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*INFLUENCE OF SCEPTICISM.*

Fortunately the time has now come, when scepticism no longer implies social ostracism, even in America. True there are a few by whom,

"The man is thought a knave or fool,  
or bigot plotting crime,

Who, for the advancement of his race,  
is wiser than his time."

But there is a large and increasing class who are boldly laying open the great questions that lie at the foundation of all true progress. Never before in the history of man have so many been ready to weigh facts dispassionately, and to abide by the results.

Every one, who is conversant with the history of mankind for the last three centuries, must be aware that every generation has demonstrated some phenomena to be natural, and governed by law, which the preceding generation fiducially accepted as supernatural and governed by the arbitrary will of an inscrutable deity. Thus every year increases our confidence in the natural and decreases our faith in the supernatural—we recoil from the uncertainty of an arbitrary Providence and cling with childlike confidence to the universal reign of law. I know of no better definition of progress than this

gradual transfer of our allegiance from the supernatural to the natural.

To whom then do we owe this progress? We owe it, if I mistake not, to those who have dared to question the correctness of the current opinions of their times, or in other words to those, who in their own times, were known as sceptics. Where in the progresss of thought would the world be to-day had not these noble spirits braved the anathemas of the Church? Let me answer this question by asking another. Where would we be in the progress of the mechanical arts if, by common consent, the sickle and the primitive press had been declared the only *authorized* instruments for reaping and printing? Where would have been our rapid transit, our telegraphic communication, our phonographical wonders, if invention had been interdicted because Christ's messengers went on foot and he himself rode into Jerusalem upon an ass? Nay, do not charge me with ridicule, for are we not expected to conform to a creed founded in many cases upon grounds equally trivial?

But the creed has changed and is still changing. As in the progress of civil law, legal fiction always precedes legislation, so in religion, religious fiction always precedes open scepticism — gradual