

they have agreed among themselves about the nature of God, whose picture is wonderfully drawn in their sacred book as the being who slaughtered nations, men, women and children, and prepared a hell for the souls of the majority of his creatures! The doctrine is Romish; the system a theocracy; the priests the statesmen who by defining the nature of God determine the ultimate action of government. Is this what the Presbyterian Church wishes to attain? The "churches" may all find unity and refuge in Rome at last.

Mr Chantry Harris, the proprietor the 'New Zealand Times,' has lately been giving a series of lectures upon Spiritualism, in the course of which he is reported to have said "that any doctrine, no matter what its beliefs and tenets might be, was to be respected if it struck a blow at the evils of the day." (Applause.) He did not include freethought among the reforms of the present time, because he did not consider that its followers had any settled objects; "they were standing aloof." From what follows in the report it seems that Mr Harris thinks freethought is too purely negative in its aims, and that to remedy this defect Freethinkers ought to embrace spiritualism. The reply to this is that to remove error is the first operation required to enable truth to take its place. If you want grass to grow you must get rid of the fern. To many people any destructive process is unpleasant, and in matters affecting the feelings and higher sentiments, extremely painful. To an Alchemist who had spent his life searching for the philosopher's stone which was to transmute all base metals into gold, and with that and other cognate objects in view, had diligently studied the writings of the great Hermes Trismegistus, Geber, and a host of other pious learned and extremely unintelligible authors, the dawn of chemistry in the seventeenth century must have looked like the beginning of a terrible conflagration which threatened to burn up all that he considered most valuable. These chemists, he might have said, have no "settled objects." They don't even profess to search for the philosopher's stone, the elixir of life, or the universal solvent, and instead of trying to "catch the flying bird," and unite it to the "red eagle," they are content simply to "interrogate nature" and to listen to her replies without dictating her answers. Yet somehow the Alchemy which promised much has performed nothing, while the Chemistry which promised nothing has performed much. Theology and its allies are more nearly akin to Alchemy than might be suspected at first sight, and Freethought and Chemistry, as representing scientific method, are as closely related to each other.

Rev. J. S. Black, a prominent orthodox minister of Montreal, in a recent discourse in that city, as reported in the 'Montreal Witness,' in reply to the question, Why has the Church never taken the lead in great moral movements in their infancy? said:—"The Church was a huge body, and as such moved slowly. By the very necessity laid upon her to preserve the peace within her own borders, and to do no injury to the consciences of her members, a new moral movement must be well under way before the Church, with its united and harmonious front, could join in the grand march of progress. The Church, too, was an aged body, and as such was inclined to be conservative, and was a censor, and not a caterer. . . . Again, the Church's true work was not so much to inculcate

"particular items in moral reform as to inculcate the principles which lie at the root of all reforms. In this respect the Church was not a knight-errant, running a tilt at particular abuses, but a sage teacher of those things which lead to sound moral life. All moral movement, too, had a social or political environment or both; and it was only right that every innovation should reach an assured vitality before it was accepted. . . . The church, in every age, has enough to do in enforcing moral truths about which all agree, instead of championing those things which are undergoing a probation. She was not the motive power in the engine of social progress. God is the living fire, and His Church is the controlling balance-wheel." This description of "The Church" might have proceeded from one of the most pronounced opponents of ecclesiasticism. Read by the light of history, it means that religious organisations have clung to error—enforcing their mandates by means of all the secular and spiritual authority within their reach—until the discoveries of Science rendered it unsafe to continue in their particular course. The admission that "it was only right that every innovation should reach an assured vitality before it was accepted," is logically fatal to "The Church." For when a moral truth has once attained "an assured vitality," it cannot matter whether "an aged body," conservative and censorious, accepts it or not. Equally stultifying is the statement that "The Church, in every age, has enough to do in enforcing moral truths about which all agree, instead of championing those things which are undergoing a probation." Truths about which all agree need no enforcing, having reached "an assured vitality." And it is just those truths struggling for recognition which require championing in the interests of humanity. Religious corporations are represented by their apologist unintentionally in their true light. How much inferior are they morally to the schools of philosophy of Ancient Greece!

The complaint that Freethought stands aloof from Spiritualism, is only another way of saying, that as a rule Freethinkers exercise due scientific caution, and that finding from experience how prone the bulk of mankind are to accept any theory that accords with their prejudices and personal interests, they are not prepared to give credence either to the theory of Spiritualism or to its evidence quite so readily as its advocates wish. Having abandoned one superstition on grounds of fact and reason, they are not prepared to adopt what looks so suspiciously like another superstition without very good reason and without being perfectly sure of the facts. So far the reasoning of "spiritists," as the Rev. J. Davin prefers to call them, is like his own, of the theological type, which giving free range to what professor Tyndall calls the "mythologic imagination" requires a mere atom of fact to support a huge edifice of fancy. The Bible recognises a whole host of spiritual existences and denounces unlawful dealings with them, therefore the facts of "spiritism" must be admitted, and being admitted they prove the truth of the Bible! This is reasoning in a remarkably small circle, but then people don't want logical fallacies exposed when to hold them is both pleasant and profitable. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" To get truth only—seems to many a bad bargain. It is so much easier to write superficial twaddle about "the uncomfortable and foolish creed of Mr. Bradlaugh," and to quote nonsense from a book called "Isis Unveiled" in support