

to take those steps which are requisite on his part, in order that the divine Spirit may make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. And as long as he puts forth no effort to know the doctrines and principles of Christianity, it is not at all likely that he will be brought under their sway. For the Holy Spirit will not drive knowledge into him by compulsion; and until he be the subject of some competent measure of it, his being a partaker of salvation and of holiness is not to be hoped for.

Thus it appears that ignorance is a mighty barrier to shut out the light of religion and all its improvements. But not only does it act as a preventive to the entrance of right religious principles into the mind, but it likewise gives rise to notions extremely false and dangerous. The ignorant are sure to be grossly mistaken in their ideas and feelings respecting everything in religion. We shall give two or three examples. In the darkness and feebleness of their minds, they are unable to form any correct and suitable opinion of the character of God. That some Being, bearing this name, exists, they have heard, and in a certain way they believe it, because they have never thought of troubling themselves to deny it. But as to any distinct conception of what He is, their understanding is a perfect chaos. Perhaps their chief and almost only idea of Him is that he is a Being of mighty power, much more to be dreaded than loved. Of His pure spirituality, His infinite holiness, justice, truth, and other attributes, they may have heard the names, but they have little or no conception of what they mean. Their notions of the *duties* which God wishes to exact from them are also miserably defective. They think that abstinence from *palpably bad actions* is nearly the sum of what is required of them. But their conscience gives them very little trouble about evil thoughts and desires, of the sinfulness of which they have scarcely any idea; and which, being known only to themselves, are winked at, and often cherished as a sweet morsel—so faint is their impression of God's omniscience and the universality of his jurisdiction. Equally scanty and superficial are their notions as to the nature of sin. They have no views of its being an evil of the greatest magnitude, as striking at the authority of God, and trampling upon His holy, and just, and good law. They can see no great difficulty in the way of sin being pardoned by God; and what between this belief, and their imagining that He is a Being of easy mercy, they have very small fears as to their escaping at last any punishment which their offences may have incurred.

In this manner does ignorance keep multitudes of men from experiencing genuine religion, by retaining them in darkness, and deluding them with the most flimsy and incorrect notions upon subjects of the greatest importance. Eternity only will disclose the dire results of ignorance, in countless myriads of souls lost for ever, through want of that knowledge which might have guided them to a Redeemer from sin and death, to heaven. We would, therefore, now,

III. Point out how destructive ignorance is to mankind, as to their future condition in the world to come. This should be by far the most impressive view of the subject, when we consider that the existence of man in another life will be everlasting, and, consequently, that the failure of his happiness throughout all the length of that endless existence will be a calamity beside which every other vanishes into nothing.

What has been said already concerning the opposition of ignorance to the acquirement of genuine religion, has prepared the way for coming to the conclusion, with hardly any new illustration, that it must consign its wretched victims to final perdition. For if they continue to spend life to its close in the same intellectual and spiritual darkness, and without becoming real Christians—then the last and fearful issue awaiting them is, that they must go down to utter and irremediable ruin. And therefore, we must say, however painfully, that they who live and die without such a portion of knowledge as to enable them to understand, in order to embrace, the Christian plan of salvation and holiness, shall be destroyed for ever. Accordingly, the Scriptures declare that