

## BENEFITS OF RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY.

There are some who think that controversy on religious subjects does no good, and ought, therefore, to be avoided. It is, no doubt, true that there have been often controversies about trifles, and there have been, also, controversies about matters of great moment, that have been conducted in such a manner and spirit as to have done, probably, more harm than good. While we are willing to allow all this, we are, however, bold to affirm that religious controversy, when conducted in a right spirit, with proper ends in view, has been, and still is, a most important means of tending to promote a healthfulness in the religious world. A thunder-storm in the air, and an agitation in the ocean, are not more necessary in the natural world to promote salubrity and drive away noxious influences, than is a controversial agitation in eliciting truth, dispelling error, and tending to separate the healthful from the pernicious.

What would tend more to the elimination of truth among the adherents of Rome than a properly conducted discussion in that Church of some of the more vital doctrines of Christianity? Is not the stagnation of controversy on these points an occasion of great spiritual corruption and miasma? And even among Protestant churches we are verily persuaded, that a most important step towards a healthful and consistent union will be in connexion with a rightly conducted controversy or discussion about those matters that form, at present, barriers between them, and keep them partially or entirely alienated from one another. How are many of these difficulties to be overcome? It is not by repressing all discussion, but by a friendly interchange of views on the points of difference, in order to a better mutual understanding, which may promote "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The agitation of controversy will tend to shake the things which can be shaken that they may be removed, in order that, "the things which cannot be shaken may remain." The Free and United Presbyterian Churches have, for some time, been contemplating the desirableness of a union; but how is it to be effected?—Is it by quashing all discussion of the points that now divide them? No, it is by a free and friendly interchange of sentiment on the controverted subjects, so that they may reciprocally apprehend what the real difference between them is, and whether that difference, if any, is sufficient to keep them in separate ecclesiastical organizations. We repeat it, that religious controversy,