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CURRENT TOPICS.

It is hard to say whether Rev. Professor Campbell, or the Presbyterian Church in Canada, is most to be congratulated on the outcome of the recent trial of the former before the Montreal and Ottawa Synod. It is perhaps true—the theologians must be the judges—that there is little or nothing in the two articles or statements which form the basis of the settlement agreed on, of special significance. The language used is far from definite. Such expressions as “true as far as they went,” “in a few cases not the whole truth,” “in the great majority of cases,” etc., seem to an onlooker sadly wanting in that clearness of outline and precision of expression which are generally supposed to be characteristic of Scottish theology. But this fact, if it be such, serves but to bring out the more clearly the other fact that the document is a way of escape from a result which would have left both parties in a false position. It means further that Canadian Presbyterians, not-

withstanding their intense loyalty to what they regard as sound doctrine, are not to be betrayed into denial of individual freedom of thought to those within their church whom they know to be honest, able, high-minded and devout students of Scripture and searchers for truth. There is reason to hope that all the Christian churches are fast learning the wisdom and necessity, and may we not add, scripturalness, of allowing the widest possible liberty to conscientious students and thinkers. Time has been when there was far too much truth in the cutting saying of the author of “*Ecce Homo*,” that the churches were much less tolerant of an imperfect creed than of an imperfect practice. Let us hope that the time is near when the ideals and standards of practice shall have been lifted much higher, with a corresponding freedom of opinion and research, in regard to questions of abstract truth.

A recent speech of Lord Rosebery's upon Home Rule has been interpreted, probably fairly enough, to mean that Home Rule not only for Ireland, but for the other great divisions of the United Kingdom, is a necessary preliminary to the federation of the Empire, of which he is so enthusiastic an advocate. It must be pretty clear to most minds that, if this was his meaning, the conclusion is reasonable. On the one hand, it is difficult to conceive of any form of federation of the Empire which does not imply as one of its essential conditions a previous federalization of the United Kingdom. Even after such a decentralization the preponderance of England alone in the larger federation would be so great as to make it extremely difficult for the colonial members to maintain any satisfactory measure of dignity and influence in the federal council and parliament. On the other hand apart altogether from any consideration of the colonies, it seems well-nigh impossible that the present state of things in the British Parliament, with its utter inability to overtake the vast amount of local legislation which is needed, and much of which has been patiently or impatiently waited for year after year by Scotland, and by England itself, can be much longer delayed. The attempt to have all the local legislation of the United Kingdom done by one large and unwieldy central body seems unworthy of the genius for organization and government which is characteristic of the British race. All this being so, it is unlikely that many of the more intelligent and far-

seeing advocates of Irish Home Rule can have failed to see that what is granted in the way of local control of local affairs to one member of the kingdom cannot long be withheld from others. But it is characteristic of all British progress to do one thing at a time, and to feel the way in great reforms step by step. The genius of the people is intensely practical. It never consciously plans the details or even the end, of a great scheme of re-organization, but is content to take one step at a time. This is the secret of the national stability even in the midst of radical changes.

The May number of the *Forum* contains a well-written and forcible article by Mr. J. Castell Hopkins, on “The Stability of the House of Lords.” It is, indeed, questionable whether Mr. Hopkins, in his enthusiasm, has not suffered his historical memory to become sometimes a little beclouded, as when, for instance, he asks as if expecting an unhesitating affirmative, “Has not the voice of England so far always been upon its (the House of Lords) side when the question at issue has been finally submitted to the electorate?” A Radical would, too, ask with a satirical smile, whether Mr. Hopkins has not considerably over-rated the intellectual breadth and acumen of the average country squire and some other hereditary members of the Upper House. What strikes us, however, as possibly a grave flaw in the argument of the essay is its failure to take sufficiently into the account the greatly changed and constantly changing conditions of the problem, as affected by the extension of the suffrage, the establishment of County and of Parish Councils, etc. Should the Registration Bill now before the Commons become law, the people of England will have a voice in the next election as they have never had before. Nor can there be any doubt that that voice will differ widely in tone and meaning from the so-called voice of the people as heard at any previous period, because the electorate will be composed, to a considerable extent, of new elements. This gradual and wide extension of the suffrage may be for good or for ill. We are not now discussing that question. It is very likely, as Mr. Hopkins evidently anticipates, that the Liberal party, weakened by the loss of its great leader, and doubly weakened by divided counsels among its members, may be defeated in the coming election, and the Tories be restored to power. The question is, whether, in that event, one of two things is not almost sure to happen. Either the Conservatives will do what they have so often done before, carry into effect Home Rule and other legislation very similar to that proposed by the Liberals, the Lords