Self-Deceit

"Let that trusteth in his own heart be a fool."


By these words the inspired writers condemn the folly of those who take counsel of no one but themselves. It means that whoever trusts his own heart as his light, guide, and guide, in the complex ways and actions of life, is a fool. Only the wisdom of the wise is in the choice of their advisers. Wise men adheres wisdom to others, and call them to counsel: the wisest man is he who least trusts himself alone. He knows the difficulties of life, and its intricacies, and gathers all the light he can, and casts them upon his own case. So must, in the end, act on his own responsibility, but he seeks all counsellors, the just, perverse, and impartial. Sometimes he opposed and unfriendly, that he may be aware on all sides; for, "there is safety where there is much counsel."

1 Prov. xi. 14.
There is wisdom in the choice of advisers, as there is also folly. This is noted as the folly of Boaz, that he passed by the aged and took the counsel of the younger. 2. Likewise thou callst only those that will advise that they have already determined to do, that is, not to advise, but to supply places and spaces. This is a high pitch of folly; but the highest of all is, to have no counsellor; to take no advice; to act upon our own lights alone; to trust our own heart. Thus, Solomon says, is to be a fool.

In all the action and probation of life, the chief and universal element in our responsibility is our own character. It enters into every thing, into every deed, word, and thought. Our whole life, both active and passive, even to its remotest relations with those about us, our fragments, inclinations, and finances, will be what we are. Like an instrument,
out of tune, or a rule out of square, they lose perfection and the particular measure of it will be perpetually reproduced. A twisted wheel, if it run a thousand years, will bear new teeth. So it is with our hearts. Whatever be our resolutions, convictions, wishes, intentions, all will come out at last just as we are ourselves. Therefore we may take these words of the book of Proverbs for a warning to seek self-knowledge, they bid us beware of trusting our own heart: or we shall but see ourselves, in a high moral sense, to be "fools" at last. But it may be asked: Is not the heart God's creation and God's gift? Did He not plant it in it, and give to it light, and discretion to guide our ways? Is it not His truest personal guide, grace, to each one of us, by God Himself? Why must a man who trusts his own heart be a fool? Let
we see why this is said; and why, holy Scripture, that is, God Himself, pronounced self-trust with such condemnation.

First, because our hearts, that is, our selves, are ignorant of ourselves. If we knew ourselves, we should not trust our selves, we do so because we do not know what we are. We are by nature; and still more by personal act, sinners. And sin blinds the heart; so that the more useful, the less it knows its usefulness; for like death, which is most evidently perceived by the living, not at all by the dead, and by the living only in the measure in which their living consciousness is still retained; so it is with sin dwelling in us. The deceivers and coltrices which grope upon a soul where the love of God is not, make it intolerable to live.

So what is sin? Is it not the rebellion of
the will against the will of God? And the with- 
trawl of the creature from that service and use 
for which he was created? God made us for 
Himself, to love, serve, obey, and worship Him. 
This is our end, as much as the end or office 
of the Sun is to give light by day. As long 
as creatures fulfill the end for which God made 
them, they content and meet in His presence 
and will; and so long they are full of light. 
They know themselves by knowing Him, and see 
themselves by seeing Him. He is the key of 
their being, the centre and interpretation 
of themselves. Such is the state of holy angels 
and of all spirits in heaven. But such was 
man before he fell. While he knew 
himself, he trusted in God; when he trusted 
himself, he became ignorant, and fell. And 
his head hour from himself. He knew that 
he was naked; but he did not know that 
he had fallen from the end for which he had
been created. And here is the great source of all sin, the chief productive spring of all evil, when the face of the Earth. "And as they liked not to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them up to a reprobate sense. "Because that they knew God they have not glorified him as God is from heaven, but became vain in their thoughts and their foul heart was darkened. For professing themselves to be wise they became fools. They became ignorant that God was the end for which they were made — that He created Man for Himself. This is the state of every man who is not converted to God by the Spirit, and they who are so converted, always distrust themselves; for habitual distrust abides with true conversion. Next for the rest, who are either wholly or in part turned from God to themselves, they make to themselves a new god, for which they imagine that they

