

prove the rule, we may proceed to consider the working of the rule itself.

The question has become considerably more complicated since Lord Sherbrooke made the speech we have quoted from, some thirty years ago. People in those days knew as little about the Bible as they do now, but they did not imagine themselves to know a great deal. As for Biblical criticism, which now forms one of the commonest topics of conversation in all societies, public interest in it had not been roused to any great extent, and it was generally left to those who had some claim to be heard.

It is in no way our intention to deal with this matter on religious grounds, such a method of treatment being clearly out of place in an article like the present. The two names quoted above, Lord Sherbrooke and Macaulay, indicate from one side the point of view in which we consider the question. It is not generally disputed in this country, that, from a literary standpoint, ignorance of the Bible is to be deprecated. The value of our Authorized Version, as a masterpiece of classical English, and a treasury of ancient literature, is still so universally acknowledged, at any rate in theory, that further discussion of this aspect of the question is scarcely necessary. But the literary side of the question is not the only one to be considered. There can be no doubt that many issues of grave national importance, political and social, are being debated, and will be decided, on grounds in which the Bible, its interpretation, and its claim to authority, play a principal part. Such being the case, it would seem desirable that some knowledge of the text of Scripture, and of a few elementary facts regarding its history, should be diffused among that great majority with whom the decision will ultimately rest.

At present (to judge from the tone

in which they are discussed in ordinary society) it would not seem that the general public know exactly why they espouse one side or the other in these questions. There is no lack of interest in such topics, only an utter want of solid information regarding them. Such ignorance is not specially creditable to those who profess to be loyal members of some one or other of the Christian churches, and who have presumably received some Scriptural instruction. But this is not so surprising as the fact that those who manifest the most distinct and aggressive hostility towards Christianity in any form are no better instructed than they. This is surely no paradox, for it is evident that persons actively attacking any set of institutions or opinions, which has gained the sanction of time and custom, assume an attitude of greater responsibility than those who lazily acquiesce in them. And probably disputants of this kind would be the last to deny such an axiom, for the most remarkable phenomenon connected with them is their entire belief in their own knowledge. The extraordinary nature of their statements is only to be equalled by the perfect good faith in which they are uttered. In this respect they present a striking contrast to the orthodox party, whose general characteristic is a kind of vague uncertainty as to whether any given text or episode occurs in the Bible or not. They seldom have the courage to make what a certain professor called "a good mistake," and there is a general tendency about them to acknowledge that they are probably wrong, which excites compassion if not respect. They may go the length of confounding the two Judases, or quoting "They are not lost, but gone before" as an integral part of Scripture, but they rarely move our amazement and laughter as do their opponents.