through unreasoning prejudice; and for many the golden opportunity may not recur. The urgency of this consideration is accentuated by the early age now operating for the calling up of young people for National Service.