1 Rom. I. 28 2 Rom. I. 21, 22.
their created; and that God, in some form or other, is self. It may be great indulgence of self, as in sensuality; or it may be refused, as in spiritual pride; but great or refused, it is all one. Their being does not terminate upon God, and centre in Him, but in themselves; and therefore they can have no true knowledge of Him, not knowing the terms, so to speak, of their creation. Not to love God, not to seek God, not to obey God, is no perceptible sin to them: at most it is only a negative sin. Not to love, serve, and obey: their supremacy is no sensible sin, so long as they do so in some measure. The proportions of their duty in relation to Him are lost. Again, where His will is but faintly perceived, how can they be conscious of their more high and direct dependence with it? In a contradiction there must be two opposites; where one is indistinct, the contradiction disappears.
So, the less visibly they are conscious of God's will, the less they can feel the contradiction of theirs to His. Their whole interior being in confusion and darkness, is troubled, and out of order. This is the state of our hearts by nature, and even after our regeneration, if we fall into habitual sin, until we are turned to God by the Spirit of repentance and of repentance. So long as we live either in sin or in a slothful, indolent, though pure and allowable life, the case never really know for what we were created: what is the office of our wonderful and fearful nature; what are its capacities and powers, its relations and laws; and what, founded on all these, are our duties, and therefore, our Sins. And then shall any man, but a fool trust his own heart? It is ignorance of its own constitution, its own God, its own destiny. Apart from God it is darkness
And disorder; all its powers and emotions cross
And mislead each other: so that at last we
Come to believe that each man is a world in
Himself, Created for self-guidance, which
Ends in self-worship. This may sound harsh
And overstated: and yet I ask, is a proud man but a self-worshipper? And
What is self-trust but self-guidance? What
Are ambitions, or worldly, or-lost souls, or selfish
People, but their own gods? Their chief love,
Hate, and endearment, are given to themselves;
And what but this is worship? Does this
Sound hard? So does all truth which is
Too stern to yield, and too real to compromise
Such being, the state of all except those who,
Through a spirit of humiliation and self-abasement,
Hunt, mistrust their own hearts, what must
We call them? What must we call the
World — the lofty, splendid, overwhelming, gorgeous
World — and all its million tribes of servants,
followers, lovers, friends, and courteous strangers.
Do they, or do they not, know the end of their
creation? If they do, how dare they revolt
from it? If they do not, how can they
know themselves? And who is there among
them that does not trust his own heart,
except when his money or his interest for
his life is concerned. There is the worldly
man who, in matters of honour and dishonour,
right and wrong, lies, deceit, wickedness,
and folly, religion and faith, health, disease,
judgment, heaven and hell, does not, with
confident assurance, trust his own heart?
For these things, all are able, all are skillful,
all are wise. To doubt it is to impeach
them in their loftiest capacity. The feet also
distrust themselves in these things as in their
eyes superstitions, slackly,Summary. The
world lives by self-trust, and each man
keeps up his fellow: nothing is so disturbing
as the falling away of a bold companion. It is
like a passing bell in the music of a feast;
or a sudden death in the full tide of reveling.
Such is the state of this fallen world, even of
people baptized and outwardly Christian. A
deep ignorance both of God and of self broods
in secret on their souls; even pure, blameless,
upright, benevolent men—many too who pass
for devout, and in the habit of their life are
outwardly observant of religion—lose under
this alarming sentence. In the sight of God,
we are told that they are "fools." And what
is the sign? It is this, that in their judgment
of God's will and service, of their own intention
and motives, of their own state and character,
they trust their own heart.

Let us take another reason. Not only is the
heart ignorant of itself, but it deceives itself.
Of course these cannot be altogether separated.
Every one who is ignorant is, in one sense, a
self-deceiver; and yet it may not be with any
laboured illusion. Ignorance is absence of light,
selves-deceivers have light, and vicious in that
light; but those vicious are illusions. Satan
is the danger of unawakened minds; self-trust
of the awakened. It is chiefly through not
exclusively, a religious temptation; and we
are only concerned, at present, to regard
it in the latter form.
As we have said, it is one of the miserable effects
of the loss of love to God, that lies are not
naturally hateful to us. We confess them
readily, and alas! eagerly, from our childhood,
with no terrible pain, but with a peaceful
delight. If we loved God, every lie, even
in thought, would be as a drop of molten
lead; it would bear and pierce us with
anguish. But through our senselessness, it is
to us as the dropings of the honeycomb.
And as the early begins to die, so we lose
The little fear which, at first, came over us. We got to sin freely and easily, and to form a ready habit, which grows into a second nature, and passes into the unconscious custom of our minds. What we have done from childhood, we grow keen to believe is right, or at least not wrong, to be lawful or to be indifferent; or what is more likely, by custom we lose the consciousness of what we do; and so go on uneasiness in things which make others tremble; and if we could do them now for the first time, would make us stand against. So sin grow up, little by little, towering unseen to a great height, and hiding themselves from our hearts. What is more common than to see men characteristic marked by some one sin, which they pointedly conceal in others, and from which they believe themselves to be absolutely free? It has almost become a proverb, that a man's best sin
is that our soul which every holy teach, but
himself. We find this, of course, in its
broader and forest forms among worldly
and indifferent people; but it is equally,
though more covertly, true of persons in the
main religious. What is more common than
to say, "How wonderful it is that such a
person cannot see what every body else
knows; that he should sincerely believe himself
to be not so much as tempted to faults which
Man and nature knows his whole mind?"}

