

mind with a vain and groundless confidence that he has reason to believe himself a special favorite of God. In the impenitent, it is often the source of that persuasion by which he is brought at last to look upon his sins without shame, and by which his heart is steeled against every impression of fear, till he can outface the aversion and scorn of men, and perpetrate iniquity before the eye of God with heroic confidence and courage. His self-esteem gives him the delusive idea of exemption from the strictness of God's law. He sees not the flame in the eye of his Maker, and cannot suffer himself to believe that it will ever strike him with terror. In the believer, it is an element of character that is infinitely dangerous—it enables him to construct a morality of his own. It can only be neutralized and kept in chains from the work of sin, by an extraordinary portion of divine grace. A depraved self-esteem in combination with a powerful imagination, is the infallible precursor of an insane fanaticism. It diminishes the distance between God and the sinner, and converts the devout and reverent communion of the soul with its Creator, into a familiar companionship—into the easy terms of a profane intimacy, while it makes its possessor the subject of its imposture. What a cunning, what a dangerous passion is an exorbitant self-esteem, united with a lively imagination of the mysterious truths of our holy faith, when finding no food to satisfy the largeness of its appetite in the ordinary path of good and happy men, it betakes itself raptaciously to the pastures of the boundless fields of heaven. It can revel there in an immensity of transports, and see sights which no eye ever saw, and receive gifts, as it supposes, that put to shame the whole world of living men, and by special inspiration, becomes, no doubt, the sole depository of the secrets of God on earth. Its property is to subdue all things to itself. It assumes the patronage of conscience by an easy assault and makes that very faith, which is the holy instrument of a sinner's salvation, the means of ministering to its appetite for ideal transports. Let a young man in whose character an overgrown self-esteem exists in combination with an ardent imagination, carry the unabated magnitude of the passion into the new field that has been opened up to him—into the glorious and unfathomable mysteries of religion.—Hitherto, from the day of his birth, his intercourse with his fellow-creatures has directly controlled the passion which lurked and ruled in him. No one allowed the claim, of which it was earnestly intent upon procuring the admission. There was an immense discrepancy between the respect which was sought for and arrogated, and the grounds upon which it was demanded. He asked it, because

he passionately desired it; but no one, save himself, could see a sufficient reason for so great a demand. The passion, therefore, in thus his prior intercourse with the world was beaten back, confronted and forced to be moderate. But thereafter, when the whole radiance of religious truth begins to dawn upon him, the pent-up passion rejoices in the things of heaven and eternity, as all its own. What has been denied to men, (were truth its utterance it would say) will be granted to me by God. It proudly commits itself, therefore, upon the mysteries of eternity—and from the very devotedness of its zeal, it derives an argument by which it flatters itself into the belief of an altogether extraordinary and peculiar intercourse with God. The royal and open high-way by which other men slowly travel in the journey to heaven, by the arduous duties of their calling, and with faith sometimes bright and sometimes dim, is no road for a spirit of this sort in which to exercise the part of a pilgrim. He soars aloft—the high hills are no impediment, his sins are no burden, and what are temptations to others to tarry by the way-side, he can surpass at a bound, and never rests satisfied till he is constituted prime minister in the religious affairs of an accursed world, and sent, as a matter of course, the only accredited ambassador to men from the court and sanctuary of heaven. The message which he supposes himself to have been instructed to convey, appears generally to others as neither genuine nor credible, and doubtless, it seems to him a matter of great astonishment that it is not implicitly received. But the consequence of this rejection by others, deserves to be noted. It is the conclusion of the mental and moral process of self-love and religious ideality—and is in exact coincidence with numberless instances with which the history of mankind furnishes us; he denounces to the wrath and punishment of God every one who refuses to receive the matter to which he testifies. *The crisis and conclusion of his passionate imagination of religious truth terminate in a malign proscription of his whole species to the woes of everlasting death.* How invaluable to such a person would be a serious and constant inclination of his mind to the precept of the Psalmist, "Stand in awe and sin not, commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still;" for religion is a still, a sober, and silent thing, and consists not in sportings of the fancy nor in whirlwinds of passion, but in a new heart, a heart of kindness, charity, or "flesh."

Again, religion does not consist in the understanding merely of the truths of divine revelation. One may have a large measure of religious knowledge, a clear and accurate understanding of all its