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PROWSE BROTHERS.

ON CHURCH UNION

Notable Ministers Give Their Views.

In Response to the Question Submitted by the Christian Guardian, Asking What Would Have to be Changed That a Union of the Bodies Might be Consummated.

(Continued from Saturday)
PRINCIPAL CAVEN,
KNOX COLLEGE, TORONTO.

"I ask me to give my opinion as to what would need to be removed or changed (1) in the Methodist and Congregational, and (2) in the Presbyterian Churches, before union between these bodies might be consummated."
I may not be able to give a very explicit and satisfactory answer to this important question, but I venture to say a few words which have, at least, some relation to the subject of union.
We cannot wonder that the question of union of the evangelical churches could come up for earnest discussion.

In spite of all that may be said to the contrary, the multiplied divisions of Protestantism are a reproach and a weakness. But no attempt to force union by any unethical compromise could benefit the good cause. Truth must ever go hand in hand with Love.
The first thing, in attempting to answer such a question as that proposed, is to estimate aright the difficulties which stand in the way. These lie mainly in the diversity of polity and doctrine in the churches named; to some extent, perhaps, in the special types of religious life formed in the several churches. Congregationalism is clearly differential from Presbyterianism, and Arminianism from Calvinism. More need not be said to suggest the existence of difficulty in effecting union.
It is hopeless to seek union by the method of any one of these churches arguing the others into full acceptance of its position. Careful and unbiased consideration of the questions which lie between churches is indeed commendable; but there is no immediate prospect of union being brought about by change of view on the part of any of these churches.
Perhaps the actual differences between churches are often exaggerated when we merely take into account their authoritative statements of doctrine and policy. Equal importance should be attached to the teaching and tone of the pulpit, and to the religious character which is the result. It may be found that the teaching which is really moulding the life and nourishing the soul in these churches is more alike than the Formularies or Confessions.
In methods of procedure the difference between these churches is not very great. The Methodist Church is essentially Presbyterian in polity. In large measure the practical working of Con-

gregationalism and Presbyterianism is the same. So far as the work of a united church is concerned, there appears to be no insuperable hindrance to union in the matter of church government. The Presbyterian would perhaps claim more explicit scriptural warrant for church government than the Methodist deems necessary; and in discussing the constitution and polity of the church in the abstract, the Congregationalists would part company with the Presbyterian; yet it seems not impossible that, in regard to scriptural sanction for church procedure, a sufficient statement could be made which would be practically adequate, and which all could honestly accept.
The matter of doctrine seems to present greater difficulty. The Presbyterian Church is Calvinistic, and the Methodist Church, it may be presumed, could not subscribe to the Westminster Confession or the Heidelberg Catechism. A doctrinal formula, which both could accept, must be neither Arminian nor Calvinistic; the question, therefore, seems to be whether a doctrinal basis of this neutral kind would be adequate; whether on both sides, it would be regarded as rendering sufficient homage to the truth of Scripture; and whether a united church could, in its teaching, properly keep within the limits of such a creed. Obviously it would be a serious matter to have one class of teachers in a church in open conflict with the doctrine of another class, touching things said to be highly important. Such diversity of teaching within a church is not indeed, unexampled; but it does not tend to edification.
But may it not be safely affirmed that the doctrinal differences between Methodism and Presbyterianism are not made prominent in the ordinary ministrations