These unsuspected sins are almost invariably
the faults of childhood, and early youth,
which have become habitual and un-
conscious; for instance, personal vanity,
selfishness, a difficult and disputations
temper, impatience, resentment, unreason,
and the like. And they, who have these
faults in them by long habit, generally
excuse themselves by ascribing the same to
Others on whom they have inflicted them, as if the mind should elude the roughness of the sea for disturbing its repose, all the while believing itself to be at rest.

The same effect, which appears in casual temptation, is more dangerously produced in deliberate action and lines of conduct. An early habit of personal vanity, or desire of wealth, sometimes unconsciously governs a person's whole life. All thoughts, labours, sacrifices, aims, calculations are made, not with a present sense of vanity or correctness, but in a direction along the whole course of which both their faults will be indulged: the aims of their whole life being just such as a man seeks towards his mind would most desire to attain. And yet it may be that innumerable secondary and contingent events may come in to make such a line at least not unreasonable, and perhaps even a duty. But better way the following line. Converts it to its own good and service. It feeds and serves itself.
of that which perhaps the providence of God has ordained for his own glory. The majority of people judge of such persons by the ordinary tests of life and of the world, and see nothing in them but what is straightforward; and they, of course, entirely believe the same themselves; but those who know them from within unravel the double fibre of their motives, and can clearly distinguish the deranging from the true thread which guides their whole life. The same also is true of worse passions, such as jealousy, envy, and resentment, which sometimes come from a secret chamber, and unconsciously to the man himself, the career of a whole life. Thus far I have spoken chiefly of the self-receit we put upon ourselves in matters relating to this world and to our neighbours. — The greatest part still remains; I mean, the self-receit we practice upon ourselves as to our state before God. The same unconsciousness which
Conceals from us our habitual sins, such as
anger, or envy, and the like. Conceals also the
impatience and stiffness of our will towards
God, and our want of gratitude and love, our
indifference and slipshoddiness in the spiritual
life. All these, having been upon us from
our earliest memory, have become our nature,
and, if I may use the word, our normal
state. We have never known any other; we
have no perception of any higher spiritual
condition born by way of idea, than either
our own as it is, or by advancing in degree,
as it may become. The want of such esteem
makes us to be a standard to ourselves. We
confess, indeed, that we are not perfect; that
we have many weaknessess and many faults,
but we think them little and superficial,
attacking loosely to the surface of our character.
And this want of a quick sense of sin makes
us slow to note what we do amiss. What
all our life long attended our present consciousness, less of having done wrong; so that one of the effects of this unconsciousness is, a ready habit of forgetting our sins from childhood to boyhood, from boyhood to youth, from youth to age, from year to year, at last from day to day and hour to hour, until the consciousness becomes continuous, and is broken only by great falls; and even these are little appreciated. Such a heart becomes, at last, saying in its own self-trust; and to watch it as we do the each motion of a man who walks blindfold, leading in the midst of dangers, which might sometimes for a moment, provoke our mirth, if it did not always inspire alarm. Such self-trustees comfort themselves with the belief of habitual good intentions, being unconscious of their past and present self; and so go on before God, approaching Him without fear, seen within.
The precincts of this altar. I am not describing the character of a good sinner; but I many who are outwardly pure and upright; some of those who have lived from childhood within great falls, in a life fair and unmarked, while spiritual faults of a high and perilous kind have grown up imperceptibly, and brought themselves into the texture of their whole character. So that what they must believe themselves to be, so farthest from the truth, and what they least suspect, they really are. But no power of man can persuade them of this fact. Though all the world beside see it at a glance, they still trust their own heart. This deceit is often not only not corrected, but very much aggravated by the growth of religious knowledge and religious practices. But this leads us to another cause, which must be taken by itself. Another reason why to trust our own hearts is a sort of folly
is because they flatter us. What we have spoken of as fear as hiding from us our real estate. Self-flattery imposes upon us with the concept of our own excellence. And this is especially the danger of such characters when they become affected by religious. The mature intellect is able to apprehend in outline and with great fulness, the description of the spiritual life, and of the sanctity character. Which, under our common condition, it requires many years of devotion and discipline really to attain. By a sort of creative imagination, and a gift of poetry and melody, people impress themselves and others sometimes, with the belief that they are what they describe. High speculations, and the excitement of talkery carry minds upward into a height where they fall in religious fancies, broken only by the least slight temptation, or the least call to an interior duty. But for this there is a
ready provision. It is their unhappy lot, they
think, being inwardly called to the contempla-
tion of Mary, to be against their will, taken
in the case of Martha. In this way they
assume an investing themselves with fictitious
characters; playing at saintliness,
As children imitate their elders. Personal
Purity, which in other characters takes
the direction of pretensions, accomplishments,
showy dress, egotistical conversation, or
spiceless imitation of flattery, secretly
vitiated itself, in such people, by an
imaginary participation in the deeds of Saints.
We turn from it, perhaps, when it is thus
naturally expressed. But let us remember
that to invest ourselves with any measure
of sanctity which we do not possess, is a
measure of the same self-flattery. It pleases
our self-love. It soothes us. It allays
the pain of thinking that we are sinners.
That some of our past sins are hateful, many of our present faults shameful and odious.
How long have we been in persuading ourselves that we are meek, poor in spirit, makers of peace, merciful, patient, and the like, because we assert in desire and will to the Beatitudes, and would fail those in their benedictions! How long have we persuaded ourselves that we pray both often and enough, earnestly and with devotion; that we love God above all, and above all desire so to love Him; that our life is, on the whole, not unlike the great example of humility; and that we know our own hearts better than any one can tell us! And yet, what does this last persuasion show? Why are we so sensitive under a reproof? Why do we accuse ourselves freely of all faults but the one imputed? Why are we never guilty in the judgment of others?
Why do we wholly guide ourselves, and feel so great security in our own direction? But because we trust our own hearts. But of this proceed our visions of devotion, our imagination of sanctity. It is a forge near cold, always at work, forming and fashioning devices, which please us by their fair and shapey forms, and flatter us, because they are a homage to ourselves.

