

I must believe that any who profess and call themselves Christians, refusing to join in this work, no matter how loudly they may vaunt their ecclesiastical commission, have mistaken it and missed their duty. I am well aware that there are some men—godly, Christ-loving men—in our own Church, who, as I believe, in regard to this matter are in the dark—victims of a strange misconception—believing that saving and instructing souls, as well as expounding the word of God, is the exclusive privilege of certain licensed ecclesiastics—all others are to them as Korah, Dathan, and their company. It may be almost impossible for us to comprehend so extraordinary a position; but let us remember that the men of weight and learning, those who have most intimate acquaintance with this book, both in Germany, America, and England, are almost unitedly opposed to any such view. Let me quote Bishop Ellicott, of Gloucester, the well-known expositor: “Supposing,” he says, “that some Society, by a wonderful scheme of action, had devised means for diminishing shipwrecks on the coast, would not universal support be accorded to it, as a means of saving human life. Is not support as urgently demanded by a Society that aims to save the soul?” So say we all. God bless the Society that saves men anyhow.

When the great Arian controversy long ago threatened to rob the Church of her Saviour; when Imperialism stretched forth its mighty arm to shield and encourage heresy;—what saved the Church from utter rout and ruin? A great defender of the Faith, himself a bishop, said, “*The ears of the people were more orthodox than the tongues of the priests.*” It is not impossible that we may see a recurrence of such a state of things.

I ask your intelligent support for this Society,—

I. Because, as I believe, it indicates the true ground of Christian stability—it gives me the Word of God; not because the Written Word contains in itself life, but because in its pages the living Christ moves, a Friend of sinners, able and willing to save man from his sins now, as from the consequences of them hereafter;—because in its pages the “Rock” is discoverable. Wisely it takes cognizance of no theological formations, of no conclusions drawn from the Word of God, of no formularies of doctrine supplementary to it. Thus its principles are stable as the living pictures of Christ Himself. Here let me say that I trust and believe that so soon as popular Christian opinion pronounces, as it must, in favour of the Revised Version, such arrangements will be made by our Society as will enable it to distribute it.

II. The Society indicates the only true ground of unity. Unity conditioned on the repetition of a common catechism is a chimera;—of such unity the Bible Society knows nothing. Unity consists not in the huddling of many sheep into one fold—the Lord never said there would be one fold and one Shepherd (the cause of Christian unity has sensibly suffered by the mis-translation of John x. 16, where in the final clause of the verse the word “flock” is wrongly rendered “fold”)—but that the time would come, His sheep scattered far and wide over hill-side and dale, “the blessed company of all faithful people,” as our Church fitly calls them, should feel themselves to be, for all their variety of colour, constitution, taste, manner of life, mode of worship, one flock under the care of one Shepherd. In the past the Church has constantly mistaken distribution for division. The Bible Society would put us right. *Distribution is God’s work—division is man’s mistake*, arising from too much imperiousness on the one hand—too little yielding on the other. We gain nothing by driving mountain sheep to meadow, nor yet by driving lowland to rock and heath. Distribution is among the deepest problems of the Divine wisdom—it is a fact undeniable. The more we study it, the more are we aware that personal gifts and graces are allowed ample space—personal tastes and wants provided for, in the economy of God our Father; each separate life gifted with a self-adjusting faculty, the more marvellous, the more we study it. See this law of distribution in insect, plant, man—see it in operation among all races, in every clime. You will find that they who have pondered longest these secrets are least disposed to think that the work of