

"RELIGION AND CIVILIZATION."

In the March number of the *STUDENT*, appeared an article under the above caption, in which the writer assayed to prove that the Church has always been a barrier in the pathway of human progress. To say the least, the article contains a considerable amount of either intentional or unintentional sophistry.

The statement is made that scepticism is the necessary forerunner of inquiry. This is, in the main, probably correct, and yet a certain amount, more or less, of inquiry is necessary to scepticism. That is to say, scepticism is always the result of partial inquiry, and is generally the forerunner of certain and newly acquired knowledge. In the statement just made, the term scepticism is used in its general sense of doubt, without applying it to any particular kind of doubt. Then the writer makes the statement that the Church has always opposed scepticism, and, as scepticism is necessary to the acquisition of new knowledge, that the Church has been a hindrance to the progress of civilization. But it will be carefully noticed that in the second statement, the term scepticism is used in a specific, or, as it might be called, a technical sense, namely, doubting the truth of the Christian religion, and herein lies the fallacy in the argument.

The Church has always opposed scepticism, in the technical sense referred to, because any doubt as to the divine origin of the Christian religion, is simply a denial of the truth of the religion, and to be consistent with herself the Church must oppose everything of the kind. That the Church has opposed scepticism in the first or general sense to which reference was made, any more than many other institutions, cannot be maintained. The Church, herself, has been, and is, pre-eminently a progressive institution; a fact which history confirms beyond a doubt. Indeed, I take it to be a truth which will find its confirmation in the natural laws

of human progress and development, and will commend itself with every thinking, intelligent person, that no institution, other than a progressive one, could have exercised for so many centuries such a powerful and extended sway over the human race as has the Church; and in the midst of such numerous and extensive political, intellectual, and social revolutions as have characterised the progress of the human race since the beginning of the Christian era. Shall an institution be condemned because it has not accepted every new theory at its first announcement? It is natural for men to look with distrust upon each new theory as it appears, and to cling to the old until the new shall find time and facts for its confirmation. And it is this tendency in man's nature which gives to society its stability. The history of the world shows that the Church, (when I say Church, I do not mean the Roman Catholic Church, but the Christian Church,) has ever led the van in those great revolutions and grand enterprises, which have been most potent, in their results, for the advancement and civilization of the human race.

But the statement is made, that "before the Church can claim to have advanced civilization, her advocates must show that she has lessened the power of the imagination, and has given broader range to the intellect of man," just what is meant by lessening the power of the imagination, we do not know, but the writer, in making this statement, assumes that civilization consists simply in intellectual advancement, which is indeed a narrow conception of that quite comprehensive term. Such a construction cannot be placed upon this term except by ignoring altogether the moral natures and vicissitudes of men. I can consider it possible for the Church to have accomplished nothing for the intellectual advancement of the race, which, however, is far from the truth, and still have done much for the advancement of civilization.

But let us turn to the historical part of