Such is our heart; by nature blind, deceitful, and a flatterer; always hiding its own face; shifting our motives for another, changing our intentions in the very moment of action, and our aims. Even when the wish is half accomplished; turning aside the reproofs of loss, and filling us with soothing falsehoods, drawing a veil over their past, and beguiling us with the past thought of our present integrity, throwing us in perfect ignorance of self, while it persuades us of our complete self.
Knowledge.
What a contrast before the Searcher of Hearts
was Mary, the Sinical, and Simon the Pharisee.
It was of no ill life, no sensual indulgence,
o no cherishing, conscious sins; in his eyes
Eyes pure, upright, graceful, and decent;
in the eyes of the Redeemer, thankless, loathful,
self-deceiv'd. "Dost thou see this woman?
I entered into thy house, thou gavest me
no water for my feet; but she, with tears
hath washed my feet, and with her hair,
hath wiped them. Thou gavest me no
kiss; but she, since she came in hath
not ceased to kiss my feet. Thy head
with oil thou didst not anoint; but
the feet of sinners hath anointed my
feet." I need all this becomes tenfold
more dangerous when, as often happens,
such people believe themselves to hear the
own hearts by the light of God's Spirit.

St. Luke vii. 44-46
The self-accusation becomes intense. It is a part of their religion to believe that He has revealed their law to them; a point of duty not to doubt that their view of themselves is the right one. These men of the world see through the delusion. The clear, strong, common sense of mankind is offended, not without just cause, at the proud and professing unreality of religious self-accusation.

If this be so, if we be our own deceivers, what security shall we take against our own hearts? Out of many, we can now take only two.

