

live in, and this without any interference from Presbyteries, so long as they keep themselves within the limits of their legal powers,—and these powers are much more extensive than most people suppose. We look on the decisions recently come to by the General Assembly, as hostile to the powers of the kirk sessions, and as having a tendency to throw more of the power of the Church into the hands of ministers than the constitution of the Church of Scotland warrants. We greatly err if in the next General Assembly those decisions will be maintained. Our opinion is that the feeling of the country in preserving intact the powers of the kirk sessions, will be unmistakably shewn, and that the people will resist, and that successfully, every attempt to curtail, or in any way to interfere with, the powers of what has always been one of the most useful courts in the Church. It is the court in which the people take most interest and have most power, and it will be a step in the wrong direction if the Church adopts, permanently, any measures that tread upon the liberties and rights of the people in matters ecclesiastical. It will be going back to the dark days of popish intolerance. But we have no such fear. It is not at this time of day that any party in the Presbyterian Church can curtail the liberty which has always been the boast of its adherents, and all such attempts will be sure to end in defeat. The following extracts are from an Edinburgh newspaper, the *Scotsman*, and our object in publishing them is, to let our readers see the interest taken in Church matters in the old country by the public press, and the able way in which these subjects are handled.

“Though petty topics and personal spites took up some of the able and interesting debate which has occupied the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland these two days, at least one very great and another very considerable question underlaid and animated the whole. It was a great question whether or not the Church of Scotland was to put or keep herself in such a position as to enable her to be, in Dr. Norman McLeod’s words, “the Church of a Nation,” not of a sect—capable of expanding and comprehending, or only of remaining fixed and frozen, exclusive and repellant. It was not an inconsiderable question whether, within a Church claiming to be National, and having national support, the liberties left by the Church’s laws were to be absorbed by the Presbyteries or to remain with the people. The decision given on Wednesday answers this latter question explicitly, the other inferentially, and both answers are, to the extent they go, unwise, and perilous (for the Church)—bad for this time, and promising worse for times to come.

The day has been, and not very long ago, when a great many people who now feel an interest in what the Church of Scotland is to be and do, regarded that subject as not worth much attention. Some thirty years ago, people thought rather more of how long the Established Church was likely to exist than how she would direct her internal policy—nobody whatever speculated upon her adapting herself to external circumstances, moving with the spirit of the age, or suiting herself to the wants and feelings of the nation. At that time, “the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house,” and many of us thought that the day of its fall could not be far off. But those who raised that great storm either blew themselves out, or have been blowing at once so very hot and so very cold that their efforts are now felt little more than as the idle wind which few men respect. At a later date, at least half the strength of the Church went out of her, and it was thought that now at last her end was near. But it has proved otherwise—why, might be difficult, and how, would be needless, to explain. The Church is standing yet, and standing apparently secure, and actually unassailed; and no man of common sense now doubts, or rather no man doubted till this week that she will last at least our time. The fact is one to which even those who least like it must be content to reconcile themselves to as a fact; and when a thing becoming or continuing a fact cannot be helped, what remains is to make the best of it. At all events, it cannot be other than a matter of interest to the country at large whether the affairs of a Church maintained by the country—which, whether rightly or wrongly, is here, and likely to remain here—are managed with wisdom or folly, liberality or narrowness. As the Nation cannot get rid of the Church, it must be interesting to know whether the Church is disposed to “consider the Nation,” as Dr. McLeod well expresses it—especially to consider what the nation is, rather than what it was, and the things that are, if not that are before, rather than the things that are behind. Nations change, and National Churches must more or less change with them—else it is a matter of obvious impossibility that they can remain national. A century or two make a great difference on a nation’s knowledge, thoughts, tastes, and tendencies; and a Church which, in its laws and customs, takes no note of these changes in the people for whom and by whom it exists, may or may not be “sound,” but cannot be national—may maintain a good testimony, but is apt to become only a testifying remnant. Infallible and unchangeable Churches are not recommended by history, and are repudiated by the principle of Protestantism, whatever may be the case as to practice. The Church of Scotland’s own history is a warning. Compared with the Church of England, or indeed with almost any other Church on earth, her creed has been precise, her policy inflexible, her laws stringent—the power of the body great, the freedom of individuals small; but, or rather therefore, she has been rent and disrupted over and over again, while neighbour Churches, with less power and fewer “safeguards,” have remained intact, and have mightily grown and prevailed.