of the pulpit, in either church? Such at least, seems to be the rule. No charge is here suggested against the ministry of either church of not believing its creed; but more and more the earnest preacher finds himself on common evangelical ground, in presenting the great facts and verities of the Christian faith. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed constitute an imperfect statement of fundamental scriptural doctrine; but may it not be that some other symbols go too much into details? Propositions may be true, and logically of much consequence, which should not enter into the bond, either of church fellowship or ministerial fellowship. The question is highly important. How far is the church warranted to go in the definition of the doctrine to which her ministers—her public teachers—should give assent? Clearly the church may err either by defect of definition or by excess. Let this matter be faithfully and earnestly considered.
There is a form of union which is receiving, in some quarters, a measure of attention—what is termed Federal Union. Under this description of union the autonomy of the several constituents would be largely preserved; it would therefore be necessarily very different from incorporating union. Some type of federation might be effected between the three churches here referred to without requiring the same degree of doctrinal adjustment which would have to be made in connection with a more complete union.
At the present time the Methodist Church of Canada and the Presbyterian Church in Canada have appointed large committees to consider whether some sort of "court" or "council" might be formed, in order to deal with certain important practical matters of common interest to these churches. Should any such step be finally taken, we should have a Federal Union of a limited kind. No doctrinal difficulties need interpose in forming an arrangement or league of this nature.
The Christian heart longs for union to the largest extent possible, and is not willing unduly to magnify difficulties or erect barriers. It is, I think, certain that the state of things which we behold—many churches on the same territory, all holding the substance of the evangelical doctrine, and striving to do the entire work of a church—is not the ideal condition of the church, even on earth; and that we should not acquiesce in it as final. Can nothing be done towards securing more perfect fellowship among the disciples of Christ, and strengthening the testimony which they bear to his name?
CHANCELLOR BURWASH,
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY.

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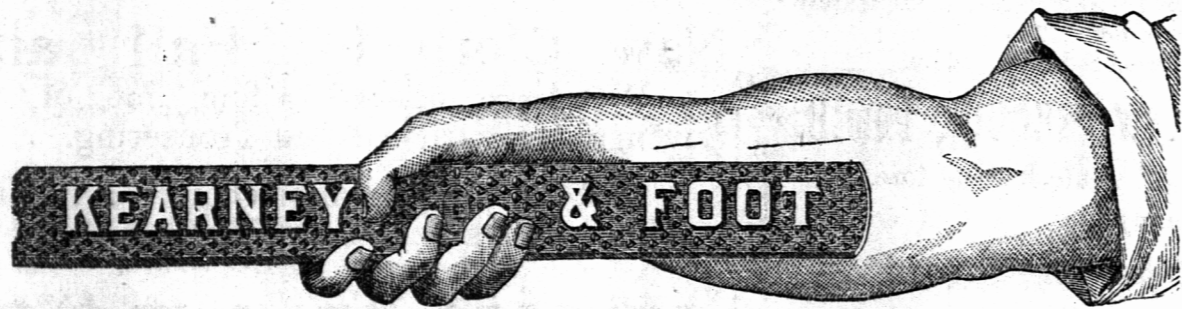
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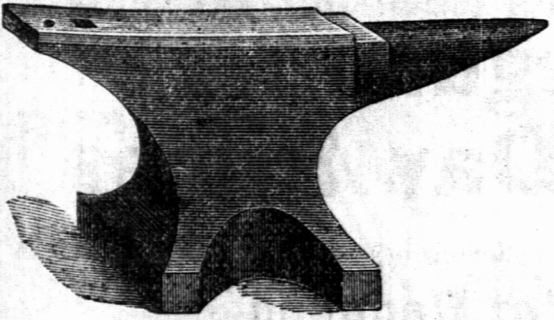
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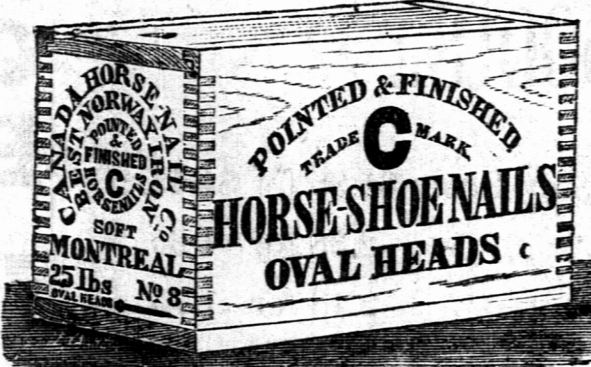


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[Continued on The Sixth Page.]