The greatest security against deceiving ourselves by trusting our own hearts is a careful examination of conscience. But this plainly runs beyond the period of our responsibility into the account of those to whom our childhood was subject. Early
Training is the fountain from which good or evil chiefly flows. The conscience of children is their first and highest faculty. Blessed, to say an outward act can make him, is the child who is early taught to know the nature of sin, not only as a thing simply wrong or shameful, but as a stain on our Baptism, a grief to the Spirit of holiness, a fresh incense in Him Who was crucified, and the rebellion of our will against the will of God. The knowledge of sin in its principle is necessary to explain the nature of our temptations, and of the sin of our hearts. From this one truth, steadily applied to ourselves, comes a knowledge of our real dangers and inclinations. God alone can tell from what evils, committed in ignorance both of sin and of ourselves, such an early information of the conscience.
would restrain us. A knowledge of their own
itself would interpret to us the true moral
character of our own conduct, and all its
divine facts of thought, word, and deed.
No weight, indeed, still deceive ourselves,
but it would be harder to do so. And
the knowledge of ourselves, beginning then
as yet there is little to be known, makes
clear the field in which the growth and
change of character are to be observed. Our
chief difficulty is in the attempt to analyse
the confused and hardened mass of self;
 neglected for twenty, thirty, half a hundred
years, to unravel a web of knots and
entanglements; to find the beginning of
the clue. It is almost impossible to do
by retrospect what it is ever easy to accomplish
by continuous watchfulness, beginning in early
years. Self-examination begins late in
life must remind the chief part of its
Accessories to the day of judgment. It is a fearful thought that we may thus err, for the first time, sins of which we ought to have spent a life in repenting.

Another benefit of this Early Information of Conscience is, that we should be preserved from the numbing and deadening insensibility which early errors bring upon us. There is, as we have seen, a sort of self-concealment by which sin retreats itself the more insensibly while it becomes the more apparent to us. It would also be impossible for a conscience, Early, enlightened as to the nature of sin, to deceive itself with imaginations which, springing only from fancy and self-love, are contradicted by all the discommoders of the higher spiritual judgment. But all this is lost to self-evidently and to full of thoughts, that we can do no more than touch upon it. No words
too strong can be found to urge on parents and guardians of children to begin the instruction of the conscience as early as the instruction of the reason; and in doing so not to content themselves with repetitions of texts and catechisms, but to proceed to clear, and detailed explanations of the law of God, the nature of sin, and the office of conscience itself. And further, let them remember that, when they offer their children to God in holy baptism, they thereby commit them to His pastors. Perhaps one of the greatest evils of this day, most fruitful of sin, and fraught with peril to the soul, is the neglect of parents in not putting their children, one by one, from the age of responsibility, under the guidance of their pastors. Until this be done, there can be no sufficient instruction of the conscience, no effective security against self-hurt.
And self-accept, and no adequate cure of the
unknown spiritual diseases which begin
in childhood, and cling to the soul, it
may be, for ever.
2. The other security is the only one which
remains to those who have never enjoyed
the first, and that is, to take the judg-
ment of some other person, instead
of trusting in themselves. It will be,
no doubt, painful and distressing; it
will bring shame and burning of face.
But is it not the slate worth the cost?
And are we not in earnest to be saved?
It is of little use, indeed, to advise people
who are not in earnest. Let us speak
only to such as know the weight of life,
the worth of one soul, the difficulty of
the narrow path, the horror of the
Second Death. If we would really help.
Ourselves, we must begin by taking for granted that we are least likely to be deceiving in our own case. To detect others better than ourselves; to know they are again. It is a proverb as wide as the world, that a man is not to be trusted in a case where he is a party. And when are more of partisans than in judging of our own character? However truly the needle may commonly point in the open sea, there are stations where allowance must be made; that is, it can be no longer true. So it is with our sincerest intentions. The acknowledgment of in matters of this world's honour and wealth; but there is no subject in which we are so unworthy of trust as in judging of our faults; partly because a misjudgment involves no present loss, and partly because self-love but relieves the whole weight of this soul. As may,
indeed, take it as a test of sincerity and reality, and all but assure ourselves, that a man who sticks to his own belief of himself, against the judgment of others is either not in earnest, or, in the grave and divine sense of Holy Writ, "a fool," that is, rash, blind, self-deceiving.

Now let us as we lay to heart, who he is that would fail stop our ears against all advice, and the man who takes counsel of nobody is his easy prey. What a spectacle is a self-trusting heart in the sight of holy angels: if those whose eyes are open, and whose office it is to watch over us against the powers of darkness which hover on all sides, night and day. If in childhood we lost the blessing of guidance, let us not lose it now. We lost it thus through our faults if ours, how the fault will be wholly our own. Let us do now what we shall
desire that we had done when we came to stir At that day, it may be, we shall say, "Woul God had trusted all the world rather than myself; even my enemies would have taught me self-knowledge; from what evils and for my sins which have been spared; from that thought which has cost me ward, from that fear which appal me; from what hindrances which slacken my repentance, my heat back my prayers. I can read what I might have been from the beginning. I was warned, but I did not believe; I was lost, by with God, but I would not be persuaded. Now all is too clear. God grant it may not all too late."